

Solution Development for Advanced Connectivity Technologies – Competition Briefing-20260409_100015UTC-Meeting Recording

9 April 2026, 10:00am

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Dawn Manser - Innovate UK UKRI 0:08

Hello, welcome.

We'll just wait a minute, see if anyone else joins, and then we'll get started.

OK, we'll get started. So welcome to this applicant briefing for the Solution Development for Advanced Connective Technologies competition. The recording and a PDF of the slides we put on IFS, hopefully by tomorrow, we'll see. But yeah, certainly within the next 24 hours.

So my name is Dawn Manser. I'm the competition manager for this competition here at Innovate UK. Alex Watkins is the innovation lead and we're also joined by Ilkate Akhtar.

This is the agenda for today's briefing. We'll look at the key dates for this competition. We'll go through the competition summary and scope, the eligibility criteria, how to start an application on the Innovation Funding Service, which we call IFS, the funding rules for this competition and some information about assessment and additional support. We'll end with some useful links.

and we'll have a Q&A, so please place any questions that you may have into the Q&A box so we can go through them at the end of the briefing.

So before we begin, these are the key dates to bear in mind for this competition. The competition open on the 1st of April will close on the 13th of May at 11am. It's important to note this deadline because IFS will automatically close at this time and applications can no longer be submitted. So please don't leave your submission to the last minute and contact customer support well in advance of the deadline if you experience any difficulties with submitting your application so we can assist you in good time.

We'll inform you whether or not you have been successful in the competition on the 17th of June by 5pm. So if successful, you then move into project setup, which takes around 90 days, meaning you should start your project by the 1st of September

2026. And the hard stop date for ending your project is 31st of August.

2028. I'll now hand over to talk about scope for this competition.

A **Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI** 2:32

Alex Watkins, the innovation lead on this competition. So Innovate UK is going to invest up to 25 million pounds funded through DSIT as part of the ACT R&D programme. This is subject to a sufficient number of high quality applications being received.

The aim of the competition is to accelerate the development, demonstration and commercialization of next-gen communications technologies that strengthen the UK security, resilience, sustainability and long-term competitiveness.

Hmm.

Your proposal must address one of the three strategic categories, each aligned to the UK's overarching ACT Grand Challenges and the Integrated Security Fund priority on. I'll go into more detail on those now.

Next slide, please.

So the first one, security resilient networks. So projects in this category must contribute to a demonstrable improvement in security, reliability, and robustness of UK connectivity infrastructure. And this may include innovations that

Main operational during fox attacks and environmental shocks, as well as...

overload conditions caused by direct attacks, rapid automated recovery. They embed security provenance and zero trust principles by design across hardware, software and operations, especially full system management and integration.

They integrate terrestrial and non-terrestrial networks, provide resilient coverage and failover. They demonstrate spectrum resilience, interference, tolerance and secure operation in contest environments that contribute directly to international standards and position UK developed technologies within global supply chains.

And finally, the sense current and latent network demand in real time, identifying and executing configurable adaptations in real time.

Next slide, please. So the second grand challenge area is sustainable networks. So projects that contribute to demonstrable, hang on, go on, same on that. Sustainable networks, category sports, innovations that enable more energy efficient and spectrum efficient networks.

such as ones that dramatically reduce energy use per bit through system level design and not just incremental optimization. They use spectrum more efficiently and

dynamically, including through sharing and adaptive reconfiguration, integrate renewable energy.

demand responsive operation and thermal efficiency at no open site level, and embed circular economy principles, life cycle measurement and design for reuse and recyclability. And finally, that support shared and neutral host infrastructure models. the lower cost and environmental impact.

So, the 3rd and final category here is part of the integrated.

Security Fund category. This is a budget that focuses on developing sovereign UK capability in critical telecoms hardware and sensing technologies, with an emphasis on advanced RF and ISAC systems that strengthen national resilience.

Projects should demonstrate components with civil and defence applications to enhance UK's technological advantage. And projects should be aimed at reinforcing the UK telecoms industrial base and support sovereign production, manufacturing scale up and greater strategic autonomy.

Within this, there are three themes. So the first is assured ISAC systems and integration, including assured ISAC.

Architectures with resilience to interference, degradation, data fusion and correlation across multiple sources.

Integration of function into existing capabilities and platforms.

and ad hoc performing networking, particularly where fixed infrastructure is unavailable. Second one, advanced RF architectures and components, including reconfigurable antenna arrays, switch between comms and sensing modes, multifunction RF front ends that reduce platform cost, by basing multiple discrete subsystems and programs.

meta surfaces that patterns or spectral behaviour in response to environments or mission needs. And adaptive EM control techniques demonstrate hardware and not just simulation. And the final one on there is RF enabled applications with civil pool. such as the use of ambient RF emissions to support drone or object detection in regulated civil airspace, RF-based tracking approaches to improve safety of vulnerable individuals or assets, and monitoring applications that leverage existing telecoms.

infrastructure rather than bespoke deployments. And more information on some of these can be found on the IFS links as well. But that's all from me. I'll pass back to Dawn.

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Dawn Manser - Innovate UK UKRI 8:13

Thank you very much, Alex. So, I'm now going to talk about the eligibility criteria for this competition. So, your project must have a total grant request of between 200,000 and 5 million pounds, lasts between 3 and 24 months, must carry out all of your project work in the UK and intend to expect results from or in the UK, start by the 1st of September 2026 and then by the 31st of August 2028. Projects must start on the 1st of the month, even if it's a non-working day, and this must be stated within your application. So to lead a project, your organisation must be a small, medium or large business.

research technology organisation, or an RTO, academic institution, charity, not-for-profit or public sector organisation. And more information on different types of organisations can be found in the funding rules. And the PDF of these slides will be available, so you will be able to click on this link in the PDF.

Um...

So, I've talked about projects must start on the first month, even if it's a non-working day. For your project to count as an eligible collaboration, there are three things you must do. First, both the legal lead organisation and at least one partner must apply for funding. This means each organisation needs to enter its own project costs in the application.

So not just the lead. Second, you need to explain why you're collaborating. So tell us the reason you're working together and how the partnership will operate, who's doing what and how you'll coordinate. Finally, the project cost must be shared fairly. So no single partner is allowed to take more than 70% of the total eligible costs. So this ensures that the work is truly collaborative and not dominated by one organisation. So this is solely to do with the costs of how the costs are split across your collaboration. It's not related to your grant rate and each organisation will receive the grant rate appropriate to the organisation type, size and research category.

So if you meet these three points, then your project will qualify as an eligible collaboration for this competition.

So to collaborate with the lead, your organisation must be one of these organisation types. To be an eligible collaboration, the lead and at least one other organisation must apply for funding when entering their costs into the application. I'm just going to go back to that.

Second slide about collaboration.

Yeah, sorry, I was just checking. Something thought I gave me some wrong information, but no, that is correct.

OK, your project can include partners.

that do not receive any funding. So for example, non UK businesses, however, their costs will count towards total project costs and we are allowing you to use subcontractors.

So as we are encouraging the use of national test beds, we understand that these organisations may be included in multiple projects. And in this specific case, involvement in multiple projects is accepted. However, if test beds are involved in more than one application, you must clearly state how all projects can be resourced and delivered if successful.

You may be asked for further evidence of, you may be asked for further evidence of your resources. So if Innovate UK have concerns about your ability to deliver multiple projects successfully, we reserve the right to award funding based on evidence of your capacity to manage them. So if you are involved in other Innovate UK funded projects, you must show you have the resources in place to deliver further projects funded.

by this advanced connectivity technologies competition.

So this competition does allow you to submit a previously submitted application.

Please be aware that addressing assessor feedback does not necessarily guarantee that the application will be funded.

So now we'll look at how you start and complete your application on IFS. So when you start an application on the Innovation Funding Service, the first step is creating an account. So we've made this a bit simpler. You'll begin by choosing the organisation type that best describes you using the radio buttons. Once you've selected that, you'll be asked to enter your organisation name and pick it from the list.

If you're a business or research organisation, you use the Companies House lookup so we can capture your company's number and that helps us with eligibility checks later on if your application is successful. So for academic institutions, it's even easier. Just type your organisation name and select it from the list that appears. And finally, if your organisation hasn't been registered yet,

It's absolutely fine. You can enter your details manually. Just remember, if your application is successful, you'll need to formally register your organisation before we

can issue your grant offer letter. So failure to register could result in an offer of funding being withdrawn. This is because to be eligible as a UK registered business, you must have a company's house registration number. So further information, please review our general guidance and reach out to our customer support team. So for this competition, you'll be asked a series of unscored questions initially, given the details of your team and some of your projects. Then you come to the main application questions. And for this competition, we have 10 scored questions. So please take a note of all the guidance given with each question, whether or not you can upload an appendices and support your answer, and if so, how many pages this appendix should be.

Again, all guidance is on IFS.

So, subject to certain criteria, UK applications are legally required to tell the government about acquisitions of certain entities in 17 sensitive areas of the economy and they are called global acquisitions.

More information can be found by the link on the slide. So the 17 areas are described on the slide. If you're uncertain about whether an acquisition is notifiable, you may contact the government on investment.screening@cabinetoffice.uk to seek a view or get legal advice from your own sources. In response to this need, we have included two unsolved questions into the application form.

You'll need to let Innovate UK know if the strategic export controls apply to the information in your application, so we can ensure that you do not share this with any of our assessors that are based outside of the UK. You should also consider if you need a licence to work with international partners or contractors during or after the project. If you need a licence to export information outside the UK, then you should also

So be mindful of what you share with international partners or contractors.

So the first additional unscored question you asked about whether your work involves any international collaboration or engagement. If yes, you must provide details of any expected international collaboration or engagement. You must include a list of the names and countries that any international project participants are based in, which must also include details of any subcontractors or service providers. So if your proposed work does not involve international or collaboration or engagement, your answer just must confirm this. So the second question is shown here on the slide and ask you to explain if your proposed project work relates to UKRI trusted research and innovation principles as per the bullets on

the slide. So as with all of our briefings, we'll be uploading the slide share today to IFS so you'll have the opportunity to review the criteria around export controls via the links on the slide. And as per the previous slides, please remember if there's any uncertainty about whether an acquisition is notifiable, you may contact the government on investment.screening.gov.uk to seek a view or get legal advice from your own sources.

So, each organisation in your application will be asked to complete a project impact questionnaire. These questions help to measure the impact that support has on organisations, businesses and individuals. The project impact questions are not scored, do not form any part of the assessment of your application. However, you will not be able to submit your application until you and your any partners complete this. So please take a look early on in your application. More information regarding project impact can be found on our website or by following the links on the slide.

So these are the categories that you'll be asked to split your project costs into in the finance section of the application. The application finances video will provide further instructions on how to complete each of these sections, including how academics include their finances. There's also guidance within each category on IFS.

So in your project finances, there are four categories and each organisation within an application must complete their own finance information. So your project costs, this is where you add in your costs by category.

Application is where your postcode will take place. Your organisation, so please add the details of your organisation, including size, turnover, number of employees, as is applicable. Size that the business declares here, along with any research category, if applicable, is what IFS will use to calculate your funding level. So your funding, here's where you must indicate if you are requesting grant funding with a yes or no.

Declare any funding you have received previously for the exact same project activities, so you can't receive public funding for the same activities twice.

So as the lead applicant, you must cheque your finances are complete and correct. Your total costs and funding requests must be in accordance with the competition's eligibility criteria. Be careful to note the difference between the cost of your project and the amount of grant funding you are requesting. For collaborative applications, IFS will highlight to the lead applicant any partners who have outstanding project finances to complete. All finances must be included in the application before the lead applicant can submit. IFS will also cheque

that your research participation costs are within the required limits. IFS does not validate project costs, so it's your responsibility to ensure that all costs are within the eligible perimeters, as stated in the eligibility section of the competition brief.

So before you submit your application, all organisations within the application must agree to the terms and conditions. IFS will not let you submit if this is outstanding. So this is my favourite slide. So we want you to stress how important it is for you to submit your application as early as possible. So customer support can help you resolve any issues you might have when submitting, but only if they're contacted in good time before the deadline. So the league carries a responsibility of ensuring that all partners in the application

have completed their assigned sections and accepted their T's and C's. So this chart shows some of our recent competitions and the red bar denotes all submissions in the last three hours before closing. So we don't allow extensions. So if you leave it too late and then experience technical issues,

We may not be able to help you in time, and you won't be able to submit.

So if you need to edit your application after it's been submitted, this is possible, but obviously this must be done before the submission deadline. First, you need to reopen your application. So on your IFS dashboard, you'll see the option to reopen as shown on the slide. The option to reopen is also visible on your application status page.

So once reopened, you can make changes to your application, but when you've finished, please remember to resubmit your application before the deadline. So click on the green review and submit button, review your application once more, then click the final submit button.

So if you reopen your application and do not resubmit it, we will not accept it. So please note, as per the previous slide, we can monitor site usage.

So when preparing your application, it's important that I share with you some things you consider if planning on using AI to support you. So Innovate UK does not endorse or oppose the use of AI technology. However, we are seeing an increase in the use of AI in applications. It is necessary that you do your own research as to whether or not this is the right tool for you and consider the pros and cons of using this technology.

If you do use it, Innovate UK does not accept any responsibility for any impact on your idea. And whilst AI offers many benefits, it's important that you are aware that

you are potentially sharing your idea with the world.

So with the JES system no longer being supportive, we have enhanced IFS to reflect how you enter academic costs in track. We hope you find this to be much simpler and a more intuitive way. So following track guidelines, academic costs are captured under the following categories. Directly incurred, directly allocated, indirect costs and exceptions. A mandatory requirement to upload their detailed costs, it must be a PDF format and approved by the research office.

So I'm not going to mention some funding rules and how your grant would be awarded should you be successful. You are able to claim funding if your company name contains FCBR, MLJE or you are from Guernsey or the Isle of Man.

Firstly, there are some instances where we would not be able to award you any funding. This will be if you have an outstanding final claim or have been asked to supply an independent accountant's report on a live Innovate UK project but have not supplied it. So it's fine if you've got a project at the moment, but if you've been asked to supply any of those two things and you haven't supplied it.

it, we won't be able to fund. So in this case, you'll not be eligible to apply to this competition as a lead or partner organisation. We'll also not award you any further funding if you've not made substantial effort to exploit a previous award or failed to comply with the grant terms and conditions.

We award our grants under UK subsidy control regime, which incorporates various agreements and frameworks. So this slide shows a definition of a subsidy. Innovate UK is unable to award funding to organisations that are considered to be in financial difficulty. All organisations that are awarded funding are subjected to financial viability and eligibility check.

So if you're an applicant who is conducting activities that will affect the trade of goods and or electricity between Northern Ireland and the EU, as envisioned by Article 10 of the Windsor Framework, then your grant would be awarded under European Commission state aid rules. In order to be eligible to receive state aid, you must pass the undertakings and difficulty test.

This only applies to limited liability companies that are more than three years old. If you're a parent company, the test can be performed on your parent or holding company. If you are successful in the competition, we will apply this test as part of the viability checks. If you're unsure whether you're eligible to receive state aid, please seek legal advice or further information is available on our website. You can also contact our customer support service.

This team, if you have any questions.

So now on to the assessments. To help you understand what happens after you submit your application, Innovate UK have produced a series of videos and I placed the links to these playlists on this slide. We won't run through them now, but please do watch them at your leisure.

Okay, you'll receive a notification explaining the next steps if you pass the technical assessment where you'll proceed to the project set up in IFS. So all eight steps are detailed in your notification, which you must complete within a maximum of 90 calendar days. So please be patient during this stage. Assigning MSPs and getting finance cheques completed can take several weeks.

Please ensure you share the T&Cs with your legal team at the earliest possible opportunity and once notified you have 30 calendar days to do this. The final step will be to sign and return your grant offer letter. We must first approve it, then you'll get a go live e-mail confirming you can start your project. So your project will always have a start date of the 1st of the month,

and you can only claim the cost incurred and paid for after your project has started.

So how you get paid? Grants are claimed and paid following an authorisation quarterly in arrears. Organisations being funded at less than 100% will need to provide evidence that they will have funding available to meet their shared costs. You can only claim for costs incurred between the project start and end date and grants can only be paid into approved UK bank accounts.

So please note we carry out regular reviews of authorised accounts to ensure they remain compliant with FCA and PRA standards and we may remove any organisation from the list that does not meet these standards.

Okay, I just want to take a moment to talk about reasonable adjustments. At Innovate UK, we want our competitions to be accessible to everyone. So here, if you have a disability or a long term condition that might make the application process tricky, we can put support in place to help you remove those barriers. So if you think you will need any adjustments,

You can get in touch with us at any time. We do recommend reaching out about 15 working days before the competition closes, just so we have enough time to arrange the right support for you. So all the contact details are on the slide, so please don't hesitate to use them. If you do request a reasonable adjustment, there's a bit of information we'll need so we can help you properly.

So initially we require your name, organisation, your e-mail, phone number and

which competition you're applying for. If you already stated that or starting an application, your application number is really helpful too. We'll also need your consent to share your details with Innovate UK Business Connect and they can only support you once customer support team have referred you, so that consent is important.

And there's a link on the slide, more details if you want to read through the process later. Now in terms of the kinds of adjustments we can offer, here are some options, but say this is not exhaustive. So depending on what you need, we can help you with things like proofreading, clarifying language, providing helpful resources, linking you up with experts or supporting with things like time management and note taking. It's all about making sure the application process itself isn't a barrier for you. And remember, this is all tailored to the individual. So if you're not sure what you need, just contact customer support.

It's also important to clear about what reasonable adjustments can't cover. So these adjustments are there to level up the playing field, not to influence your application content and to give you an advantage. So we can't offer things like deadline extensions, help choosing which competition to apply for, developing your idea, advising whether it's in scope, providing financial advice or helping with research. So this support is here to help you access and navigate the process, not to shape the application itself.

Here we have some useful links to help and provide support for you during the application process and beyond. We highly recommend you read our general guidance and cheque out Business Connect's good application guide. If you need some help with pulling together your collaboration agreement, then please do cheque out the Lambert toolkit. We cannot otherwise advise you on how to put this together. We've also provided some useful links to help you keep you updated and in touch with all the opportunities that are available. So that brings us to the end of my presentation and we've just come on to the Q&A. So please type any questions you have into the Q&A box and we'll do our best to answer them. So while you're typing, I'll leave this slide up, which has some useful information.



Richard Foggie 27:50

Thanks, Dawn.

D Dawn Manser - Innovate UK UKRI 27:50

And while we're waiting, OK, thank you.

 **Richard Foggie** 27:52

Yeah.

We have indeed people have been popping in questions as we go along. So I'll feed them, farm them out. One for Alex, I think, for Santa has got a couple of questions. What's the expected TRL level for this call?

A Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI 28:11

Yeah, so I think I answered one of these in the chat in the Q&A bit, but we're not restricting projects directly through TRL for this call. However, saying that we're not funding projects that are purely research focused, there needs to be some kind of commercial opportunity enough. So on the Eligibility, I think it's saying that, but not strictly restrict them to TRLs, but yeah, there needs to be some commercial opportunity and not purely research focused.

 **Richard Foggie** 28:39

Andy, I think you may have covered the second part of the question there: Is having an industry partner important?

A Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI 28:47

I believe there has to be an industry partner on this call. So if it's a sole participant, then that needs to be an industry organisation. And so it should be, yes, industry hold.

 **Richard Foggie** 29:01

Thanks, Alex. One for you or possibly Ilkay. Mark wants to know, how does the scope of this call overlap with or relate to the ACT call as presented yesterday? That was the contracts for innovation, as I recall.

A Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI 29:17

Yes, so we've got two calls open at the same time, a contractor innovation and the CR&D call. This call is for sort of longer projects on technology and solution

development, where there is the contractor innovation call is sort of
More for near-term demonstrators.

to be tested. I think I can be able to remind me of the full length of that project, and
then nine months initially, and then there's scopes that there can be future around
there and calls there. Is there anything else?

Now, Sadhwani.

I **Ilkay Akhtar - Innovate UK UKRI** 29:57

Yeah, the duration is for CFI is 12 months and CFI is being a pre-commercial contract
is 100% based on the costs occurred for achieving those milestones, whereas CRND
has got its own subsidy rules.

D **Dawn Manser - Innovate UK UKRI** 30:16

Six.

I **Ilkay Akhtar - Innovate UK UKRI** 30:20

to apply certain percentages. So the maximum that the lead partners could get,
depending on the size of the company or the size of the organisation, is up to 70%.

And with CFI, the

the route to commercialization, the evidence is also very essential to be included in
the proposal. And one of the things maybe to mention as well,

before we obviously expect for organisations, single organisations to lead and to use
subcontractors for CRND, the setup, the structures is slightly different. And there was
another question in relation to the scope, I think.

for these two competitions. For CFI, we have two grand challenges, secure and
resilient networks and sustainable networks. With CRND, we have another bucket
that is included within the scope. And as Alex mentioned, it is to do with

The, you know, defence element, security elements of the of the scope.

 **Richard Foggie** 31:46

Thanks, Simon. Mohali has a scope question: Is optical wireless within scope for this
competition?

A **Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI** 31:54

As long as it fits between one of those three grand challenge areas, the way we've

kind of designed it is so that we're trying to be a bit more open on the kind of specific technologies, more that addresses the solutions kind of within those grand challenges. But, you know, broadly, it fits within a couple of spaces in those three challenges.



Richard Foggie 32:12

Thanks, Alex. Yes, Steve would like to know how much is budget is allocated to integrated security fund track. Is there a division of largest?



Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI 32:23

It's a catchy name. It will be dependent on applications. We're going to look at portfolio approach across the three grand challenge areas. And we're discussing as well with EPSRC on that kind of thing. So that's a TBD upon receiving applications.



Richard Foggie 32:41

And another TRL related question, perhaps more apposite. What's the required jumping TRLs between the outset and end of the particularly the integrated security fund projects? What sort of gain of TRL would you be looking for?



Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI 33:01

Again, which kind of trying to be a bit more...

not using TRLs in that kind of way, but I think it would be project dependent. I think as long as there's kind of justification for why it's moving that those sort of levels of what the kind of justification is for that movement, then it'd be taken on a case by case basis.



Richard Foggie 33:20

Thank you.





Ilkay Akhtar - Innovate UK UKRI 33:20

And actually, just to add on that, in the brief description in IFS, you will notice that there are two areas, industrial research and experimental development. So we are not including feasibility studies within the CR&D. So we expect it's To be exciting, very, very early TRL levels, whereas actually we haven't specified a specific.


I should think.
That one experimental.


 **Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI** 33:58
Mm.


 **Richard Foggie** 33:59
Well, well remembered, Gilkai. Matt, Matt, you had a couple of questions. I think you got the one in the text. Will an application be de-prioritized if it isn't a collaborative project?


 **Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI** 34:12
No, it would be dependent on the quality of application, as I said.
About them, if the sole applicant, they have to be an or industry organisation as opposed to academic solely.


 **Richard Foggie** 34:27
Bello.

 **Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI** 34:27
Bye.
It's.

 **Richard Foggie** 34:29
And just question there.
If the lead is in industry, is there requirement for an additional collaborator?

 **Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI** 34:39
There's no requirement to put them on there.

 **Richard Foggie** 34:39
No, see.

 **Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI** 34:41
application and the project, really. We have a mixture of both, so it just depends on

the quality of the application, whether everything can be done and the assessment, whether they, you know, every component of the project proposal can be completed by the sole organization.



Richard Foggie 35:01

OK, thank you, Tim. I think we have, according to my calculations, answered all the questions that were put into the Q&A. Over to you to wrap things up. Thanks.



Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI 35:10

Look at that.

Thanks, Lowry.



Dawn Manser - Innovate UK UKRI 35:15

OK, is there anything else you want to add, Alex? OK.



Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI 35:21

Nothing else from me. Thank you very much to everybody for joining and looking forward to seeing applications coming out.



Dawn Manser - Innovate UK UKRI 35:26

And as previously stated, so you'll get a copy of this recording and a copy of the slides on IFS, hopefully by end of the day tomorrow. But thank you very much for attending.



Alex Watkins - Innovate UK UKRI 35:38

Thanks, Matt.

● stopped transcription