CfI: Earlier identification of UK children with SEN

Applicant Briefing

Date: 29 June 2026

The webinar will start at 11:00.

- Welcome, we are currently waiting for more people to join.
- This briefing will be recorded. A copy of the slides and the recording link will be made available on IFS.
- Please enter any questions that you may have into the Q&A Box.
- For more information on the competition process, please view our YouTube channel.

Welcome and Introductions

Liam McCartney

Competition Manager, Innovate UK

Diana Martin

Delivery Lead, ESRC

Matt Neale

Innovation Lead, ESRC

Rhianne Lucas

Contracts for Innovation Portfolio Manager, Innovate UK

UKRI Innovate UK

Agenda

- Key Dates
- Competition Summary & Scope
- Contracts for Innovation
- Eligibility Criteria
- Innovation Funding Service (IFS)
- Funding Rules
- Assessment
- Use of AI
- Additional Support
- Q&A

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Key Dates

Timeline	Date
Competition Opens	**23 June 2026**
Submission Deadline	**5 August 2026** at **11am**
Applicants informed	**8 September 2026** by **5pm**
Project start and end dates	Start by **1 October 2026** End by **30 September 2027**

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Competition Summary & Scope

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Background

- Opportunity Mission – part of UKRI R&D Missions Accelerator Programme – one of five programmes linked to UK Government's Plan for Change missions

- Delivered in partnership with the Department for Education

- Part of our SEN Identification and Support Challenge

    - early identification
    - strengths and needs assessment, and
    - support

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Summary

The aim of this competition is to develop innovations that enable earlier, fairer, and more reliable identification of special educational needs (SEN) in contexts where existing market solutions underperform or do not operate.

- The competition has a UK-wide remit, with the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Additional Support Needs (ASN) terms used in Wales and Scotland being within the definition of “SEN”
- This is phase 1 of a potential 3 phase competition. The decision to proceed with phase 2 will depend on the outcomes from phase 1 and assessment of a separate application into a subsequent phase 2 competition.
- Only the successful applicants from phase 1 will be invited to apply to take part in phase 2.

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Scope – Part 1

Projects that are developing solutions with a credible route to real world adoption and impact to enable one or both of:

- earlier and more accurate identification of children and young people in the UK who have, or are likely to have, SEN
- consistent, high-quality assessment of each child's individual strengths and needs

This could include, but is not limited to, projects that:

- **develop tools designed for deployment by frontline services** especially at universal review points
- **enable identification of children's needs at the earliest stages of life**, particularly prior to formal education
- **refine and test high potential approaches to ensure they are ready to be scaled** at pace across national education systems
- **mitigate current inconsistencies in SEN identification or assessment** in different local authorities and educational settings
- develop **innovations based on the predictive value of prematurity indicators or early speech and language assessments**
- **use health data or operate in health settings**. However, **there must be a clear link to education**, either by products having utility in educational settings or improving educational outcomes.

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Please also refer to the funding competition for more details

Scope – Part 2

You must:

- demonstrate **a credible and practical route to real use**, including plans to commercialise or otherwise embed the solution within existing systems or services
- develop a **tangible output**, such as a product, tool, framework, service model or platform, rather than undertaking purely exploratory or conceptual work
- set out **clear plans for delivery, spreading and scaling**, including who the end users are and how they will access or adopt the solution. Where relevant, innovations should be compatible with existing school and health processes and systems, and forthcoming SEN reforms where appropriate
- demonstrate a **clear plan for establishing the usability and validity of tools** across different geographic regions and age groups. This should include appropriate child, parent and carer, teacher, and SENCO co-design or engagement
- commit to **working collaboratively with UKRI and the Department for Education (DfE), or the equivalent body in the devolved administrations**, to support potential adoption, integration and wider take-up of the solution following the project
- develop projects which, where relevant, have the **potential to "grow with the child"**. That is, having lasting utility over time, rather than being applicable to a single development stage or narrow period of education

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Please also refer to the funding competition for details

About Contracts for Innovation

Innovate UK | Contracts for Innovation

Innovate UK Contracts for Innovation

Helping government, helping businesses

Helping government:

Contracts for Innovation helps government organisations solve tough challenges by connecting them with innovative organisations.

Helping businesses:

Contracts for Innovation offers innovators the chance to win a government contract to help demonstrate and develop their new technologies.

- over 100 public sector organisations participated
- average annual sales grow 30%

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Jenny Griffiths, founder, Snap Fashion

What are Contracts for Innovation?

- Pre-commercial procurement
- Requires a lead customer
- Outcome-driven solutions
- Well-defined challenges
- 100% funded R&D services procurement contracts

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Contracts for Innovation: Key Features

Development Contracts

- 100% funded R&D (procurement contract for R&D Services)
- Payment made on completion of milestones

Contract with Lead Applicant

- Any subcontractors remain accountable to the lead

IP rests with Supplier

- Certain usage rights for the Public Sector (licenses etc)
- Companies encouraged to exploit IP and will be assessed on this basis

Eligibility

- Open to all organisations. No limit on the size or type of company
- Open to companies not currently engaged in the sector
- Research organisations may also apply
- All organisations must demonstrate a route to market

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Applying to a Contracts for Innovation competition

- In addition to the technical criteria, you will be assessed on your plans to commercialise your technology; value for money; potential benefits.
- This is a contract to deliver a specific outcome - be sure you can deliver what's in your application.
- You must include **VAT** (if registered), as this is a contract for R&D services and the award is classed as trading income.
- You **must not** include profit within your application.
- Explain the problem your project is looking to solve and who your target customers will be.
- We cannot increase your costs once you've been awarded a contract.
- Familiarise yourself with the contract - our terms and conditions are non-negotiable.

Eligibility criteria

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Eligibility Criteria – Your Project

Your project must:

- start by 1 October 2026
- end by 30 September 2027
- last up to 12 months
- have total costs of between £200k and £500k, inclusive of VAT

Projects must always start on the first of the month. You must not start your project until your Contract has been approved by Innovate UK.

Contracts for Innovation competitions are open to single applicants only.

Eligibility Criteria – Lead Organisation

To lead a project, you can:

- be an organisation of any size, including those based in the EU, EEA or internationally
- work alone or with the subcontracted skills and expertise of others from business, research organisations, research and technology organisations, or the third sector (charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups)

More information on the different types of organisation can be found in our Funding rules.

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Contracts will be awarded to a single legal entity only.

Eligibility Criteria – Subcontractors

Subcontractors

Subcontractors **are** allowed in this competition.

Subcontractors can be from anywhere in the UK and you must select them through your usual procurement process.

You can use subcontractors from overseas but must make the case in your application as to why you cannot use suppliers from the UK.

All subcontractor costs must be justified and appropriate to the total project costs.

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Eligibility Criteria

Number of applications

You can lead in any number of applications, but if successful you will need to demonstrate your organisation has capacity and necessary resources to fulfil the projects.

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Previously submitted applications

This competition **does** allow you to submit a previously submitted application.

Previously submitted application	Not a Previously submitted application
A previously submitted application is an application Innovate UK judges as not materially different from one you have submitted before (but it can be updated based on the assessors' feedback). If you have previously submitted an application that reached our assessment stage, you can re-apply once more with the same proposal.	A brand-new application, project or idea that you have not previously submitted into an Innovate UK competition. or A previously submitted or ineligible application which: • has been updated based on assessor feedback • and is materially different from the application submitted before • and fits with the scope of this competition

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Innovation Funding Service (IFS)

How to apply

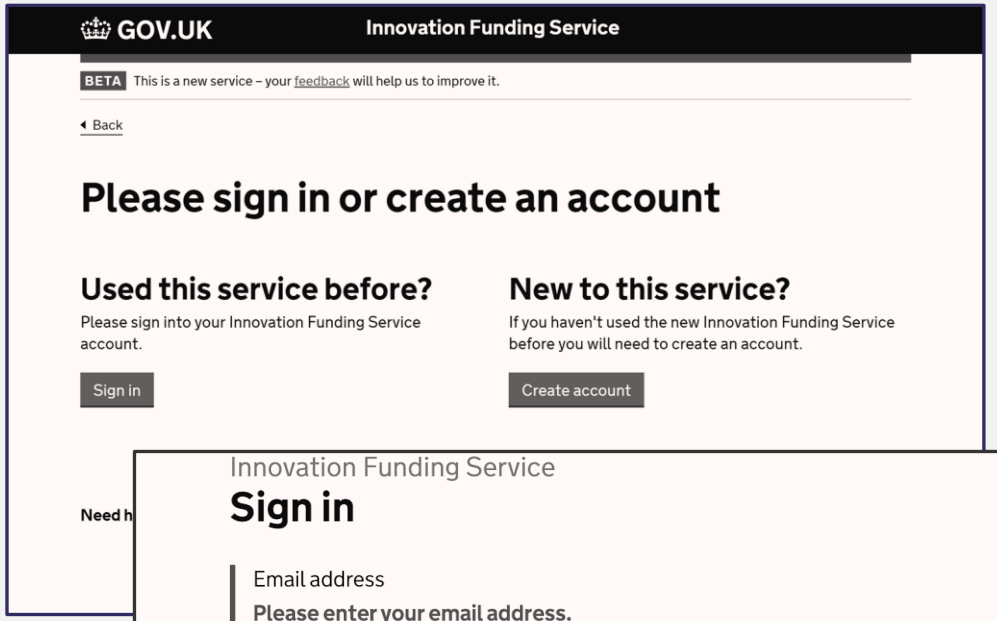
The lead applicant must create an account:

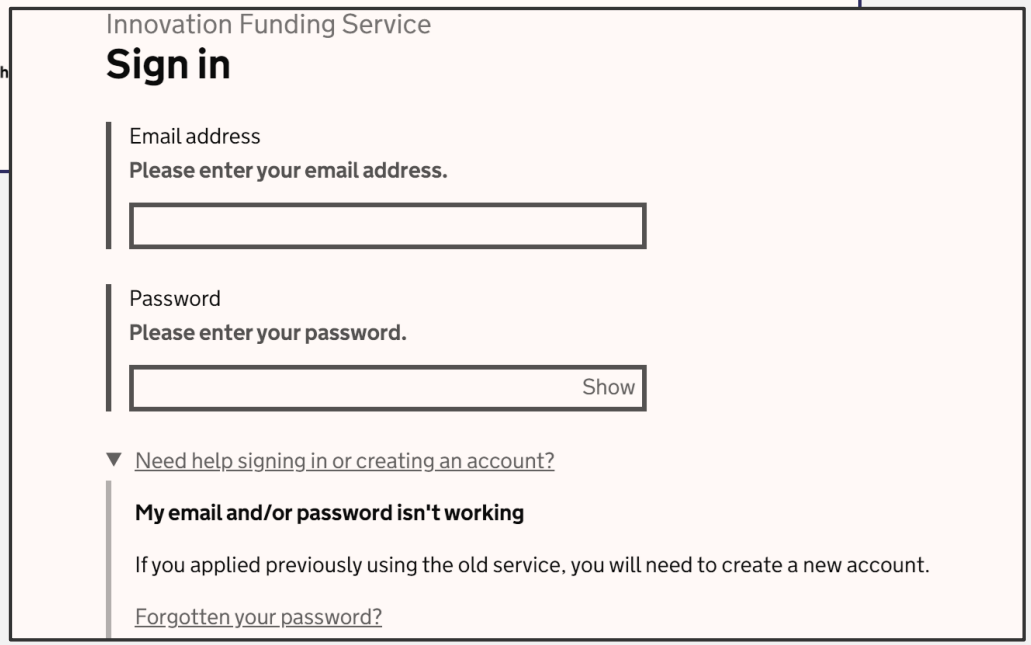
UK registered businesses

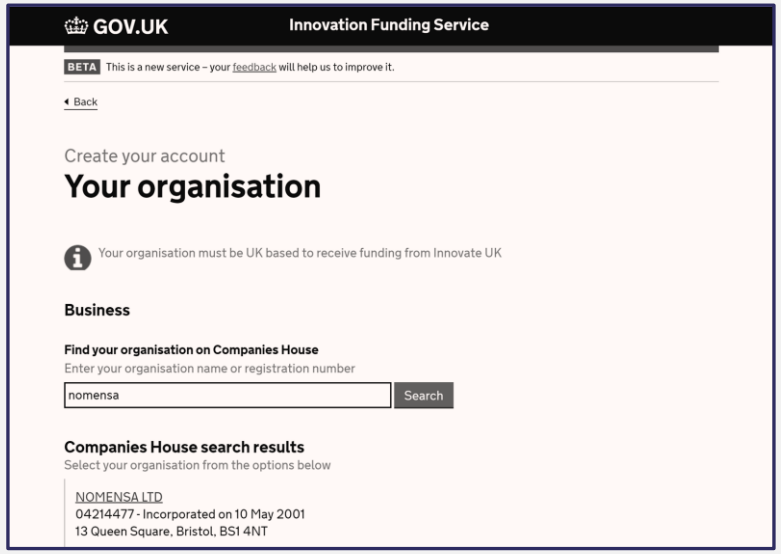
Use Companies House lookup using your company number. This facilitates our checks later if you are successful.

Research organisations, academics and universities

Enter your information manually on IFS







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Application Questions

Application Form		Word Count	Appendix
Question 1	Animal testing (not scored)	Multiple choice	No
Question 2	Permits and licences (not scored)	Multiple choice	No
Question 3	International Collaboration (not scored)	400	No
Question 4	Export licence (not scored)	400	No
Question 5	Trusted Research and Innovation (not scored)	400	No
Question 6	Proposed idea or technology	400	Yes – optional, 2 pages
Question 7	Technical project summary	400	No
Question 8	Current state of the art and intellectual property	400	No
Question 9	Project plan and methodology	400	Yes – mandatory, 2 pages
Question 10	Technical team and expertise	400	No
Question 11	Costs and value for money	400	No
Question 12	Commercial potential	400	No

Detailed question guidance is available on IFS

National Security and Investment Act - overview

Subject to certain criteria, UK applicants are legally required to tell the government about acquisitions of certain entities in 17 sensitive areas of the economy (called 'notifiable acquisitions').
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-and-investment-act-guidance-on-notifiable-acquisitions/national-security-and-investment-act-guidance-on-notifiable-acquisitions

These 17 areas are:

- Advanced Materials
- Advanced Robotics
- Artificial Intelligence
- Civil Nuclear
- Communications
- Computing Hardware
- Critical Suppliers to Government
- Cryptographic Authentication
- Data Infrastructure
- Defence
- Energy
- Military and Dual-Use
- Quantum Technologies
- Satellite and Space Technologies
- Suppliers to the Emergency Services
- Synthetic Biology
- Transport

If there is significant uncertainty about whether an acquisition is notifiable, you may contact the government on **investment.screening@cabinetoffice.gov.uk** to seek a view or get legal advice from your own sources.

UK Strategic Export Controls - overview

UK strategic export controls - GOV.UK

The UK government has put together this guidance for those who export or transfer goods, software or technology (including data, information and technical assistance) which might be subject to strategic export controls.

It explains what control lists are, as well as who they apply to and when, so that exporters can make sure they comply with the law.

Applicants should assess how these controls may impact the project and confirm if they will need a licence (see question 5).

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Q3 International Collaboration (not scored)

Does your proposed work involve any international collaboration or engagement?

You must provide details of any expected international collaboration or engagement. You must include a list of the names and the countries any international project co-leads, project partners, visiting researchers, or other collaborators are based in. You must also include details of any subcontractors or service providers.

If your proposed work does not involve international collaboration or engagement, your answer must confirm this.

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Q5 Trusted Research and Innovation (not scored)

You must explain if your proposed project work relates to UKRI's Trusted Research and Innovation Principles, including:

- a list of any dual-use (both military and non-military) applications to your research
- a list of the areas where your project is relevant to one or more of the 17 areas of the UK National Security and Investment (NSI) Act)
- whether an export control license is required for this project under the *academic export control guidance* and the status of any applications
- a list of any items or substances on the UK Strategic Export Control List

We may ask you to provide additional TR&I information at a later date, in line with UKRI TR&I Principles and funding terms and conditions

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Project Impact questions

- Each organisation in your application will complete the Project Impact questions within the ‘Supporting information’ section
- The Project Impact questions ask for data about your business and innovation and its contribution to the UK economy, society, and the environment
- Visit the Project Impact guidance page for more information, the types of questions you will be asked and how to get further support
- By providing this data, you are enabling us to better understand the impact of our support. It will help us identify success stories and provide evidence to government and the public of the value of supporting innovative businesses

For more information:

- Watch Our Impact Management Framework video
- How is the Project Impact data collected? video

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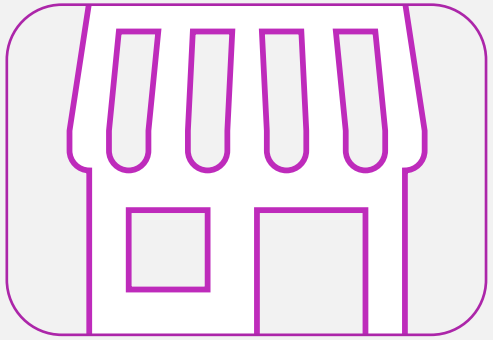
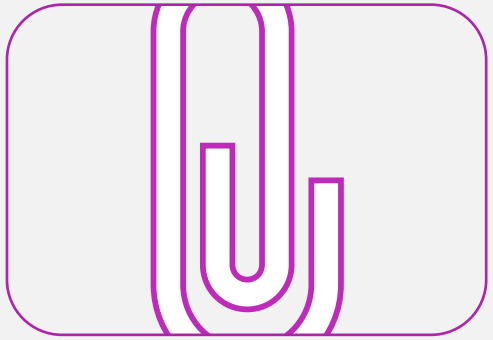
Your Project Cost Categories

View our Contracts for Innovation costs guidance

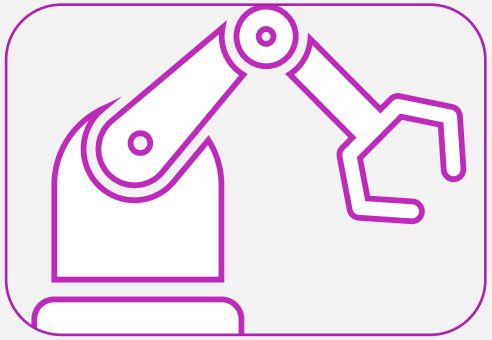
Labour



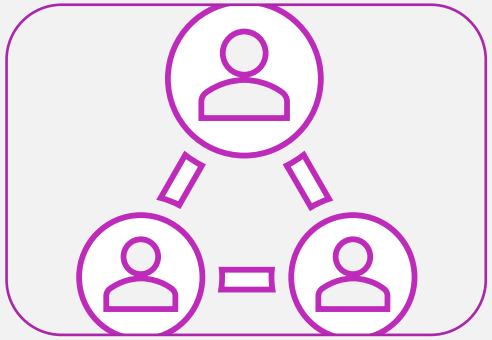
Overheads



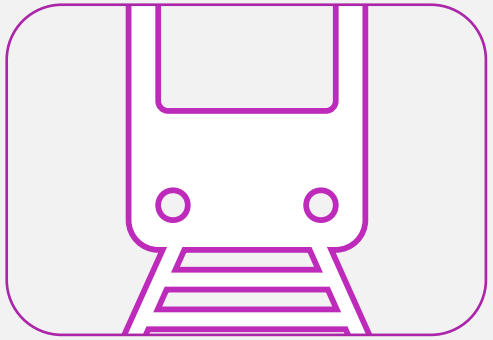
Materials



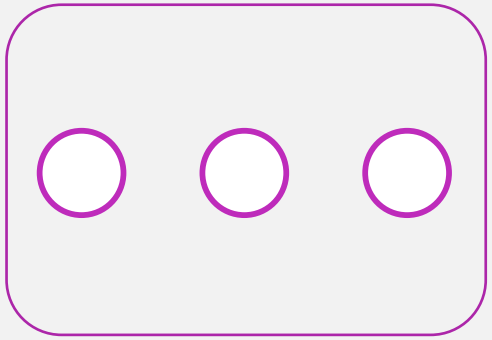
Capital Usage



Subcontractors

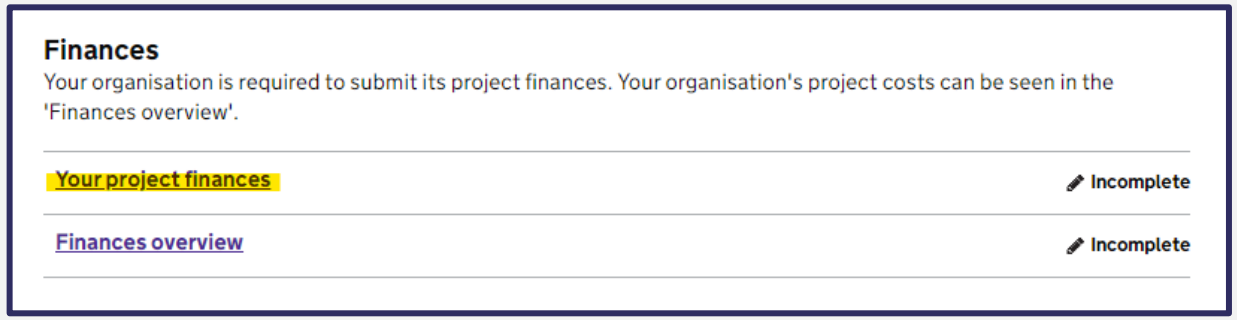


Travel & Subsistence



Other

Your project finances



Your project costs
Add your project costs by category – refer to previous slide for link to guidance

Your project location
Enter postcode for where most of the project work will take place.

Your organisation
Add details of your organisation including size, turnover and number of employees

Your payment milestones
Enter each milestone and deliverable information. Where appropriate, link the milestone with a payment request.

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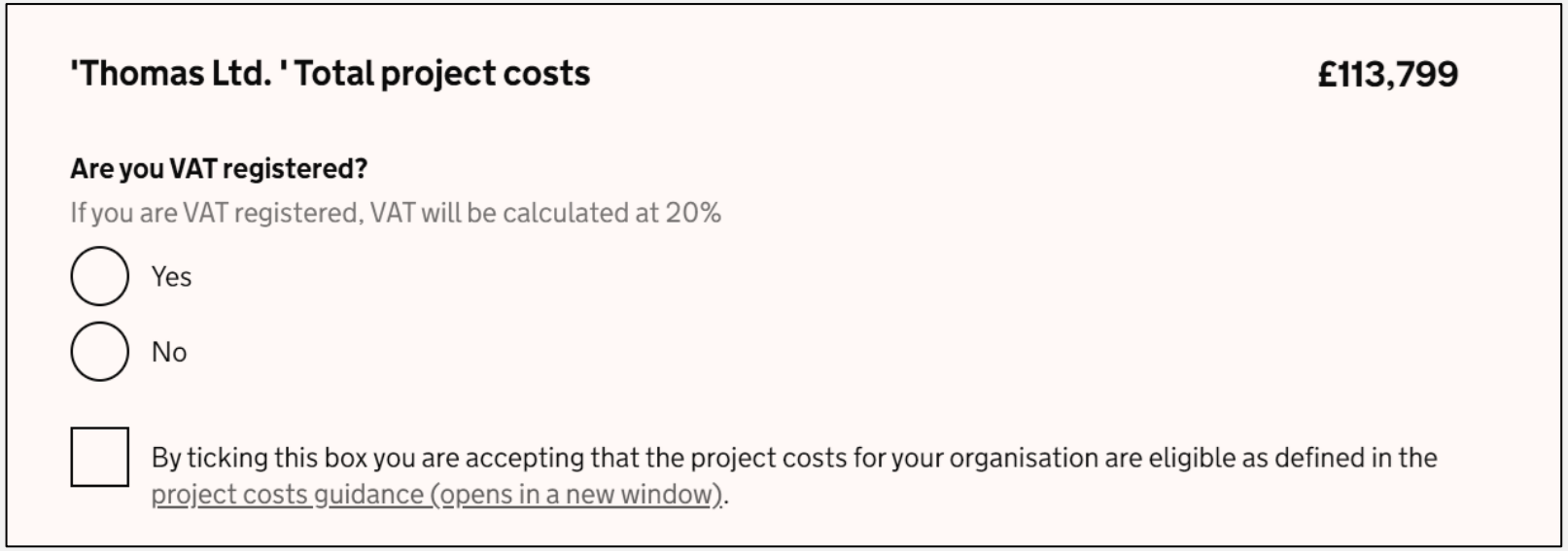
VAT

Once you have completed your costs you will be asked to confirm if you're VAT registered.
If you select 'yes', IFS will automatically add on VAT calculated at 20%.

If you are a VAT registered organisation you will **not** need to enter your project costs inclusive of VAT as the application form will calculate the VAT for you.

If you are not VAT registered then you can quote without VAT, but you will not be able to increase invoice values to cover VAT later on.

Make sure not to double count your VAT as it may increase your project costs and make you ineligible.



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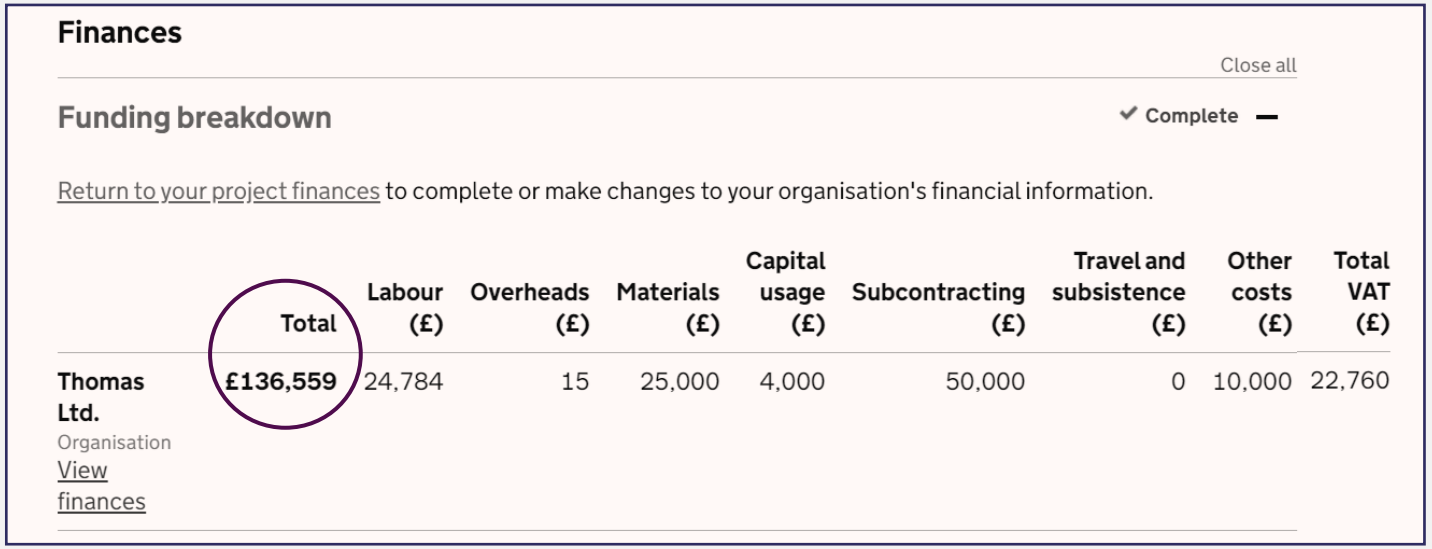
Project cost summary



Finances

Close all

Funding breakdown ✔ Complete —

Return to your project finances to complete or make changes to your organisation's financial information.

	Total	Labour (£)	Overheads (£)	Materials (£)	Capital usage (£)	Subcontracting (£)	Travel and subsistence (£)	Other costs (£)	Total VAT (£)
Thomas Ltd. Organisation View finances	**£136,559**	24,784	15	25,000	4,000	50,000	0	10,000	22,760

Ensure the highlighted costs fit the criteria for this competition.

The maximum project costs for this competition are £**XX**

The lead organisation can see a summary of project costs calculated inclusive of VAT (if VAT registered)

Ensure the total costs of your milestones match total project costs

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Subcontractors

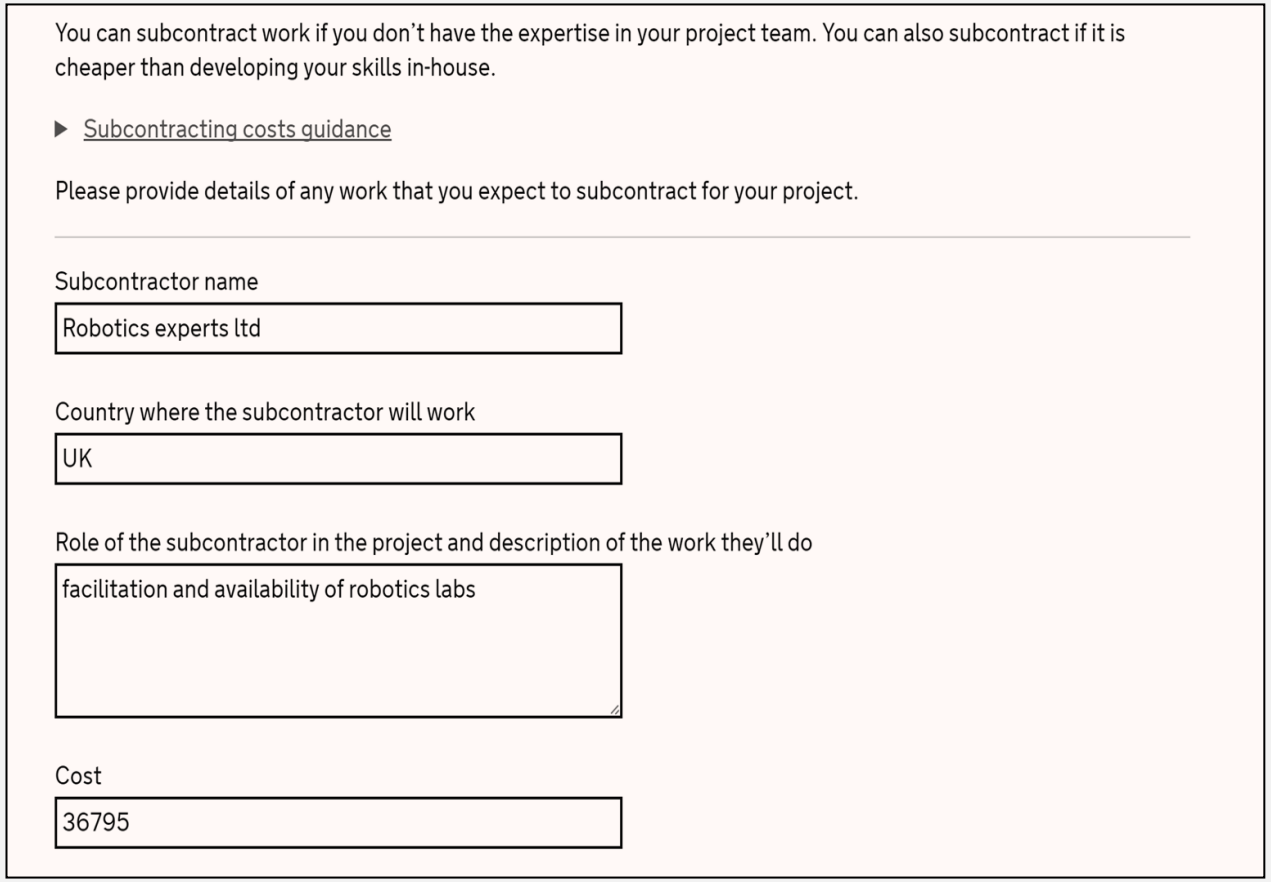
Eligible:

Subcontracting outside of the UK is permitted.

You should fully explain the specific skills the subcontractor brings to the project.

If you're subcontracting to a parent or sister company, please ensure you list at cost and do not include profit.

All costs must be justified and quantified.


You can subcontract work if you don't have the expertise in your project team. You can also subcontract if it is cheaper than developing your skills in-house.

▶ Subcontracting costs guidance

Please provide details of any work that you expect to subcontract for your project.

Subcontractor name

Robotics experts ltd

Country where the subcontractor will work

UK

Role of the subcontractor in the project and description of the work they'll do

facilitation and availability of robotics labs

Cost

36795

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Other costs

Costs that could not be added under previous headings.

Do not double count.

All costs will be reviewed by the finance team during contract award

Other costs **£ 0**

Please provide details of any project costs which cannot be covered by the other cost categories.

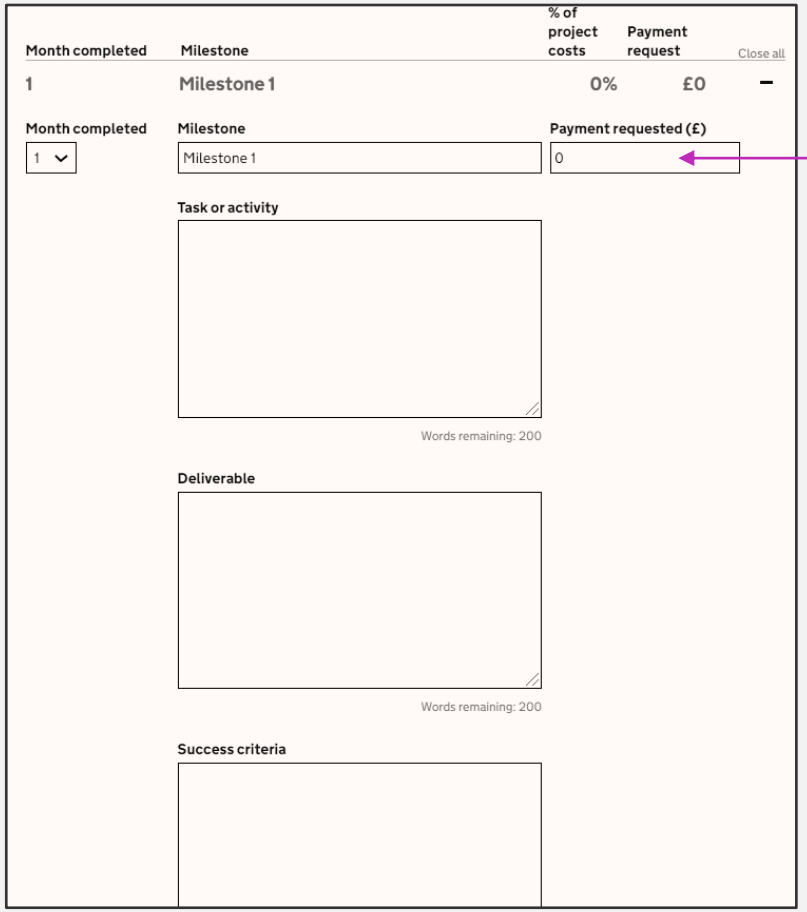
▶ Other costs guidance

Please note that legal or project audit and accountancy fees are not eligible and should not be included as an 'other cost'. Patent filing costs of new IP relating to the project are limited to £7,500 for SME applicants only. Please provide estimates of other costs that do not fit within any other cost headings.

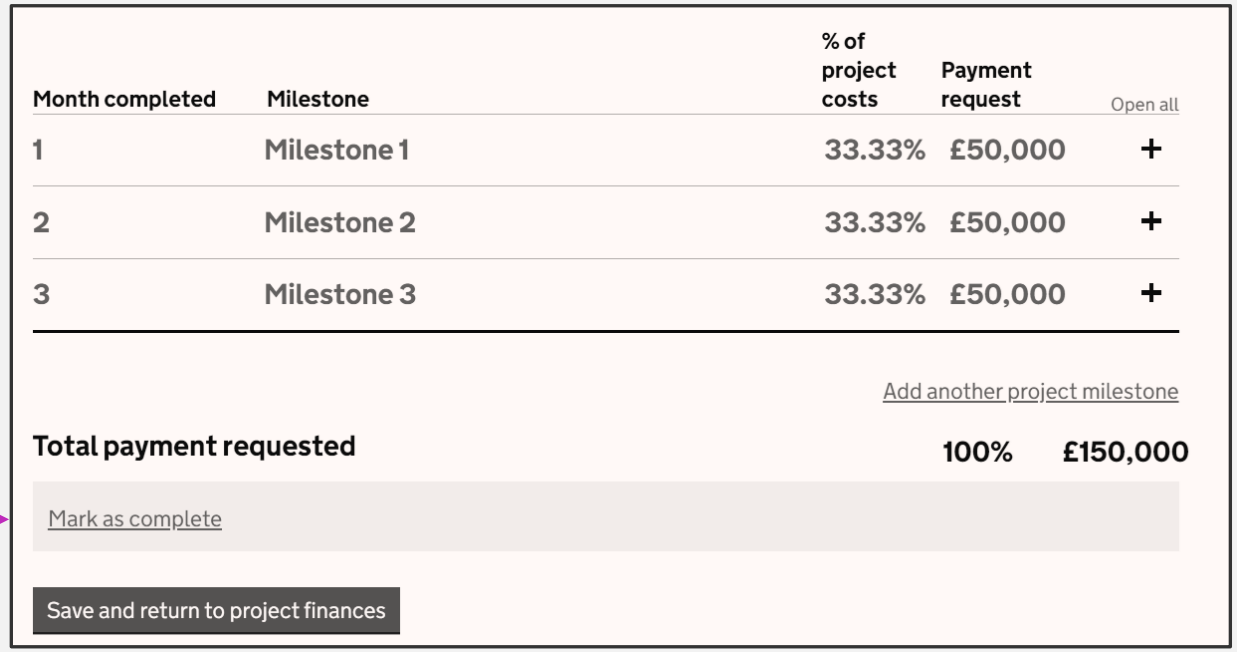
Description and justification of the cost	Estimated cost (£)
	0

Add another cost

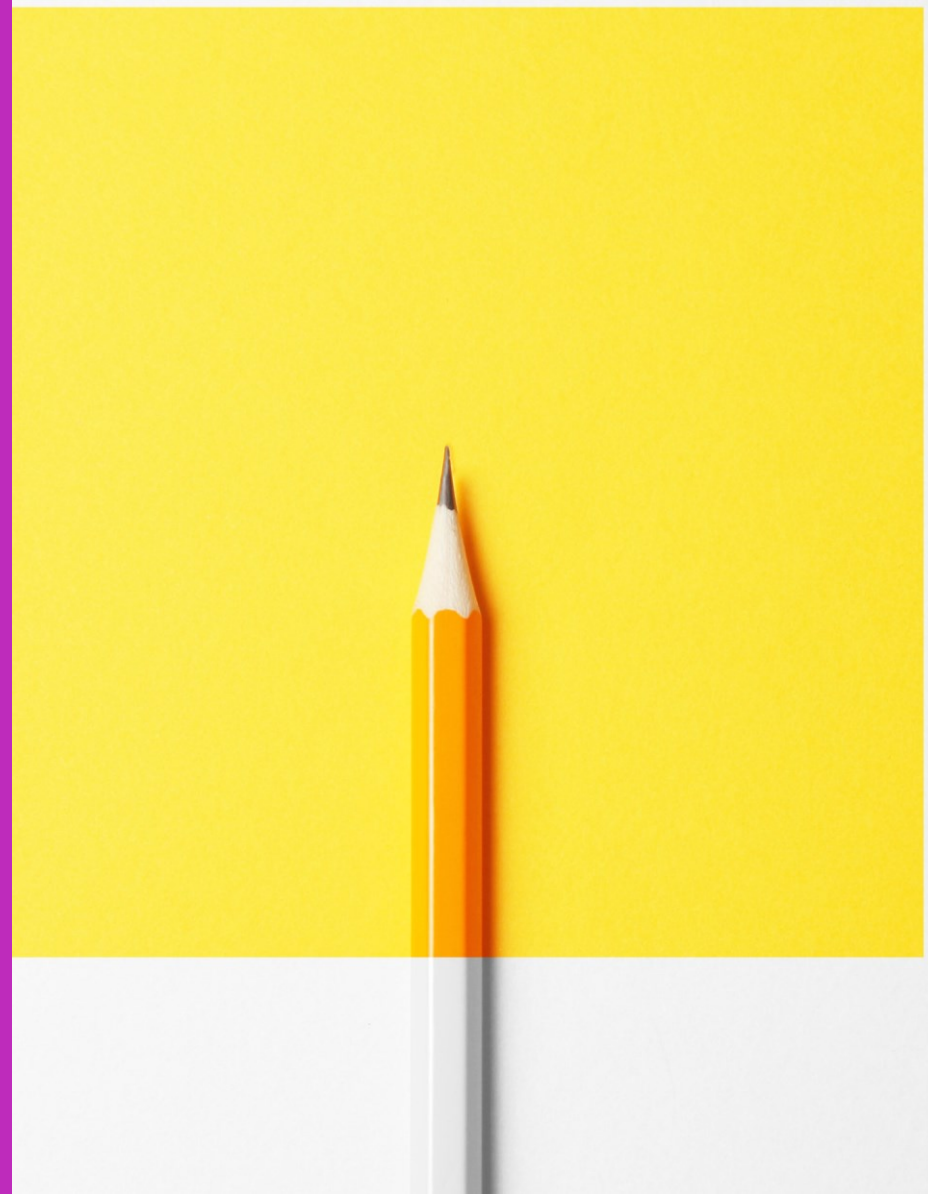
Payment milestones



Enter each milestone and any associated payments



Once all milestones have been entered, mark the section as complete



Information to include in your milestone template

- Details of work packages with clear description of the activities taking place in each milestone.
- The month the milestone will be completed, which will help form your **quarterly** payment schedule.
- Clear and distinct deliverable(s) from each milestone that you'll be able to evidence to confirm you've completed the milestone in full.
- Success criteria for each milestone, noting that it must be clearly relatable to the work packages, deliverable(s) and must be measurable within reason.
- Costs for each milestone – check that the total costs on the milestones match the total project costs page within the finance section.
- Do not cluster your milestones together, even if they occur in the same period. We need separate deliverables and costs for each milestone.

Milestone example

Milestone

Build test environment for prototype

Task or activity

Complete physical hardware build

Software integration finalised

Deliverable

Prototype test environment built in accordance with associated designs

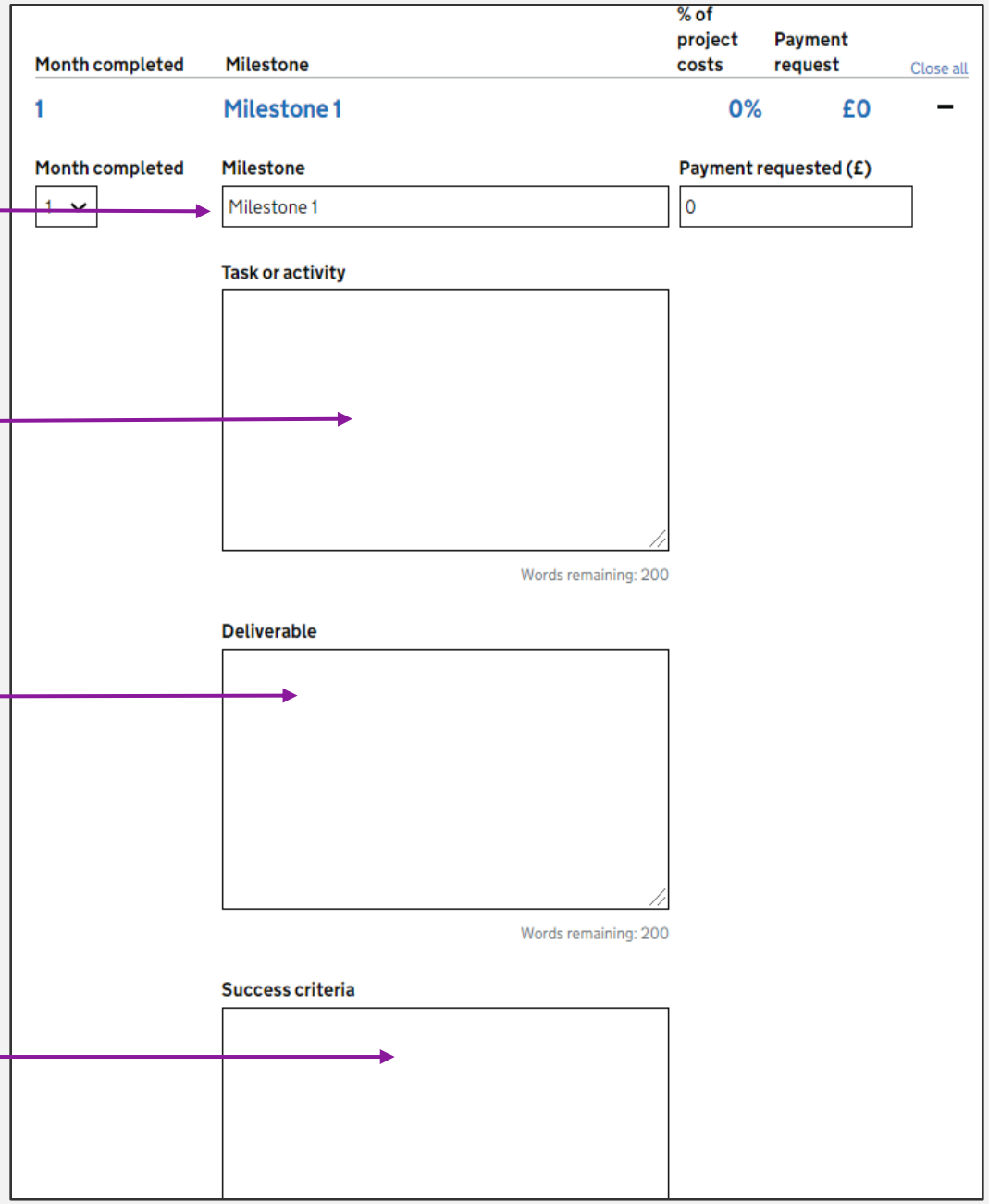
Operating instruction manual completed

Success Criteria

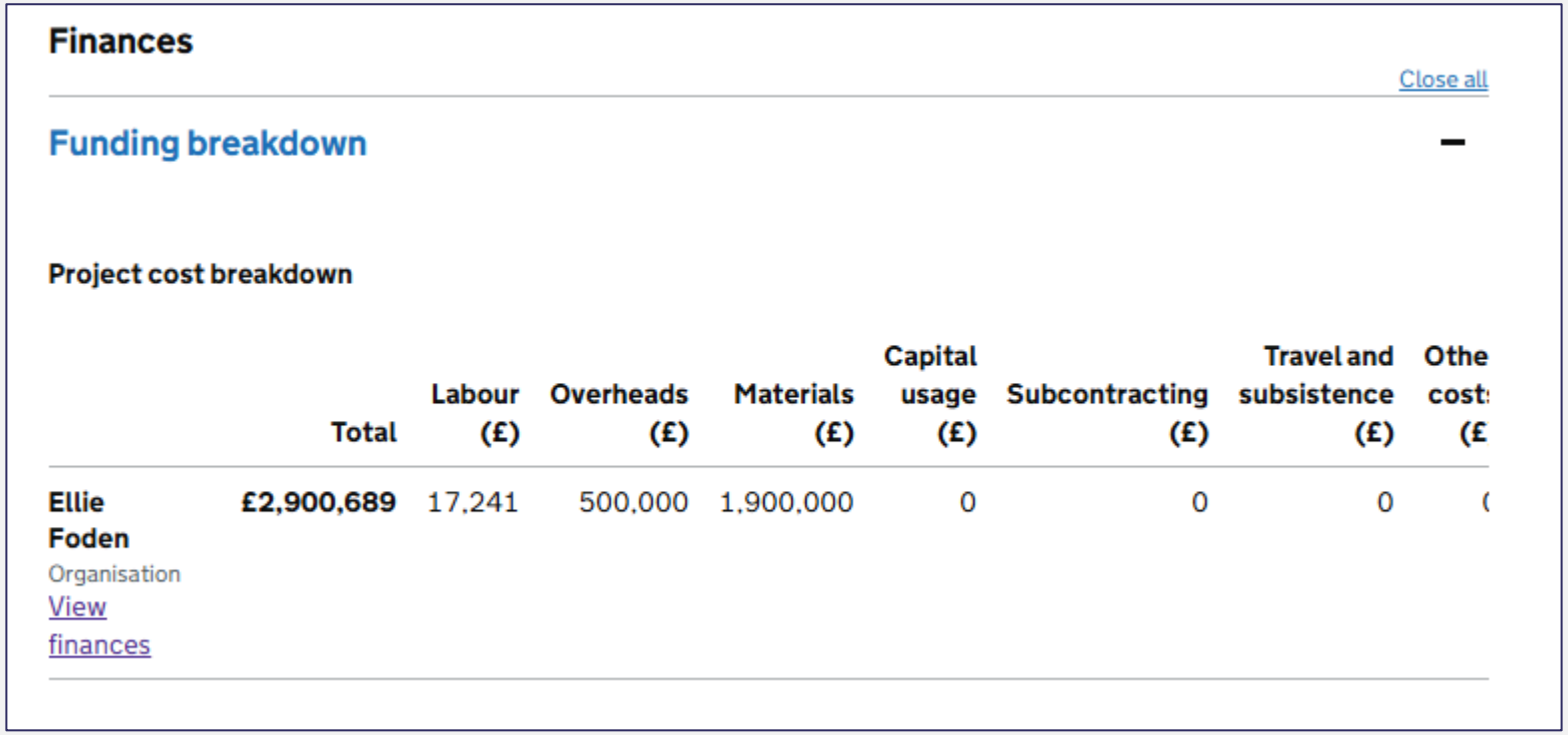
Fully operational test environment.

Successful integration of prototype and test environment software.

0.5% error rate



Checking your finances are complete



Finances

Close all

Funding breakdown –

Project cost breakdown

	Total	Labour (£)	Overheads (£)	Materials (£)	Capital usage (£)	Subcontracting (£)	Travel and subsistence (£)	Othe cost (£
Ellie Foden Organisation View finances	**£2,900,689**	17,241	500,000	1,900,000	0	0	0	(

Check your finances have been correctly entered, with the correct costs as per the eligibility criteria of the competition and the correct VAT status.

IFS DOES NOT VALIDATE TOTAL PROJECT COSTS

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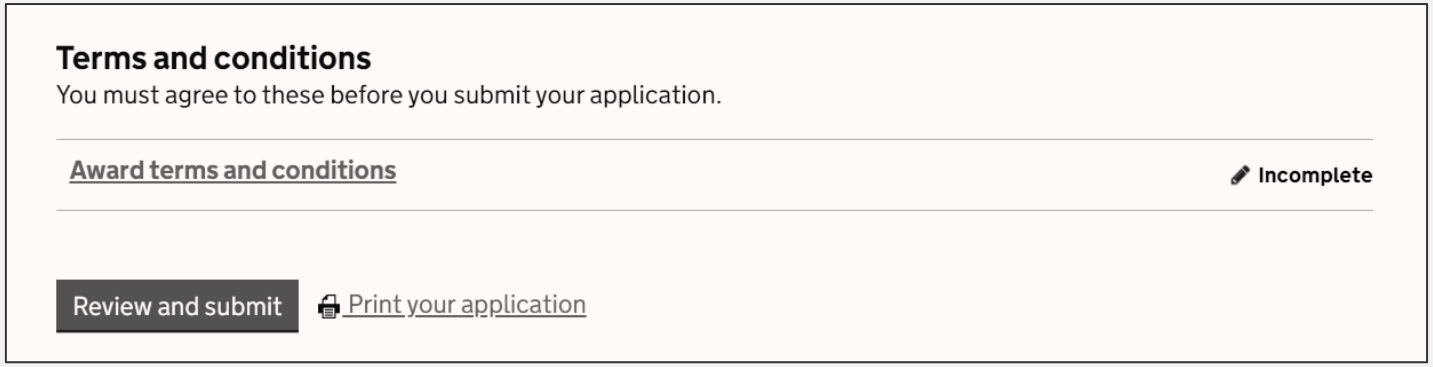
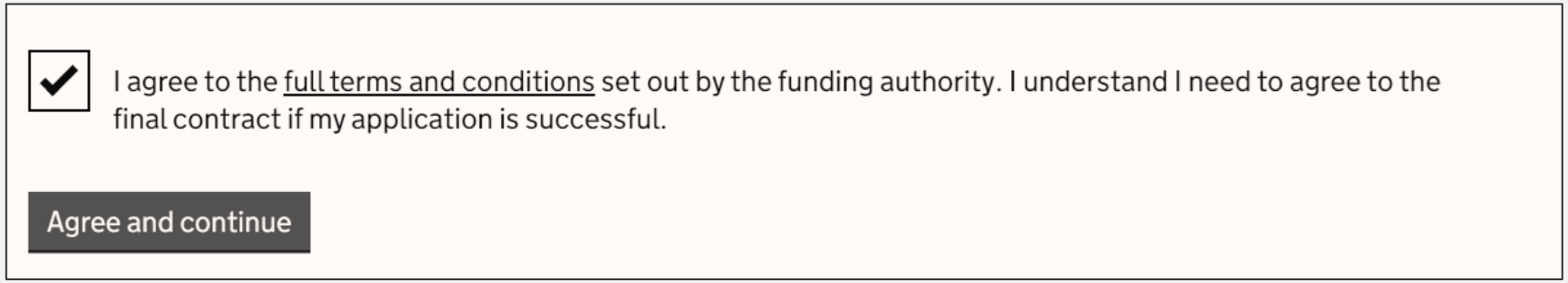
Terms and Conditions

Before you can submit your application, you must agree to the draft terms and conditions for this competition. Please ensure you share the T&Cs with your legal team at the earliest possible opportunity.

Note that for procurement, they may differ from any you have agreed to before. These terms are set and are non-negotiable.





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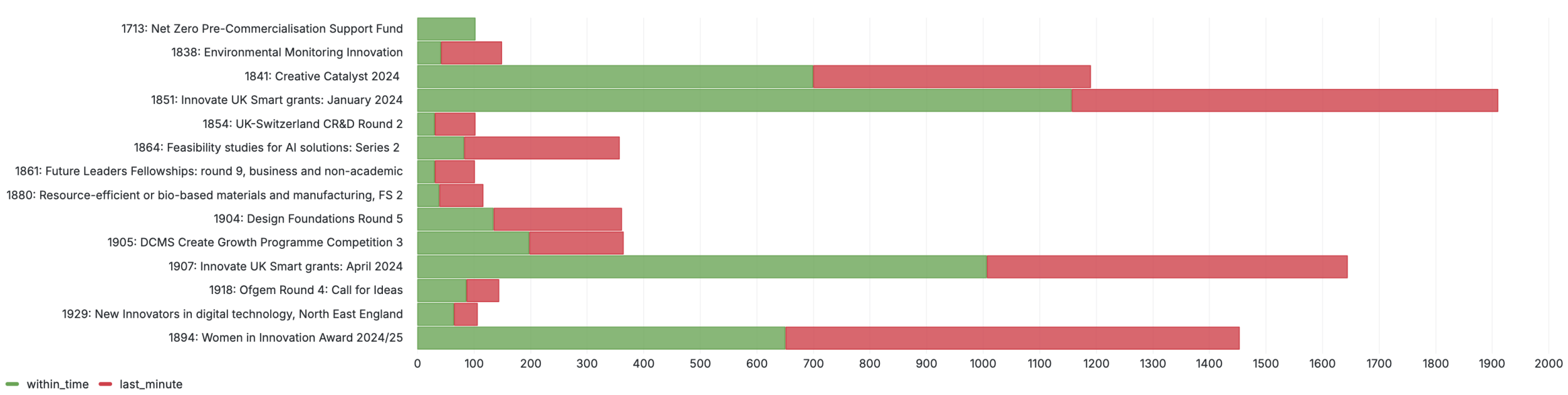
Submitting your application

Customer Support can help resolve any issues you might have when submitting **but only if they are contacted before the deadline**.

Once the deadline has passed, your application cannot be submitted.



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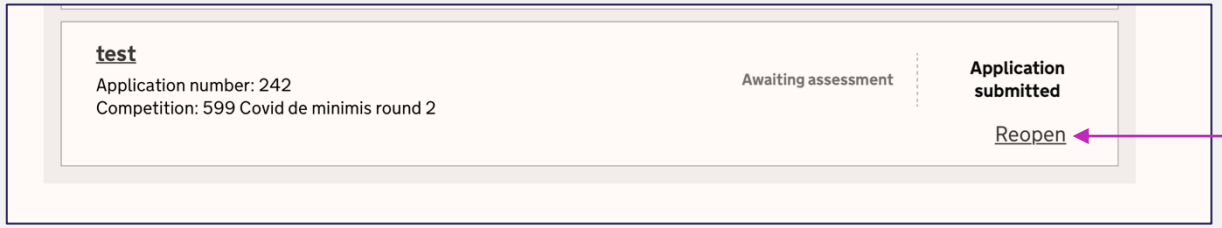
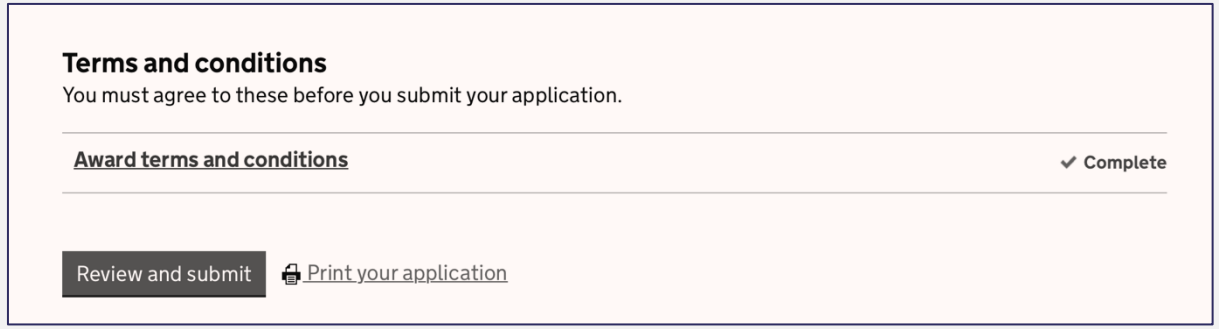
Editing a submitted application



Reopen by clicking here



Remember to press ‘Submit application’

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Pros & Cons of using AI to support you

With the advances in AI technology, it is only natural to use technology to support you in applying to our competitions. Whilst we don't recommend or advise against it, we would like to make you aware of the following which could potentially impact your project.

Pros

- Removes barriers for people with disabilities and non-English speakers
- Allows you to rephrase your content to meet the word count in a question
- Ensures all aspects of a question are answered
- Can aid a better understanding of:
  - intended/wider market
  - best practice in project management
  - complementary technologies and advances in the industry
  - expected project impacts

Cons

- It is not always accurate in its assumptions and can get things wrong
- AI learns from the information you give it as well as what it has already learnt
- May provide a generic response meaning your application could use similar phrasing to others
- AI can be detected as non-human as it lacks expression and insight because it relies on logic to summarise information based on the question asked

Whilst AI offers many benefits, it is important you are aware that **you are potentially sharing your idea with the world,** so be careful what you share as you have no control over how it is shared on once you do.

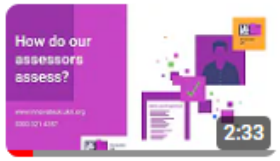
UKRI Innovate UK

Assessment

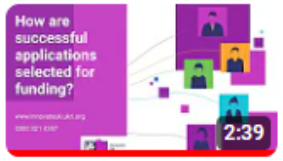
UKRI Innovate UK

Assessment

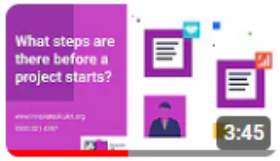
[YouTube Playlist]

1 

How do our assessors assess?
Innovate UK • 8.1K views • 2 years ago

2 

How are successful applications selected for funding?
Innovate UK • 17K views • 2 years ago

3 

What steps are there before a project starts?
Innovate UK • 7.7K views • 2 years ago

4

How are successful projects monitored?
Innovate UK • 4.1K views • 2 years ago

5

How successful applicants receive their funding.
Innovate UK • 4.6K views • 2 years ago

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Project setup

If you pass the technical assessment, you will have a further eight steps detailed in your notification to complete in Project Setup before being able to start your project.

These are:

- Project details
- Project team
- Documents
- You will be allocated a Monitoring Service Provider (MSP)
- Bank details
- Finance checks
- Spend profile
- Contract

Please share the T&Cs with your legal team at the earliest possible opportunity to avoid any delays.

You are expected to complete all the steps above **within 30 calendar days** of receiving your notification. Failure to do so may result in funding being withdrawn.

Work can only commence on your project once you have received your Go Live email.

Additional Support

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Reasonable adjustments

We welcome and encourage applications from people of all backgrounds and are committed to making our application process accessible to everyone. This includes making reasonable adjustments, for people who have a disability or a long-term condition and face barriers applying to us.

You can contact us at any time to ask for guidance. We recommend you contact us at least 15 working days before this competition's closing date to allow us to put the most suitable support in place. The support we can provide may be limited if you contact us close to the competition deadline.

You can contact Innovate UK by email or call 0300 321 4357. Our phone lines are open from 9am to 12pm and 2pm to 5pm UK time, Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays).

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Reasonable adjustments – what we need from you

To apply for a reasonable adjustment we will need to collect some information from you, below is the list of what we need:

- Name
- Organisation
- Email address
- Phone number
- Competition you are applying to
- Application number if you've started an application
- Consent to pass info to Innovate UK Business Connect

This information must be given to Innovate UK Customer Support Services, Business Connect are unable to provide support without a referral from CSS

Further information on the process can be found here https://iuk-business-connect.org.uk/how-we-help/reasonable-adjustments-service/

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Reasonable adjustments – what we can do

Below is a list of possible adjustments we can make, this list is not exhaustive and not every adjustment will be appropriate for you, adjustments will be made on a case-by-case basis:

- Proofreading
- Clarifying language
- Resources
- Introduction to experts
- Time management
- Note-taking

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Reasonable adjustments – what we can not do

The reasonable adjustments offered are designed to remove barriers to applying, they are not designed to make decisions for you or give you advice on an application. With that in mind, the support we offer does not include the below:

- Providing deadline extensions
- Choosing which competition to apply to
- Developing an idea
- Advising whether your idea is in scope for a competition
- Offering financial advice
- Helping with research

UKRI Innovate UK

97% of clients would recommend us

94% report that our service has had a positive impact on their growth

Innovate UK Business Growth

The indispensable partner for ambitious innovators

We equip innovation-focused businesses to **make the best strategic choices** and **harness the right resources** to accelerate their growth.

Thousands of innovators benefit from our **intensive and tailored advisory support** to achieve their ambitious goals every year.

We are in their corner – do you want us in yours? Visit iukbg.ukri.org to learn more.

"Innovate UK Business Growth gave us the tools to grow with confidence"
Natali Georgieva, Co-founder at ALIANAz

Who do we support?

- Ambitious, innovation-focused businesses that have won an Innovate UK competition, and are growing strongly or have high growth potential, may be contacted about support
- Registered at Companies House with up to 250 employees
- Management teams motivated to engage fully with us to help achieve growth milestones

UKRI Innovate UK

Cyber Action Toolkit

The NSCS has created a free Cyber Action Toolkit that gives clear bite-sized actions to protect small businesses, their money and reputation from cyber crime

Search “NCSC cyber toolkit” or click here: https://cybertoolkit.service.ncsc.gov.uk/

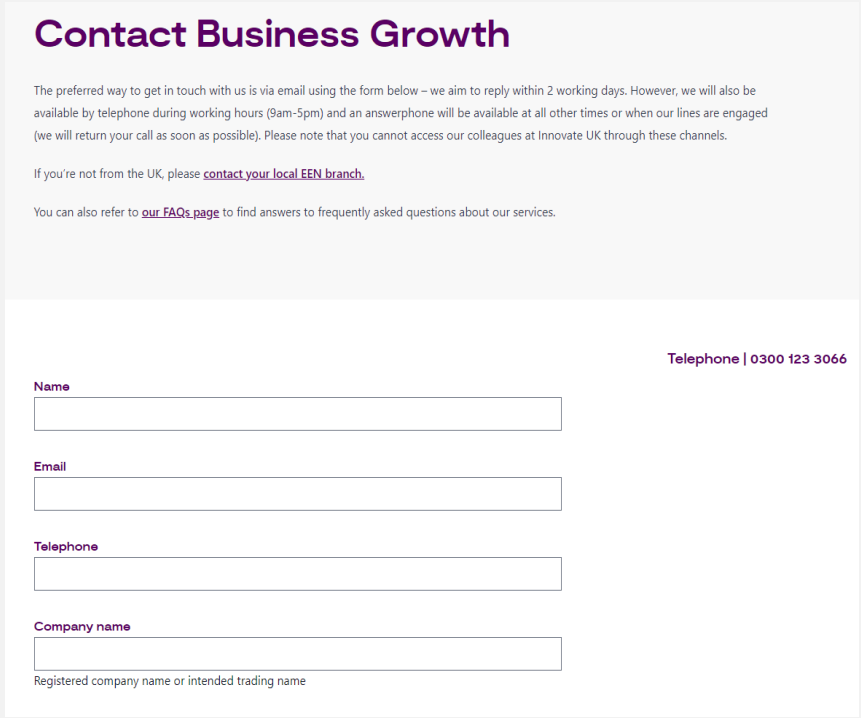
UKRI Innovate UK

Contact Us

Whether you need help to set a strategic direction or with progressing your innovation, financing your growth or unlocking the potential of international partnerships.

visit our website:
www.iukbg.ukri.org

or call us on:
0300 123 3066



Note: The service is offered to all Innovate UK competition winners but any suitable ambitious innovation-focused businesses with under 250 employees can be supported

UKRI Innovate UK

Useful Information

- UKRI's General Guidance
- Innovate UK Business Connect's Good Application Guide
- Who we fund
- Collaboration Agreement Guidance: Lambert Toolkit
- Innovate UK: Shaping the Future

Funding opportunities

To find out more about the competitions currently available you can visit either the **Innovation Funding Service (IFS)** or the **funding finder** on the UKRI website. Through these links, you can review the competitions available and decide which ones may be right for you.

You can **sign up to our newsletter** to receive all the latest information on our competitions straight to your inbox or **register for email alerts** to get page updates from Innovate UK.

The government also offers **other opportunities for businesses to get finance and support**.
Innovate UK reserves the rights to host competitions on a needs basis and will adjust each competition criteria and scope accordingly. We may occasionally run closed competitions that are for invited applicants only. These are run based on the challenge requirement or need.

UKRI Innovate UK

Q&A

Innovate UK

Contact

Customer Support Services

0300 321 4357 (Monday - Friday 9am-12pm and 2pm-5pm)

support@iuk.ukri.org

Innovate UK
ukri.org/councils/innovate-uk

Innovate UK Business Connect
iuk-business-connect.org.uk

Innovate UK Business Growth
www.iukbg.ukri.org

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Thank You

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