Innovation Accelerator Q&A

Ref	Question	Answer
1	**Objectives**	
1.1	What are the main objectives of Innovation Accelerator?	The aim of the Innovation Accelerator is "to accelerate the growth of regional clusters of excellence in HealthTech, MedTech and Cleantech, delivered through the exploitation of applied and transitional research; the application of regional strengths in engineering, manufacturing and advanced computing; and supported by a robust regional innovation framework". We are seeking to create fertile ground for business growth in these clusters.
1.2	What does a Cluster of Excellence look like?	A Cluster of Excellence will: • Be driven by market demand with strong private sector business leadership • Support cross sector R&D and innovation • Position the region on the global scale as a beacon for Foreign Direct Investment • Provide a sustainable framework for building innovation capability and capacity
2	**Contact Details**	
2.1	What are contact details for further queries regarding IA processes?	WMCA: WMIA@WMCA.ORG.UK
3	Programme Management	
3.1	How many EoIs were received and how many have moved onto the next stage?	In total 60 Expressions of Interests (EoIs) were received from identified areas of interest – HealthTech/ MedTech, CleanTech & Cross Cluster & Capacity Building. 35 applications have successfully moved onto the next stage
3.2	How the Innovation Accelerator funding will be distributed?	This funding opportunity will not be subject to Innovate UK's normal process. Proposals will be assessed on whether they exceed a quality threshold. Following the assessment process, the West Midlands Innovation Board and Innovate UK will select a portfolio of projects from those which best deliver the IA partnership plan.

		The Innovation Board will seek to create a balanced portfolio of projects with a spread between the Cluster areas.
3.3	Innovate UK managed project in the past had very little flexibility over activities, timelines and spend. Will they be more flexible with IA projects?	The scope of the West Midlands IA has been developed by the West Midlands Innovation Board through the West Midlands IA Plan. The list of eligible IA activities is extremely broad. The list below is subject to change, but as of 20/09 draft, your project can focus on one or more of the following: - research commercialisation - support to spin-outs and start-ups, including for innovation investment - knowledge exchange and activities to support the adoption and diffusion of new knowledge, technologies, and processes used by businesses - research and innovation networking activities - talent and skills development for enhanced Research & Innovation - translational R&D carried out by either the research sector or businesses, including collaborative research and development (CR&D) - demonstration - underpinning infrastructure development; the need for new 'centres' will be challenged on the basis of forward sustainability, beyond this funding support - attracting R&D and innovation focused inward investment The timeline for the IA programme is determined by the UK's spending review period. The maximum spend per enterprise is determined by the UK's subsidy control rules, and a maximum cap per project is in place to ensure a portfolio of projects can be funded.
3.4	Will Innovate UK assessors be looking to align with the Levelling Up paper policies or regional economic needs?	Innovate UK assessors will assure the quality of the project, whereas the strategic fit is ensured by the project's scope aligning to the West Midlands IA Plan developed by the West Midlands Innovation Board.

3.5	Levelling Up White Paper description of the IA heavily implied that regions with these awards would be excluded from other future region-based innovation support programmes such as Strength in Places future competitions. Is that still the UKRI/IUK thinking (at least within the current CSR timelines across all sectors)?	In this UK spending review period, there are no further rounds for funding for Strength in Places Fund.
3.6	What are the timescales for the delivery of the projects?	Successful applicants/projects as per current timelines will run from April-23 to March-25 (2 years).
3.7	What reporting structure will be required over the project lifecycle?	You may wish to review, "What happens if you are successful": https://www.ukri.org/councils/innovate-uk/guidance-for-applicants/general-guidance/what-happens-if-you-are-successful/#contents-list
3.8	If successful, can projects start early?	The funding model agreed with government is for project spend to commence in April 2023
4	**Geography**	
4.1	What are the geographical boundaries? Can applicants collaborate with national or international partners?	The IA has been offered to the WM city region which includes Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Coventry. Therefore, we are seeking the main impact of the IA to be within the WMCA/LEP geography, however partners outside of the region are acceptable.

UK based partners are eligible to claim IA funding as well as contribute co-investment into projects.

Non-UK based enterprises are not eligible to claim IA funding, although their costs will count towards the total project costs and so should be identified as private co-investment into the project. |
5	**Application Process**	
5.1	Will there be an opportunity to discuss individual projects with IUK and WMCA before and after the applicant briefing?	Yes, it is recommended to consult with WMCA before submitting a proposal. IUK will assist with any queries regarding technical aspects of the submission.
5.2	Is there a standardised Business Plan applicants need to fill?	There is a standardised application form that applicants will be required to fill in. This will be covered in further detail in the applicant briefing session, pencilled in for 3rd October.

5.3	What is the word limit per section?	All questions have 500-word count limit with exception around 'Need and Challenge' and 'Local Growth and Wider Impact' section extending to 1,000 words. These word limits are more than on a typical Innovate UK competition and this is a result of early feedback from potential applicants. Further clarity will be provided by IUK at the applicant briefing session pencilled in for 3rd October.
5.4	Can appendices be included with the application?	Appendices can be added to some of the questions and the application form will make this clear. Appendices will be limited in the length and size of the attachments. It will be essential to include a 'Risk Register' and 'Project Plan' (e.g. Gantt Chart) within appendices.
5.5	Are all questions equally weighed?	That is the current position. This is subject to change and will be highlighted if it does.
5.6	What score are Innovate UK setting as the fundable quality threshold?	70% is the standard score that represents for Innovate UK a fundable level of quality.
5.7	Can education/skills be included as an activity as long as it aligns to the project?	UKRI and Innovate UK are very flexible about the type of skills activities that can be funded. Eligible activities include those that: - Support the development of provision to enhance R&D skills in disciplines relating to the purpose and objectives of the Innovation Accelerator - Enhancing the innovation, management and leadership capability of key businesses in the cluster
5.8	Many non-commercial industrial facing activities at universities are not run by non-academics. The JES application route may cause non-academics specialists an issue with making an application. Are alternative application mechanisms possible?	Organisations undertaking non-economic activity as part of the project can share up to 100% of the total eligible project costs. If your consortium contains more than one organisation undertaking non-economic activity, this maximum is shared between them. You could get funding for your eligible project costs of up to: - 80% of full economic costs (FEC) if you are a Je-S registered institution such as an academic

		- 100% of your project costs if you are an RTO, charity, not for profit organisation, public sector organisation or research organisation
6	**Evaluation**	
6.1	What are the key assessment criteria for the reviewers?	The criteria used by Innovate UK assessors will be explained at the applicant briefing session pencilled in for 3rd Oct-22. At the same time as Innovate UK assesses for quality and value for money, the West Midlands Innovation Board (WMIB) will undertake a regional strategy prioritisation assessment. Those proposals that pass the Innovate UK assessment threshold will be ranked by priority against regional prioritisation criteria. An independent Selection Panel will select a balanced portfolio of projects from those which pass the Innovate UK threshold and score highly on regional prioritisation. The recommended balanced portfolio of projects will be passed to the WMIB for endorsement. Full details can be found in the WMIB
6.2	Applications within the WM cluster reference one another, will they be seen by the same reviewers consistently? Or there is a possibility it may work against them as assessed by separate assessors?	If there is a dependency between projects then you should consult with WMCA before submitting a proposal. Your project will not be eligible for funding if it is dependent on a separate project that has not passed the quality threshold. Take advice on whether it would be better to merge into a single project to strengthen the likelihood of being awarded funding.
7	**Collaboration/Partnership**	
7.1	Is there a limitation on the number of partners?	There is no limit on the number of partners. You are advised though that a Collaboration Agreement may become increasingly complex for a project with many partners.
7.2	Will WMCA broker any partnerships where there are similarities?	The WMCA has already suggested collaborations after the initial EoIs assessment process.
7.3	What are the rules around collaborators and subcontractors?	Both are permitted. It's important to distinguish the relationship of each organisation clearly in the application. Sub-contractor costs are effectively an operational cost on the project, whereas business partners will bring private co-investment into the project as well as requesting public money.

7.4	Will EoIs encouraged to merge / partner with other applicants be communicated to the IUK panel?	Applicants can discuss the project team within Q4 of the application form by highlighting the relationships and benefits of working together. Any prior separate arrangements or recommendations for partnerships is not relevant to the Innovate UK assessment of quality.
7.5	Will businesses need a minimum TR level to be supported?	For further guidance on eligible categories of R&D please refer to the link: https://www.ukri.org/councils/innovate-uk/guidance-for-applicants/general-guidance/categories-of-research-and-development/#contents-list
7.6	Is there a preferred contractual arrangement for consortiums?	If your project is a collaboration, you will be asked to provide a collaboration agreement. The agreement will need to be signed by all collaborative partners in the project. Example agreements can be found in the Lambert toolkit. https://www.gov.uk/guidance/university-and-business-collaboration-agreements-lambert-toolkit
8	**Funding**	
8.1	how would the funds be drawn, i.e., in stages/ milestones etc ?	You may wish to review, "What happens if you are successful": https://www.ukri.org/councils/innovate-uk/guidance-for-applicants/general-guidance/what-happens-if-you-are-successful/#contents-list Further information will be provided at the applicants briefing session, pencilled in for 3rd Oct-22.
8.2	Will the lead applicant receive the funding only or all the partners for their element directly from IUK if successful?	All the partners directly from Innovate UK against eligible claims
8.3	Does every partner need to offer investment if taking funds?	You will have to detail the grant fund requested by each partner, the contribution from each of the partners, and how they comply with UK Subsidy Control rules. If the majority of an organisation's work on the project is commercial or economic, they will need to co-invest a proportion of their costs. The UK's Subsidy Control regime means only organisations undertaking non-economic activities are permitted to have 100% of the cost covered by public

		funding. (Or 80% of full economic costs (FEC) if you are a Je-S registered institution such as an academic.)
8.4	What is the expectation for private sector co-investment?	Over the duration of the project periods, the aim is to achieve a 1:1 ratio of public to private co-investment within the West Midlands IA project portfolio
8.5	is sub-granting allowed?	Yes, and the application form will clarify how any projects including a 'secondary competition' should present this element. The specific mechanism is to be discussed. UKRI retain the right to run the secondary competition for compliance with UK Subsidy Control rules.
8.6	Can funds be spent outside of the UK to support inward investment?	It depends on a number of things. Whether the organisation spending it is eligible to claim IA funding. Whether the activity is part of an R&D project that brings inward investment into the R&D project. Whether the activity is an eligible cost for the R&D project. Note that the UK rules do not permit public R&D funding to be used for non-R&D marketing activities.
8.7	Would the use of current building be considered as part of match funding?	This is covered in the eligible cost guidance provided on IUK web page. https://www.ukri.org/councils/innovate-uk/guidance-for-applicants/costs-we-fund/costs-guidance-for-non-academic-organisations/ If you require infrastructure capital for the refurbishment or re-fit of the building, please discuss this with WMCA as early as possible, and take guidance from Innovate UK prior to the submission.
8.8	IUK forms require universities going through the J-es system to generate their costs only get 80% of their actual costs. As several projects have grant funding within them for companies (administered by a university lead) this is potentially an issue.	Organisations undertaking non-economic activity as part of the project can share up to 100% of the total eligible project costs. If your consortium contains more than one organisation undertaking non-economic activity, this maximum is shared between them. You could get funding for your eligible project costs of up to: - 80% of full economic costs (FEC) if you are a Je-S registered institution such as an academic

		- 100% of your project costs if you are an RTO, charity, not for profit organisation, public sector organisation or research organisation
9	**Costing/Budgeting**	
9.1	Do projects need to operate within initial budgets outlined in the EoIs?	The budgets in the EOI were indicative. In your proposal to Innovate UK a fully costed budget will be required, at most requesting £15m in grant award.
9.2	Can CICs claim %100 of costs?	Yes, for non-economic activity. Otherwise, the same intervention rates apply as for other economic organisations.