



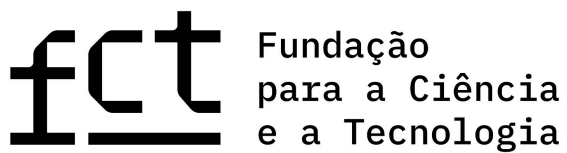
A new Science Diplomacy model for Portugal:

**A proposal for a sustainable
strategy and delivery model,
building on the diaspora.**

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Executive Summary

Portugal has world-class scientific assets but lacks the processes to systematically turn them into international influence. Science diplomacy offers the framework to achieve that and has become a basic capability of well-organised states. At the moment, no single actor owns science diplomacy across the Portuguese government; there is no permanent science and innovation representation in priority embassies; and scientific advice to the government, including in foreign-policy contexts, remains fragmented. Portugal should address these to move from ad hoc activity onto a permanent, networked delivery model.

A recent PARSUK pilot employing dedicated science diplomacy advisers has shown that a lot can be done with modest resources: a lean, diaspora-based, function created the Scientific Telegram, mapped strategic areas and academic champions for Portugal–UK collaboration, contributed technical analysis to the design of the new Agency for Research and Innovation (AI²), and convened a high-level technical mission to London. It proved demand, credibility and delivery capacity.

The priority now is to act before the moment passes. Several time-sensitive windows are open at once: the pilot's funding has just ended; the EU has adopted its first framework for science diplomacy; AI² is being designed; and the GraPE diaspora network is completing its formal registration. This brief proposes a science diplomacy model for Portugal built on three complementary pillars: **an institutionalised PARSUK programme for the Portugal–UK corridor** (Pillar 1); a **GraPE umbrella network coordinating the diaspora globally** (Pillar 2); and a **state-led science attaché network in priority embassies** (Pillar 3). Its recommendations, set out in full below, are addressed to the institutions that can act now:

- **PARSUK:** prepare to institutionalise its programme (Pillar 1) so that professional delivery, including the Scientific Telegram, can resume quickly.
- **Government (MNE and MECI):** set up a light cross-government steering mechanism, clarify ownership, and align the national approach with the EU framework.
- **AI²:** anchor the model financially, as the natural continuation of the FCT protocol, and engage with GraPE as a convener for a global science diplomacy programme.
- **Embassy and the diplomatic network:** continue to host and champion the programme and embed science diplomacy in the training of Portuguese diplomats.
- **Universities and diaspora associations:** engage as partners, putting forward academic champions, pursuing joint and dual doctoral partnerships, and building GraPE's shared capacity.

Introduction

PARSUK, the Portuguese Association of Researchers and Students in the United Kingdom, is an independent, non-profit and politically neutral association founded in 2008 that represents a community of over 2,600 Portuguese researchers and students, and for which science diplomacy is a central pillar. Its science diplomacy work began in 2019 with the creation of the PARSUK Scientific Advisory Board (SAB, Conselho Científico in portuguese) – the first science-advice structure associated with a Portuguese diplomatic mission – under a protocol between PARSUK, the Embassy of Portugal in London and the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). A renewed 2024–2026 protocol with additional funding from FCT took this work a decisive step further, launching a ground-breaking professionalised pilot led, for the first time, by dedicated Science Diplomacy Advisers working alongside the SAB and the PARSUK Executive Committee to deliver a coherent and robust science diplomacy programme.

This brief draws on the lessons of the pilot to propose a wider model for science diplomacy in Portugal, aimed at continuing and extending the work it has begun. It sets out the challenge and the opportunity, summarises the key outcomes and impact of the pilot, and presents a new science diplomacy model for Portugal, based on three complementary pillars, offering recommendations for the institutions that can take it forward.

The challenge and the opportunity

Science diplomacy connects science, technology and innovation with foreign policy. As Science, technology and innovation (STI) has become more central to geopolitics, economic competitiveness and national resilience, many countries have

built dedicated science diplomacy capacity. Effective systems vary, but usually combine political ownership, coordination between foreign-affairs and science authorities, skilled representation in priority embassies, and structured links with universities, research institutions and diaspora networks. Science counsellors, attachés and advisers now form part of many diplomatic systems, helping countries gather intelligence, broker partnerships, support delegations, promote scientific credibility and advise governments on science-related policy questions.

Portugal has built a significant international scientific presence over the past four decades. It participates in major European research organisations and infrastructures, including the European Organization for Nuclear Research and the European Space Agency. It has long-standing international partnerships with institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Carnegie Mellon and the University of Texas at Austin. Portuguese institutions are active in capacity-building initiatives in the global South, in ocean and space science, and in research links across the Portuguese-speaking world.

The United Kingdom corridor illustrates the scale of the opportunity. PARSUK's PUMP study¹ found that Portuguese and British researchers jointly participated in almost 1,500 international projects between 2014 and 2020 and produced around 15,000 publications , showcasing the clear potential for deeper strategic cooperation.

Portugal has the raw materials for science diplomacy: international research links, scientific credibility, European embeddedness, Portuguese-speaking networks and a highly qualified diaspora. What it lacks is an operating model. There is no single strategy, lead institution or coordination mechanism across government, agencies, embassies, research institutions and the diaspora. Portugal also has no permanent science and innovation staff in priority embassies - despite an existing legal basis

¹<https://www.parsuk.pt/pump>

for scientific attachés - and scientific advice to the government remains fragmented.

The opportunity is equally clear. Portugal has a diaspora asset that many comparable countries would value. Portuguese researchers abroad have built credible associations, including PARSUK in the United Kingdom, the Portuguese American Post-Graduate Society (PAPS) in North America and the Association of Graduate Professionals and Portuguese Researchers in the Nordic Countries (SPOT Nordic). These organisations, alongside six counterparts in other countries and regions, already collaborate through GraPE – the forum of Portuguese graduates abroad. These associations have local knowledge, institutional access, scientific credibility and convening power. They can provide agile intelligence on foreign research and innovation systems, broker collaboration, identify academic champions, support missions and help turn brain drain into brain circulation.

This is why the present moment is unusually favourable – and why it is fleeting. Several windows are open at once and each is time-sensitive: the EU adopted its first framework for science diplomacy in 2026; AI² is being designed now; GraPE is completing its formal registration; and the PARSUK pilot, having proved the concept, has just reached the end of its funding. Acting while they align lets Portugal build a networked model that combines state capacity with diaspora reach; letting them pass risks losing both the capability and the moment.

What the pilot showed

The professionalised pilot began in September 2024 with two part-time Science Diplomacy Advisers, expanded to three from March 2025, working in coordination with the PARSUK Scientific Advisory Board and Executive Committee and connected

to the Embassy of Portugal in London. Despite modest resources, it showed that a lean, diaspora-based function can generate intelligence, respond to policy needs, convene institutions and support strategic engagement. This translated into several concrete outputs:

- **The Scientific Telegram.** The pilot's flagship output: a concise, regular briefing that channels UK science and innovation developments to Portuguese institutions through diplomatic channels. A new instrument in Portuguese science diplomacy, very well received by national institutions, it turns diaspora-based monitoring into policy-relevant intelligence.
- **Advice on Portugal's research and innovation reform.** The pilot supported the design of the new Agency for Research and Innovation (AI²) through a technical report on lessons from the creation of UK Research and Innovation, formal input to the Secretary of State for Science and Innovation and an opinion article. Several of PARSUK's suggestions were taken up by the Portuguese authorities. Most recently, it convened a high-level technical mission to London in May 2026 that brought together a senior Portuguese government delegation, UK institutions and the diaspora.
- **Strategic mapping for the Government.** At the request of the Government and FCT, it identified priority areas for Portugal–UK collaboration and mapped 63 academic champions across more than 30 UK institutions, clarifying where partnerships could be built and who could help activate them.
- **A stronger network and institutional standing.** It deepened relationships across government, diplomacy, academia and the diaspora – from the Government, FCT, AICEP and PlanAPP to the Portuguese and British embassies, UK science and innovation bodies and peer diaspora associations – establishing PARSUK as a trusted intermediary.

The pilot therefore provides an important proof of concept for the need of further dedicated work on science diplomacy. It showed that a professionalised diaspora-based function can generate intelligence, respond to government requests, support institutional reform, convene relevant actors and raise the profile of Portuguese science diplomacy. It also exposed the weakness of the current model: short-term, part-time arrangements are not a stable basis for a function that depends on trust, continuity and specialised skills.

The new model of three pillars

Building on PARSUK's experience, network and on the recent pilot, we introduce in this brief a proposal for a new model that addresses the gaps and opportunities in the Portuguese system. It is an initial proposal – a starting point for discussion rather than a finished blueprint. The specifics, including governance, sequencing and resourcing, should be considered over the coming months, involving all interested parties.

The model responds directly to the gaps identified above and to the lessons from the PARSUK pilot. Portugal needs a science diplomacy system that can do three things at once: preserve the capability already demonstrated in the UK, coordinate diaspora expertise beyond a single country, and build the official state representation that only the government can provide. A single instrument cannot do all three. This is why the proposed model is organised around three complementary pillars, each addressing a different function and each capable of advancing at a different pace. Pillar 1 consolidates and preserves what has already been demonstrated in the UK; Pillar 2 scales diaspora coordination across countries; Pillar 3 provides the official state capacity that civil-society actors cannot provide.

Pillar 1 – an institutionalised PARSUK programme

A permanent, professional science diplomacy function for the Portugal–UK corridor, building directly on the pilot. Placing it on a stable footing – with a dedicated professional, a clear mandate and multi-year resourcing, and hosted in a third party institution, preserving its independence and bottom-up character. This new model would protect the capability, relationships and delivery model already proven, and is the shortest path from the current arrangement to a durable one.

Pillar 2 – a GraPE umbrella network

A coordinating platform for Portugal’s diaspora associations, so that effort currently dispersed across countries can pool expertise, share learnings and offer Portugal a single interlocutor, with collective reach greater than the sum of its parts. GraPE is already being registered as a federative organisation, its member associations have agreed a governance model, and a neutral home has been secured at Ciência Viva in Lisbon. What it now needs is a clear mandate and dedicated resources to scale its remit.

Pillar 3 – a state-led science attaché network

Dedicated science and innovation staff in a small number of priority embassies, providing the official, state-to-state representation that only the government can offer. An existing legal basis already provides for scientific attachés, so this is a matter of political and budgetary decision rather than new legislation.

The three pillars are complementary rather than alternatives. They perform different functions, can advance at different paces, and reinforce one another. Ideally, Portugal’s model will combine all three over time.

The model is progressive. The immediate priority should be to institutionalise the PARSUK programme before the current capability lapses. The next design task is to

support GraPE's consolidation and scope a first science attaché post. The longer-term ambition is a coherent Portuguese science diplomacy system that is lean, networked and built around existing scientific assets.

Table 1. Summary of the three pillars.

	Pillar 1 / PARSUK	Pillar 2 / GraPE	Pillar 3 / Attaché
Independent diaspora advice	Lead in the UK	Coordinates across corridors	Contributes to, receives and uses input
Official state representation	No	Partner	Lead
Policy intelligence	UK-focused	Cross-country synthesis	State and embassy-focused
Bilateral missions	Delivery and support	Mobilises diaspora	Official diplomatic lead
Strategic ownership	Shared with funders and stakeholders	Shared network governance	MNE / MECI mandate

Risks and opportunities

The most immediate risk is losing momentum. The pilot has proved its value, but its professional capability is fragile and would erode quickly unless the work is continued and built upon. A more permanent model also needs what the pilot lacked: clearer mandates, defined reporting lines and a minimum of resources committed over a multi-year programme, rather than reliance on informal goodwill.

There is also a balance to strike. If the model becomes too state-driven, it risks losing the independence and agility that make the diaspora contribution valuable; if

it remains too informal, it will lack official mandate and continuity. This is precisely the opportunity that Pillar 1 offers: bringing in a credible third party to host the programme, while preserving its autonomy, would give it stability and institutional standing without sacrificing the independence and bottom-up character that have been its strength.

A further consideration is implementation: building the whole model at once would be too complex to deliver well. The opportunity is to sequence it: securing Pillar 1 first, evolving towards Pillar 2, and preparing Pillar 3 over the medium to longer term, itself phased in by starting with a small number of priority embassies.

Taken together, these point to a clear and immediate opportunity. The end of the pilot is not a conclusion but a decision point: with a modest and timely commitment, Portugal can turn a successful experiment into a lasting capability, protecting the investment already made and opening a realistic path towards a networked, diaspora-based science diplomacy model.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are sequenced around one immediate priority: securing continuity before expanding ambition. They are addressed to the institutions whose decisions will shape the next stage.

For PARSUK

- **Recommendation 1:** Lead the preparation of Pillar 1 – defining the hosting arrangement, mandate and resourcing for an institutionalised programme – so that professional delivery, including the Scientific Telegram and other outputs, can resume as soon as possible.

- **Recommendation 2:** In the meantime, remain active as a key science diplomacy actor even with limited voluntary resources – preserving the independence of the Scientific Advisory Board, sharing tools and lessons with GraPE and peer associations, and continuing to engage with government and public authorities as part of the ongoing reforms.

For the Portuguese Government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education, Science and Education)

- **Recommendation 3:** Establish a light cross-government steering mechanism to clarify ownership of science diplomacy across ministries, agencies, the diplomatic network and the diaspora (engaging with GraPE, the diaspora's emerging single interlocutor).
- **Recommendation 4:** Align the national approach with the EU science diplomacy framework, and communicate its work transparently, including through a joint statement and published outcomes that can guide community action towards a national science diplomacy strategy.
- **Recommendation 5:** Commission a short route-map for a first science attaché post under the existing legal basis and strengthen the domestic science-for-policy system on which any external science diplomacy effort depends.

For the Agency for Research and Innovation (AI²)

- **Recommendation 6:** Anchor the model financially – providing multi-year core funding for the institutionalised PARSUK programme as the natural progression from the current FCT protocol. Act as the contracting agency for future science diplomacy instruments, and draw on diaspora expertise as a two-way channel for Portugal's research and innovation reform and internationalisation, as it did in the design of AI². It should also engage with

GraPE, now being formally established, as an existing diaspora federation to recognise and resource rather than a model still to be scoped.

For the Embassy of Portugal in London and the diplomatic network

- **Recommendation 7:** Continue to host and champion PARSUK's science diplomacy programme, sustaining its diplomatic reach, and embed science diplomacy in the training and awareness of Portuguese diplomats so that demand for the function grows from within the foreign-policy system.

For universities, research institutions and other diaspora associations

- **Recommendation 8:** Engage as partners – nominating academic champions and institutional contact points, pursuing joint and dual doctoral partnerships where there is strategic fit, and, through GraPE, developing shared work packages and operating capacity for diaspora coordination.



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