

Circular letter

Connecting Capability Fund: Short-term preparatory funding

To	Heads of English Higher Education Providers
Reference	RE-CL-2023-02
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Enquiries to	REDCCF@re.ukri.org

Dear Vice-Chancellor or Principal

Connecting Capability Funding (CCF): invitation to bid for short term preparatory/pump priming projects

1. This circular letter invites bids for short-term pump-priming of university collective capabilities for commercialisation of university research and knowledge, including collaborative R&D with business.

Background to the invitation: the CCF-RED programme

2. Funding allocated through this call is intended to prepare the ground for our full CCF-RED programme (first announced [here](#)) to be launched in Autumn - rounds of competitive bidding for large scale collaborative projects to deliver specific priority topics identified by Research England with advice from an expert group (membership at Annex A) and the RE Development (RED) Fund panel. We are currently working with the expert group on a long-term map of opportunities under the CCF-RED programme, to be able to give clearer information on the specific topics, sequencing and timetable for bidding and awards, and to enable higher education providers (HEPs) and their partners to make strategic choices on where they will focus.
3. The overall aim of CCF-RED is to deliver a step change in identification and adoption of university commercialisation best practice, and hence in success, across

the university sector. The programme is supported by a CCF Programme Enhancement Team (PET) and builds on successful features of our previous [CCF programme](#) while taking a more targeted approach.

4. We expect the first full calls for CCF-RED projects to be issued in Autumn 2023 with bids submitted in Winter 2023-24. Calls will be focussed on specific topics, and we expect to issue a series of calls over the next year. We do not expect that every HEP or every collaboration will bid to every call, but focus instead on calls where they have a particularly innovative and substantial proposal to put forward. This targeted approach is intended to help HEPs and their partners to focus on the topics that address their needs and opportunities, with less need for demand management approaches which might be needed in less focussed open calls.
5. We cannot fund extensions to existing and previous CCF projects through any of our programmes, though past CCF collaborations may form the basis for new activities that are the subjects of bids to this or other funding opportunities.
6. Commercialisation remains a priority in our main RED fund programme, and discussion with our RED Fund team on a specific institutional development may be an appropriate way forward for some proposals. For example, the RED fund may be a more appropriate route for important individual HEP developments or for proposals that include commercialisation with other activities. The same proposals should not be presented to both this call and the RED fund.

The competition

7. Funding is available for projects of one-to-two years duration and a value of up to £1.5 million of our funding. We expect to allocate up to £20 million through this call. Priority will be given to projects with focussed expenditure in 2023-24 and hence which can, building on a body of existing capacity and practice, prepare the ground quickly for full CCF-RED projects.
8. We are seeking projects that will address gaps in essential ingredients to successful commercialisation, and in doing so provide a strong platform for the radical and stretching models that we want to support through full CCF-RED. This may include demonstrators of approaches that could feature in subsequent bids. The portfolio of projects should help enable the CCF-RED programme to move quickly and securely to delivery, achieving successes to inform future policy and public funding cases. We

are interested in funding projects that build capability in all parts of England and contribute to rebalancing R&D and innovation capabilities where there is most opportunity.

9. Projects successful in this call may bid to continue or further develop activities as part of a subsequent CCF-RED bid, though they may also provide a platform to further other opportunities, such as other UKRI or local developments. It is not necessary to have bid in this call to be eligible for the CCF-RED calls. Decisions on later CCF-RED awards will be made only on the merits of the CCF-RED bid.
10. Bids are invited against the following capability development areas:
 - a. Ecosystem development – networks and partnerships, including experienced private entrepreneurs and mentors, that bring together a specific ecosystem. This includes, for example, regionally or with a focus on a particular sector or theme in a national ecosystem (for example, the digital sector). This must include and prioritise private sector partners – investors, entrepreneurs, accelerators, R&D intensive and other businesses. It may include or focus on marketing and development of business R&D partnerships, whether with small or large businesses. Priority will be given to projects that have the potential to deliver the greatest added value on top of the current state of development of the ecosystem. We are also interested in projects that include international partners, to enable testing of our approaches against global standards.
 - b. Proof of concept – models that add value (over individual HEP provision) from the collaborative approach to CCF and can target and rapidly deploy proof of concept funding to support most promising opportunities. We are particularly interested in supporting models that will provide evidence related to appropriate scaling of proof-of-concept funding and likely impact on return on investment, and innovative partnerships that make proof of concept funding more effective – such as with accelerators or investors.
 - c. Training and development for commercialisation, such as entrepreneurial skills for academics/researchers, training of technology transfer practitioners and business development managers, including supporting

process improvements, and for leadership – with a focus on identifying and filling gaps that are regarded as critical to effective commercialisation.

- d. Physical infrastructure – support for build or revenue support for incubators, adaption and access to equipment and facilities for entrepreneurs and businesses, and networks and linkages between incubators and grow on spaces as part of a wider ecosystem.

11. All bids must demonstrate how the bid develops existing capabilities in commercialisation/collaborative business R&D within the collaboration (with potential to deliver later, wider sector benefits) and provide justification as to why the proposed approach is appropriate and demonstrates added value over and above existing activity within participating HEPs or accessible through other established routes. Wider context including the extent of existing commercialisation and collaborative business R&D activity within the partnership and ecosystem maturity will be accounted for in assessment. We recognise that bids will not be developing capabilities from a common baseline.
12. Bids can be for all forms of KE expenditure, including capital. Bids cannot include research (or core teaching) expenditures such as support of research posts.
13. All bids must include a minimum of three English HE providers. Partnerships with businesses, including investors, businesses, accelerators etc., must be a main feature of all bids. Bids must be focussed on economic growth objectives. Individual HEPs can lead a maximum of two bids. Where appropriate, a HEP can be a partner on any number of projects. We are unlikely to make multiple awards for the same ecosystem.
14. Bids will be checked for eligibility against conditions above, and then assessed against the following criteria by RE, with support of the CCF PET and taking account of the expert group and RED fund panel advice:
 - Building capabilities – The local fit - with current strengths and approaches, and evidence of need; and at appropriate scale; and/or novelty of approaches to building collective commercialisation capabilities, including collaborative R&D with business. Bids should demonstrate that plans develop and enhance the platform of existing commercialisation activities.

- Collaboration – Ambition and appropriateness (to the activity) of HEPs and key commercialisation partners, with clear articulation of roles and strength of partnership to be built on, and demonstrate potential for significant later scale up, such as in subsequent CCF-RED bid or other opportunity. Evidence that the collaboration is best placed to deliver the activity for the topic/system and will work well together. Clear plans to disseminate findings and learning for benefits of the ecosystem and wider HE sector system development.
 - Delivering high performance - evidence of consideration and learning from successful practice within the collaboration and elsewhere in developing approaches to deliver capability development to drive further success.
 - Delivery and funding – Project costs and activities justified by need and evidence, providing value for money including additionality and leverage/match, appropriate project team, risks considered and appropriately addressed.
15. Bids should be submitted on the [RED fund template](#) to REDCCF@re.ukri.org by 28 July 2023. The length of the bid should be proportionate to size of funds requested, with a maximum length of 10 pages including tables (noting that RED bids have a maximum length limit of 15 pages). Letters of support are not needed at this point. Feedback will not be given on applications during development, and this is a single stage competitive process. Awards for successful projects will be made through our RED fund processes and will be monitored and evaluated as part of the RED Fund.
16. Guidance on adherence to relevant RED processes and requirements, specifically eligibility, success criteria, project monitoring, project reviews and evaluations, Impact assessment, Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Subsidy Controls (previously State Aid) can be found in the [RED fund guidance](#) and on the first page of the RED fund template.
17. To assist us with preparing for bid assessment we request that if you intend to submit a proposal as lead institution to please inform us at the above address by 30 June 2023. This is not a mandatory step in the application process and no other information is requested at this stage.
18. Questions regarding the call can be addressed to REDCCF@re.ukri.org.



**Research
England**

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Jessica Corner'.

Professor Dame Jessica Corner FMedSci, MAE, RN
Executive Chair, Research England



Annex A: Membership of the Research England Commercialisation Expert Group

Chair – Research England Executive Chair Professor Dame Jessica Corner

Deputy Chair – Dr Carol Bell (Development Bank of Wales, RE Council Member and RED Fund Panel Member)

Tomas Coates Ulrichsen (University Commercialisation and Innovation (UCI) Policy Evidence Unit, University of Cambridge)

Neil Crabb (Frontier IP Group PLC)

Paul Van Dun (KU Leuven R&D)

Alice Frost (Research England)

Tony Hickson (Cancer Research UK and Cancer Research Horizons)

Dr Karin Immergluck (Stanford University Office of Technology Licensing)

Dr Poonam Malik (University of Strathclyde, Scottish Enterprise and Angel Investor)

Dr Carolyn Reeve (Retired BEIS)

Zoe Reich and Dr Amy Nommeots-Nomm (Octopus Ventures)