

Available support

- **JOIN OUR LinkedIn Group**
 - **Farming Innovation Programme: Finding Information and Partners**
- **1-2-1 MEETING BOOKING LINK**
 - **15 min 1:1s with Jo or Simon (Innovate UK Business Connect)**

Find out more:

<https://iuk-business-connect.org.uk/agrifood/>

Why not get the Business Connect [AgriFood Newsletter](#) each month?



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Robert Crook
Innovation Lead – Innovate UK

Farming Innovation Programme

Small R&D Partnership Round 4 Competition

Q&A and Consortia Building Event

18th September 2025

Robert Crook Innovation Lead



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



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Why are we supporting innovation?

Productivity: The UK has seen lower productivity growth than our neighbours over the last 30 years

Environment: Agriculture accounted for 10% of UK greenhouse gas emissions in 2018

Fragmentation: many fantastic researchers, innovative businesses and promising ideas, but players don't necessarily collaborate effectively

Coordination: failures in the current innovation system result in poor translation of public spending into real life impacts on productivity/sustainability

Adoption: Low levels of uptake of innovation by farmers, growers, businesses in large part due to capital risk & ineffective knowledge sharing

Previous Programmes

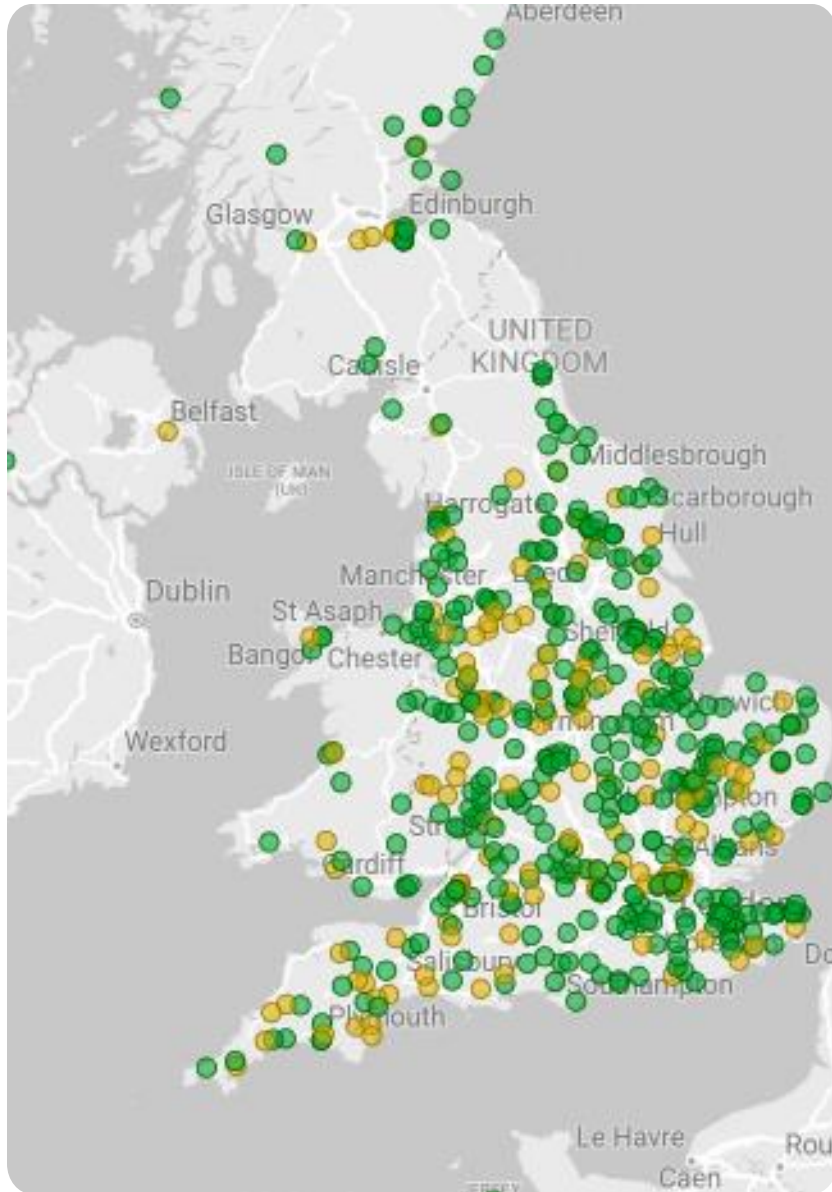
2013 - Agri-Tech Strategy

£70m Agri-tech Catalyst
£90m for 4 Agri-tech Centres

2018 - Industrial Strategy Challenge

Fund (ISCF) £90m Transforming
Food Production Challenge

2021 - £14.5m **Farming Innovation
Pathways** fund



Farming Innovation Programme

Since 2021, the **Farming Innovation Programme** (FIP) has been Defra's flagship for supporting research and innovation in farming and is one of the main vehicles for our innovation and research ambition.

FIP aims to enhance productivity, environmental sustainability and resilience in England's farming sectors.

Funding is awarded on a competitive basis to high quality, innovative projects.

To date it has supported 294 projects involving 611 organisations. FIP has committed over £150m of Defra funding and attracted over £54m of private investment.

The **Farming Innovation Programme** offers a range of opportunities for farmers, growers, businesses and researchers to collaborate on industry-led research and development:



Small **Research Starter Projects** where farmers, growers & foresters can explore a new idea



Feasibility projects where businesses can check if a research idea works in practice.



Small/Large Partnership Projects, where businesses can further develop a new farming product or service towards commercialisation.



Themed competitions (Farming Futures R&D Fund), where businesses and researchers can work on longer-term innovation focussing on issues like: **Climate-Smart Farming, Sustainable farm-based Proteins, Robotics and Automation, Environmental resilience or Nutrient Management**



ADOPT Fund where farmers can trial on-farm new innovations, practices or technologies

Coming up...

Feasibility Round 4

- Publish date 29th September 2025
- Open date 13th October 2025

The future...

Announcement within the Modern Industrial Strategy to allocate at least £200 million to the Programme up to 2030

Agri-tech one of the sectors featured in the Advanced Manufacturing Sector Plan





Develop a new farming product or service

→ Small R&D Partnership Round 4

Summary

Total budget

 **7.8**
Million

Total project costs

£1-3
Million

Duration

Up to **30**
months 

If you have **primary producers** receiving grant funding, a **min of 50%** of those funds, **must** be **allocated** to primary producers **based in England**



For **UK businesses** wishing to **collaborate** with other UK organisations



Businesses within a supply chain, are encouraged to come together as a partnership to solve major challenges or opportunities

Competition opens
15 September 2025

Competition deadline
5 Nov 2025 11:00 am

Projects to start by
1 July 2026

Projects to end by
31st December 2028



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Develop a new farming product or service

→ Small R&D Partnership

- Develop commercially relevant solutions/outputs for major on-farm or immediate post farmgate challenges or opportunities
- Look to improve productivity, sustainability and resilience of farming.
- Collaborate within UK communities for better R&D agricultural solutions
- Accelerate adoption by ensuring knowledge exchange with the wider sector and other stakeholders



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Scope



In Scope

Address major on-farm or immediate post farmgate challenges or opportunities.

Solutions **must** significantly **improve**:

- ✓ productivity
- ✓ sustainability and environmental impact
- ✓ progression towards net zero emissions
- ✓ resilience

Out of Scope: we **will not fund** projects that

- × do not benefit farmers, growers or foresters in **England**
- × are equine specific
- × involve wild caught fisheries
- × involve aquaculture, **for fish production or human consumption**
- × involve cellular expression of proteins or cultivated meat or acellular production systems
- × are for the production of crops or plants for medicinal or pharmaceutical use



Specific Themes



Address a significant **industry challenge or opportunity** in at least one of the below:

- ✓ farmed animals
- ✓ plants
- ✓ novel food production systems
- ✓ bioeconomy and agroforestry



Hints and Tips



- **Preparation is Key**

Do not leave this until last minute

- **Eligibility and Scope**

Understand and comply with criteria to avoid missing out before assessment

- **Build up your partnership**

Get to know and understand your partners

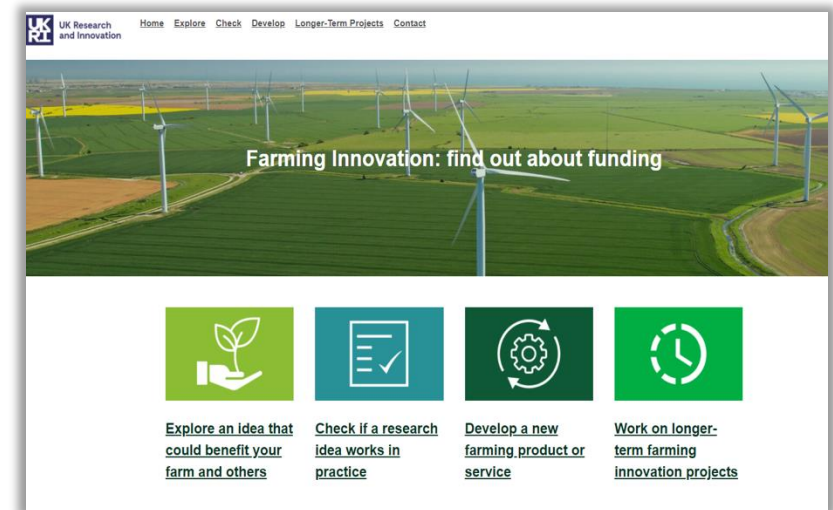
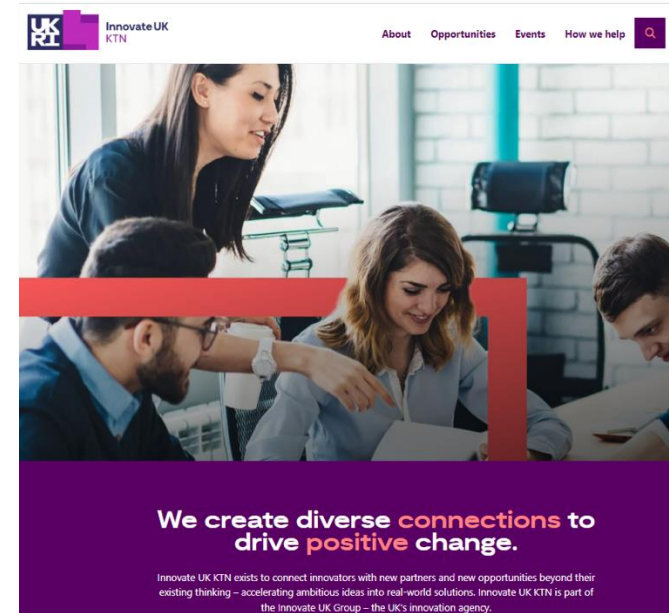
Know who you are planning to work with before you commit and make sure all partners are aware of their role and responsibilities

- **If you apply you will be entering a competitive process**

Provide clear concise information so we can fully understand your project

Support

- **IUK website pages:**
 - Competition brief: [link](#)
 - General applicant and finance guidance
- **Innovate UK Business Connect Agri-Food Team**
 - Identify potential collaborators and make connections
 - Help identify strengths of your proposal and how it can help with issues that farmers, growers and end-users may be facing across
 - Make 1-1 connections with other attendees
- **Farming Innovation Programme website**
 - <https://farminginnovation.ukri.org/>
- **IUK Customer Support**
 - email support@iuk.ukri.org or call 0300 321 4357.





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Previous Competition Winners (Round 3)

Andrew Lessey, COO – Antler Bio



Antler | bio

FIP: Small R&D Partnerships – Round 4

Dr Andrew Lessey
COO



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European
Innovation
Council

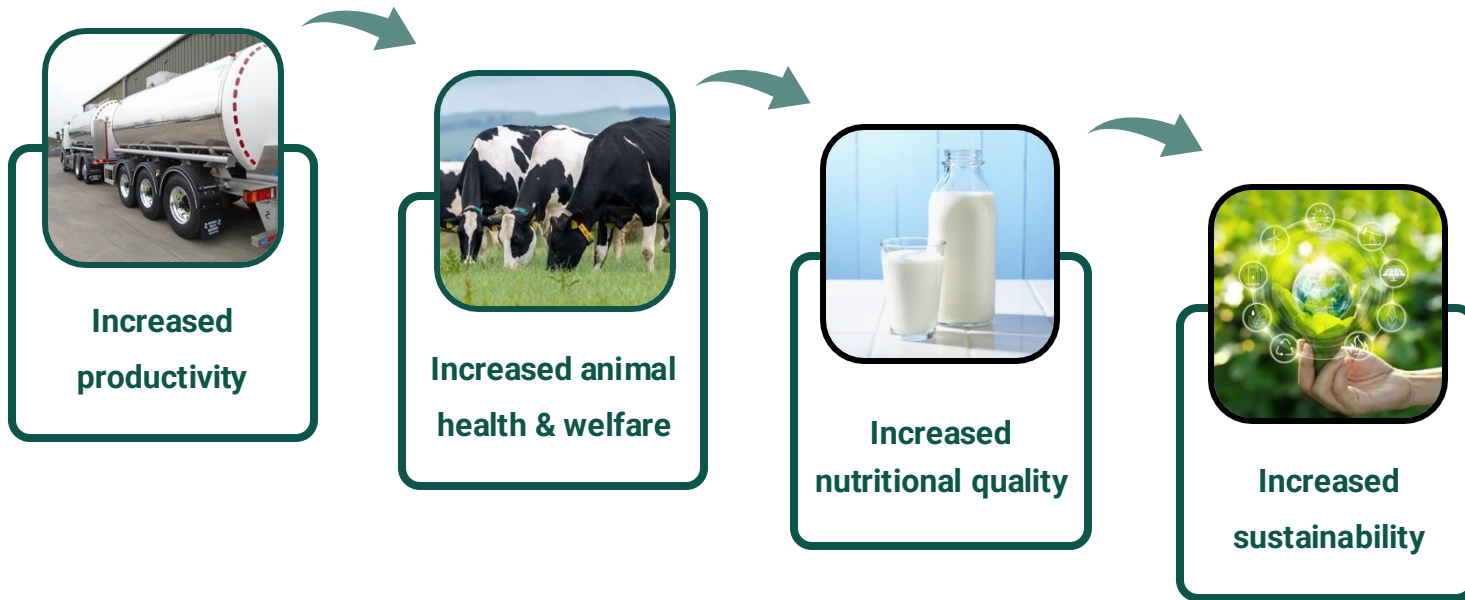


Co-funded by
the European Union

EPI^hERD



Novel decision-support tool for dairy farmers, to unlock the potential of their animals.



Pioneering the use of **Epigenomics** in livestock management.

Optimising dairy cow health & performance

Genetics



Performance



Environment



EPIHERD

1. Blood Test



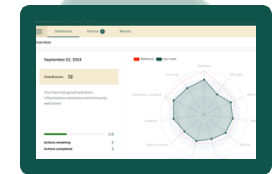
We measure
expression of all
genes

2. Farm Data



Performance
and health data

3. Precision insights



**Nutrition
Habitat
Health
Management**



Holistic Impacts & Outcomes



Increased productivity & efficiency

- Up to 22% increase in milk yield
- Improved feed efficiency
- *Avg. farmer ROI >7:1*



Increased nutritional quality

- Up to 5% increase in milk protein
- Up to 6% increase in milk fat
- *Improved fatty acid profile*



Elevated animal welfare:

- Improved resilience
- Elevated Fertility
- *Increased longevity*



More sustainable production

- >20% CO₂e reduction per litre of FPCM
- More from less – animals & inputs
- *Reduced stocking density, replacement rates*

Company Biography



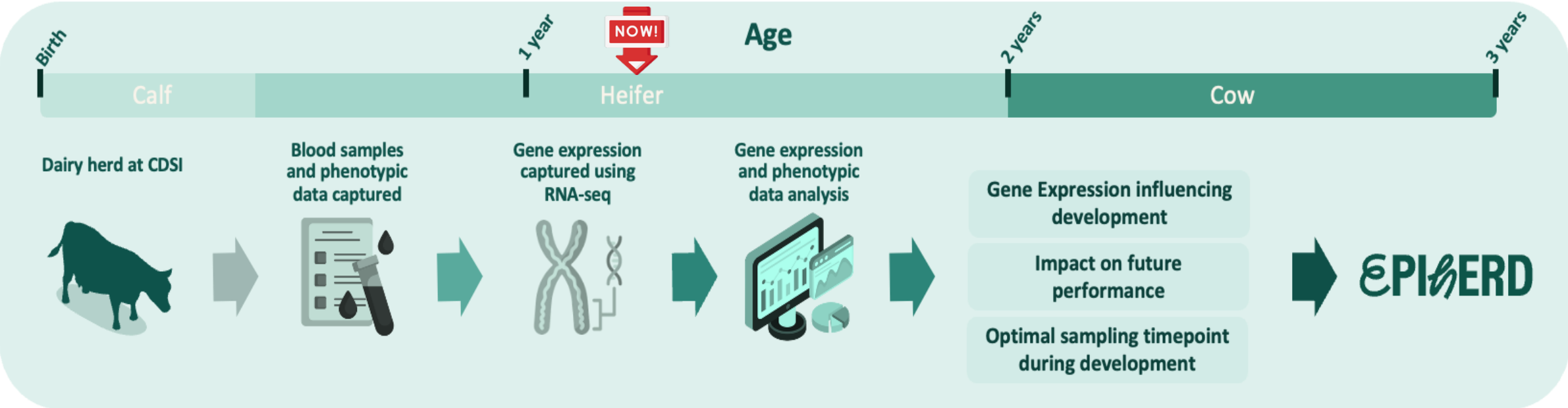
- 2020 Antler Bio incorporated.
- 2020 £250k Pre-seed funding round closed.
- 2021 Team of 3 employees
- 2021 Antler Bio awarded an IUK Smart grant to translate our technology to dairy cattle
- 2022 Successful proof of concept in dairy cattle
- 2023 First dairy farm case studies showing the ability to increase animal health, performance and sustainability
- 2023 Antler Bio awarded a €75,00 Women TechEU grant by the European Commission
- 2023 £650k Bridge funding round closed, led by the Nest Family Office.
- 2023 Antler Bio awarded an IUK 'Better Food for All' grant to enhance the nutritional quality of cow's milk
- 2023 EpiHerd soft launched to Early Adopters
- 2024 Antler Bio awarded a Defra/IUK FIP: Small R&D grant to expand EpiHerd to youngstock
- 2025 £3.25m Seed funding round closed, led by The First Thirty, Endgame Capital & Generation-Re.
- 2025 >100 farms, >20 employees, start of scaling journey

Small R&D Project Proposal – Round 3

Scope: Optimising the development of dairy calves and heifers to enhance the productivity, welfare and sustainability of dairy cattle

- **Rationale:** The future performance of dairy calves and heifers is predisposed during their development
- **Problem:** Avg. cost of rearing a heifer is ~£2,000, big impact on resources, sustainability and GHGs
- **Outcome:** Expanding the use of EpiHerd to support calf and heifer development

Duration: Jul 2024 – Jun 2027



Building your consortium.





A successful application is hard & more competitive than ever

- Look at what the questions are asking for and make full use the appendices
- Utilise as many feedback opportunities as possible - IUK Business Growth, collaborators etc



Less, more often than not, is more

- Every additional collaborator adds cost and complexity to the project (and application)
- Endeavour to keep consortiums lean and focussed, if possible



Time moves faster than you can imagine

- Maximise the time available to you, especially during the application process
- Consider bottlenecks and potential delays in project design, management and risk mitigation



Think about exploitation from Day 1

- Easy to put off until the end of a project but can miss opportunities throughout
- Be sure to leverage consortium networks and channels to maximise impact



Don't lose sight of the purpose

- Why this funding, financing your contribution, opportunity cost?
- Outcome & impacts – investment? job creation? business growth?

**Lessons learnt & tips
for new applicants.**

EPI^hERD



“....set to take dairying to the next level and be as important – if not more so – than the introduction of sexed semen, genomics and robotic milking.”

info@antlerbio.com

www.antlerbio.com





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Support: What makes a good consortium?

Simon Baty
Innovate UK Business Connect

What makes a strong consortium?

- **Read the competition brief, collaboration is required**
 - 20 August 2025 online briefing event: [watch the recording](#)
- **To lead a project**
 - UK business of any size (including sole trader), Academic*, RTO*
- **Projects with partners that cover a supply chain are generally stronger. Consider English Farmers.**

**must collaborate with at least one eligible grant claiming business of any size.*

You have a great consortium – what could go wrong?

- **Who owns what?**

You will need a consortium agreement, so start early

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/university-and-business-collaboration-agreements-lambert-toolkit>

- **Collaborate in all aspects of the bid**

No passengers – check everyone knows what they get and how much they have to contribute

- **Check the number of bids you can be part of**
- **Too many or too few partners**
- **Subcontracts**

From start to finish be prepared

Key Dates:

- Competition opened: 15 September 2025
- Competition closes: 5 November 2025 - 11:00am
- Invitation to interview: 17 December 2025
- Interviews: Between 10 and 20 February 2026
 - Projects from: 1 July 2026
 - Projects to end by: 31 December 2028



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Support: What makes a good application?

Simon Baty
Innovate UK Business Connect

Start preparing now

**Your written application needs all
the usual hallmarks of great bid**

<https://iuk-business-connect.org.uk/investment/good-application-guide/>



Eight Hallmarks of a Good Application

1. Alignment to the competition scope
2. Innovation
3. Strong business case
4. Convincing value proposition
5. Credible R&D plan
6. Right consortium
7. Clear need for support
8. The right kind of risk

Tops tips – part one



**Agree key points of
the collaboration
EARLY**



**Explicitly answer
all sub-questions**



**Use appendices
where available**



**Don't assume
assessors are experts
in your area**

Top tips – part two



**Quantify and
justify
assertions**



**Check all
deadlines and
event dates**



**Start discussing,
planning and writing
ASAP**



**Remember risk
and innovation –
you need both**



Write an exciting and compelling bid

Get in touch if you want our help

Joanna Gosling

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Simon Baty

Simon.baty@iukbc.org.uk

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Thank you!

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