



Funding opportunity

Expression of interest: CCF- RED university commercialisation ecosystems

Opportunity status:	Closed
Funders:	Research England
Funding type:	Grant
Total fund:	£30,000,000
Award range:	£3,000,000 - £5,000,000
Publication date:	6 March 2024
Opening date:	6 March 2024 9:00am UK time
Closing date:	15 May 2024 12:00pm UK time

Expressions of interest for funding for universities to develop the emerging and maturing place-based commercialisation (which includes collaborative research and development (R&D) with business) ecosystems around them in England.

To submit your proposal, you must be an English higher education provider (HEP) and on the Office for Students (OfS) approved fee cap providers list.

Proposals must:

- be collaborative and comprise a minimum of three English HEPs
- include private commercial partners

An indicative £30 million of funding is available. We anticipate individual projects will be awarded between £3 to 5 million over three years.

We may consider higher awards by exception, of up to £10 million over five years.

Who can apply

In order to be eligible for Research England funding, as laid out in the terms and conditions, you must:

- be registered with OfS in the 'approved (fee cap)' category of its register (this includes continuing to meet the OfS' ongoing [conditions of registration](#))
- be undertaking research and related activities, which include knowledge exchange
- have research activity with the principal, though not necessarily exclusive, aim of creation of new knowledge which is made freely available to all

Proposals must be collaborative with:

- a minimum of three HEPs
- at least one private commercial partner (such as businesses, investors, private accelerators and more)

HEP partners must be located within a self-defined contiguous geography that can be evidenced, and such will form the basis of the core of the university-centred commercialisation ecosystem, which is the focus of the bid.

The chosen geographic footprint should be evidenced as follows:

- reflecting the locations of the major complementary assets to the ecosystem
- how the locations come together in terms of civic and business or economic growth networks and shared purposes

Non-HEP partners based outside the geography are eligible to contribute to activity within the collaboration where their participation would directly benefit the ecosystem development.

In exceptional cases a HEP partner with unique capabilities of key strategic importance to the key activities of the project outside the geography may be included with strong evidence that its participation benefits the ecosystem development.

We are unlikely to give multiple grants to the same ecosystem. In line with past Connecting Capability Fund eligibility rules, individual HEPs can lead a maximum of two proposals and where appropriate, a HEP can be a partner on any number of projects.

All proposals should look to bring together collaborations that:

- further activity of strategic importance to the partner HEPs
 - bring together a depth of complementary opportunities, capabilities, and experience in the relevant ecosystem
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What we're looking for

The Connecting Capability Fund – Research England Development Fund (CCF-RED): developing ecosystems funding opportunity aims to:

- support the strategic development of emerging and maturing place-based university-centred commercialisation ecosystems across England
- develop HEP commercialisation best practice, focusing particularly on best practices collaboration between HEPs and with wider ecosystem partners

The programme defines commercialisation to include collaborative R&D with business. Proposals should describe the geographic footprint of their ecosystem, and our expectation is that projects will primarily involve partners from within that footprint. External non-HEP partners based outside the geography are eligible to contribute to activity within the collaboration.

From expert evidence, university commercialisation ecosystems crosscut between higher education (HE), private and commercial partners and others including local leadership.

A number of internal HE and external factors together drive an environment where university research or knowledge and entrepreneurial talent can be commercialised or developed, to realise economic and societal impacts. Factors include but are not limited to:

- people and skills
- private business
- business support and professional services
- finance
- infrastructure
- commercial space and amenities
- access to networks and leadership

Factors and how they come together will differ in different places dependent on the economic or business characteristics of the place.

We distinguish between maturing and emerging ecosystems with the view that proposals should be clear on, and based around activity related to, the maturity

of their ecosystem, and that it is clear in the bid whether it is in the emerging or maturing class.

Maturing

We understand that HEPs and place partners may have already developed an ecosystem upon which this funding can be used to expand and evolve beyond the natural course. We would expect in such proposals that the ambitions of activities and outcomes should be higher.

Emerging

We note that for some projects these funds will be used to grow an emerging ecosystem. Proposals need to identify evidence of clear groundings of an ecosystem and appropriate expertise within the collaboration to make it possible for it to achieve a significant step forward in maturity, with a good trajectory in terms of outcomes and sustainability.

There will be different expectations on proposals focused on maturing or emerging, with higher expectations that proposals addressing the former category deliver ambitious outcomes relative to the nature of their opportunity.

Proposals from HEPs in emerging ecosystems, earlier in the journey towards maturity, should look to describe and demonstrate their potential to develop, including evidence that this has begun and there is reasonable evidence on a potentially viable growth trajectory.

Proposals from HEPs embedded in ecosystems closer to maturity should be able to demonstrate greater additionality from receipt of this funding, including ambitions in activity and outcomes, which may include:

- bringing in partners beyond those that already exist in the ecosystem
- a sharp focus on demonstrating how the learning from their project can be disseminated throughout the sector

This funding opportunity will look to enable those with potential to move the dial on their local activity and evolve their emerging or maturing ecosystems to move towards joining those at the global frontier.

Activity should involve the participation of private partners (including businesses, investors, accelerators and more) and may include other public or third sector actors if helpful to delivering the aims of the project. Where appropriate, activity should look to support, or benefit from, local economic development strategies and engage with relevant local leadership in the development of plans. You should consider how you build upon the full diversity of strengths and potential of local and institutional entrepreneurs and innovators.

The technology, sectoral or other focus or breadth of projects should be determined by the nature of the ecosystem development opportunity, such as the concentration of a mix of HEP and private or business partners.

This funding opportunity is part of a series of targeted funding opportunities within the CCF-RED fund. A list of priority topics for future funding opportunities within CCF-RED is presented in the background document (additional information section).

Funding available

To account for differing scales of opportunity across ecosystems, there are two options to apply for funding.

Option one: primary funding

An expression of interest proposal is submitted for a total amount of funding between £3 to 5 million over the course of up to three years.

Option two: primary funding and boost

An expression of interest proposal is submitted alongside an addendum to the proposal to extend the project to a total of up to £10 million funding over a maximum of five years. This means up to £5 million additional funding over an extended project lifetime of up to an additional two years.

Costs

You should understand your costs, including indirect costs, but we do not determine a costing format. Your proposals are premised around risk-benefit sharing with an expectation that HEPs and other partners should contribute to costs appropriately to the benefits to them, with the CCF-RED contribution reflective of the sector or wider benefits. Proposals can be for all forms of knowledge exchange expenditure, which for CCF-RED includes capital costs.

Proposals cannot include research (or core teaching) expenditures such as support of research posts. Undergraduate students or graduates may form a component to proposals, but should be a minority of activity.

How to apply

You are required to use the Connecting Capability Fund – Research England Development Fund expression of interest template provided.

If you are applying for primary funding, it should be a maximum of three pages (excluding cover page provided).

If you are applying for boost funding, you can complete an additional two pages.

The primary proposal must comprise a complete standalone project if a boost proposal is submitted. The full stage competition will be run by invitation over summer and autumn 2024.

You should submit your proposal via email to redccf@re.ukri.org by midday on 15 May 2024.

What to include in your expression of interest proposal

At expression of interest stage, your proposal should summarise:

- the starting place: a description of your emerging or maturing ecosystem
- the opportunity within your ecosystem, including any sector, technology or other focus, including evidence of private sector contribution and demand
- the primary objectives you will set to address the opportunity
- the roles of HEP and private commercial partners in the collaboration and the engagement of local partners. If successful at the expression of interest stage, you can add partners at the full stage. However, there should be a clear description of the roles of all types of partners within the activities described in the expression of interest
- a description of the activity that will be undertaken by HEP and all partners, and the associated outcomes and expected commercial and economic impacts
- evidence of alignment with relevant research, development and innovation and appropriate local priorities, targets and strategies
- an insightful account of barriers and enablers to collaborative ecosystems in knowledge exchange and how you will address these
- a description of the sustainability of the core collaboration and the collective ambition to develop it and the wider ecosystem further

Successful proposals will highlight the outputs, outcomes or impacts they aim to achieve throughout the duration of the project's lifetime and beyond. We would expect to see suggested outputs, outcomes and impacts within these three categories:

- embedded changes in the HEPs: for example, an increase in entrepreneurial outputs from partner HEPs, increased volumes of collaborate R&D
- embedded change in the performance of the universities or ecosystem: for example, increased volumes of local R&D, investment into the area
- cross-cutting: for example, increased stickiness of university spin-outs

What to include in your full stage proposal

If successful at expression of interest stage, you will be invited to submit a full stage proposal using the RED fund template. In addition to the above, you will be asked to provide further information, including:

- a credible and detailed plan for ecosystem development
 - costed work packages including contributions from delivery partners
 - detailed risk analysis and mitigation approaches
 - letters of support from partners and key ecosystem stakeholders. For example, private, HEP, local leadership partners, and strategic backing at the institution level (Pro Vice-Chancellor or equivalent)
 - plans for sustainability and plausible ambition to grow or scale further, and for evaluation and dissemination of the project for the benefit of the wider higher education sector
 - detailed equality, diversity and inclusion statement relevant to the aims and delivery of the project
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How we will assess your application

Assessment process

We will assess proposals, including the advice of our Commercialisation Expert group (see background document for membership) and RED panel. We will apply the expression of interest assessment to all proposals and will recommend a shortlist to the Research England Executive Chair to proceed to full stage development.

Invitation to take part in the full stage

Expression of interest proposals that do not present a strong case for funding or that do not meet the requirements of the funding opportunity will be declined and will not be able to take part in the full stage competition.

Not all proposals successful at the expression of interest stage requesting the primary and boost funding will be invited to apply for the boost funding at the full stage.

If you have been invited to apply for primary and boost funding at full stage, you will be advised that primary and boost components will be assessed individually on their own merits, and grants of boost funding will be made by exception for proposals that make a very strong case for the ambition and impact of the intervention. We reserve the right to make no boost grants if that strength of case is not made.

Feedback

Once the assessment period has been completed, feedback will be provided to both successful and unsuccessful projects. Successful applicants at expression of interest stage will be invited to submit applications to the full stage competition which will have a 12-week development period starting from August 2024.

Assessment criteria

Building capabilities (local fit)

This includes:

- current strengths and approaches
- evidence of the opportunity related to needs and at appropriate scale and nature for the ecosystem
- convincing evidence on emerging or maturing

Also, proposals should demonstrate that the activity develops and enhances the platform of enabling factors within the ecosystem with local partner commitment.

Collaboration

This includes:

- ambition and appropriateness (to the activity) of HEPs and key private commercial partners, with clear articulation of roles and strength of partnership to be built on
- potential for sustainability, including commitment to the ecosystem growth trajectory, after the project
- evidence that the collaboration is well placed to deliver the activity for the ecosystem (and technology or sector of focus as appropriate) and will work well together
- clear plans to disseminate findings and learning for benefits of the ecosystem and wider higher education sector system development

Delivering high performance (performance relevant to the state of development of the ecosystem and related to level of stretch (with higher for mature))

This includes:

- evidence of consideration and learning from successful practice within the collaboration and elsewhere in developing approaches to deliver ecosystem development

Delivery and funding

This includes:

- project costs and activities justified by need and evidence
- providing value for money, including:
 - additionality and leverage or match
 - appropriate project team
 - risks considered and appropriately addressed

There is no specific match funding requirement. However, we would expect to see clear evidence that partners are contributing in a measurable and meaningful way to the project.

Partner contributions (both cash and in-kind) demonstrate buy-in to the project and that partners see the value of the work in achieving mutual economic goals, and there is appropriate value for money including for public funds. Contributions need to be proportionate to benefits within legal and regulatory frameworks.

Contact details

Get help with developing your proposal

For help and advice on costings and writing your proposal please contact your research office in the first instance, allowing sufficient time for your organisation's submission process.

Ask about this funding opportunity

Louise Wall and Chris Gibson

Email: redccf@re.ukri.org

We aim to respond within three working days.

Additional info

This funding opportunity is part of the Connecting Capability Fund – Research England Development Fund (CCF-RED) programme which sits within the RED Fund.

Find [guidance on adherence to relevant RED processes and requirements \(PDF, 169KB\)](#), specifically:

- eligibility
- success criteria

- project monitoring
- project reviews and evaluations
- impact assessment
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- subsidy controls

[Research England as an ecosystem-builder: £60 million to invest in commercialisation success \(National Centre for Universities and Business\)](#)

[Connecting capability fund](#)

[Research England development fund](#)

Supporting documents

[Expression of interest template \(DOCX, 40KB\)](#)

[RED documentation and guidance \(PDF, 169KB\)](#)

[Research England supporting paper \(PDF, 142KB\)](#)

Guidance on good research

[Good research resource hub](#)

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<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/university-commercialisation-ecosystems>