

South Korea

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With more researchers per capita and a higher spend on research and development than any leading country in the Nature Index, it's clear that South Korea invests heavily in science. But its 'bang for buck' – judged by pitting research spend against output in the Nature Index, measured by Share* – is surprisingly low (see page S8).

This disconnect chimes with the many challenges that South Korea faces, including concerns over the country's status as an innovation powerhouse and signs that its historically close ties between industry and academia might be faltering (see page S14). Add to the mix the world's lowest birth rate and declining student numbers, and South Korea seems to be at an inflection point, where it either pivots and adapts, or struggles to keep pace.

Many researchers would like to see the country engage in more diverse partnerships, in addition to those with the United States and China, its two strongest collaborators in the Nature Index. South Korea's acceptance into the European Union's Horizon Europe funding programme is a positive step (see page S2), but domestic conditions need to improve to help it forge more international links. Foreign researchers cite language barriers and cultural divides as hindrances to staying long-term in South Korea, which is affecting recruitment at universities and companies.

What is arguably South Korea's starkest weakness, meanwhile, could provide an opportunity for renewing its innovation potential: just 23% of its research workforce is female (see page S18). Addressing the drop-off that occurs during women's careers might be one way to cement the country's place as a global leader in science.

These are all issues that are sure to be discussed at a Nature Index event on the future of Korean science being held in the country next year.

Bec Crew
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**Nature Index's signature metric Share, used in this supplement, is a fractional count for an article allocated to an institution, city or country/region, that accounts for the proportion of authors on the article whose institutional affiliation is with that institution or location. Adjusted Share accounts for the small annual variation in the total number of articles in Nature Index journals. We point out that the Nature Index provides just one indicator of research performance, and many other factors must be taken into account when assessing the quality of research or institutions.*



On the cover
 A scanning microscope at QNS.
 Credit: Caroline Hommel, QNS

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