



UKRI Venture Doctorates Webinar Q&A

Last Updated: 18/09/2026

Criteria

Q: Can the programme can be focused on a specific subject, or does it need to be open to all STEM and SHAPE disciplines?

A: Applications must clearly support at least one of the eight high-growth sectors in the UK Government's Industrial Strategy, as well as UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)'s mission to advance knowledge, improve lives and drive growth.

Q: Would you expect applications to align with one IS8 sector or contribute to several?

A: Your application will be assessed on the basis of how well it meets the assessment criteria – this is the most important aspect when UKRI is considering how well your application will score.

The balance across IS8 sectors will be one of a number of factors taken into account, in particular when selecting between applications that are in Tier 2 (highly competitive, but not of the highest quality). We recommend identifying the IS8 area/s where your partnership has genuine strength, is coherent, and demonstrates excellence against the assessment criteria.

Q: Are there expectations regarding the number, type or level of commitment of business and industry partners?

A: Applicants are best placed to determine the make-up of their consortium.

Q: Are multiple HEI bids favoured? How important will region/place be?

A: Proposed bids will need to demonstrate the breadth to meet the assessment criteria. The balance of UK research organisations and geography will be one of a number of factors taken into account, in particular when selecting between applications that are in Tier 2 (highly competitive, but not of the highest quality).

Q: Given that a degree awarding organisation is not required at the consortium at outline stage, will bids that have not yet named one be at a disadvantage under capability to deliver?

A: This will not be a disadvantage. At the outline stage, we will need evidence that you are looking into this and are aware that this is needed by the full stage.

Funding process

Q: How will the assessment panel distinguish between a strong programme that produces valuable commercial learning and alternative commercial outputs?

A: We will consider the track record of partners in producing spin outs to give reassurance that students will be supported in this process. We will also consider the proposed governance of the centre in overseeing this.

Q: Will there be any feedback given on the expressions of interest?

A: This stage is not assessed and is in place to support our internal planning. We are unlikely to publish feedback.

Q: Is there a need for the host HEI to already be providing a venture doctorate PhD programme?

A: Partners may apply to this funding opportunity regardless of whether they currently or have previously held any type of venture doctorate PhD programme.

Q: Is there a requirement for match funding from industry or university?

A: There is no requirement for match funding from institutions. We will welcome direct and in-kind contributions from project partners, but it is not a requirement.

Q: Is the 30% international student cap in place for this call and will the grant cover international fees?

A: The cap will remain at 30% for international students and grants can only charge the equivalent home fee rate.

Q: Is there a limit to the number of EOIs that can be submitted?

A: As per the funding opportunity, only the lead organisation should submit an EOI. For universities, you must discuss with your university research office before submitting an EOI. Multiple EOIs could be submitted, however, for universities they will have to have discussed this with their research office and received some backing. Demand management will be strictly enforced at the application stage - one outline as lead and it must have been submitted as an EOI.

Q: How many industry partners can join the programme and can they host students?

A: There is no limit to the number of Project Partners. Industry partners can host students, but the student needs to be registered at an RO and there needs to be a degree-awarding body on the application by the full application stage.

Q: What level of industry involvement does UKRI expect at outline stage?

A: Information on project partners is not required at outline application stage. If you already have confirmed partners, you are welcome to include this information. At full application stage the involvement of any project partners in your application is expected to be justified, for example, outlining the direct (cash) and indirect (in-kind) contributions to your training programme. At full application stage, we will require project partner letters for that partner to be included.

Q: Are there any requirements for organisations to be UK-based?

A: Overseas commercial companies cannot act as a Co-lead or collaborating partner for this call. The overseas company could be a project partner or subcontractor, but the proposal would have to explain how that helped anchor the commercial outputs in the UK.

Q: Can some projects and partners be developed after the award begins?

A: Projects and partners can be developed after the award begins. At both assessment stages, applications should contain enough information to meet the assessment criteria.

Q: The call sets out that 'Any organisation hosting students at any point of your award must be named as a collaborating organisation'. Does this include short term hosting (e.g. short, fixed term placement) or other small training provision (e.g. a workshop)?

A: This only refers to ROs or other organisations which are the primary host of the student for the majority of their studies and will therefore be in receipt of funding from the grant to support

those students. This does not include organisations which are hosting students on placement e.g., Project partners or longer term placements such as in Engineering Doctorates.

Q: Can you provide more detail about what type of people/organisations will be involved in the assessment process.

A: The assessment process is covered in the funding opportunity. UKRI will use expertise from across the community, including individuals from academia, business, industry across UKRI's remit areas to assess applications to this opportunity. Conflicts of interest will be managed according to our normal processes, and the panel will assess in line with the criteria.

Q: Will the panel be assessing match funding from partners?

A: The panel will be given the UKRI's policy on institutional matched funded and will be instructed to follow the criteria as worded. The priority is on whether partners are contributing positively and playing a key role in the delivery of the centre, not the amount contributed. Panels will not be instructed to ignore project partner funding, but they will ask to work in line with the criteria as they stand.

Q: How do you want consortium bids to represent themselves?

A: Roles and responsibilities of both individuals and organisations should be described within your application. You should describe individual members as part of your core team whereas contributions of your partners may be described in other sections, as relevant.

Q: Can you add new partners between the EOI and outline stage, and / or between the outline and full stage?

A: UKRI appreciates that the composition of consortium may change, as long as justifications are provided. In particular, we need to see and agree any partner changes between the outline and full proposal stage.

Q: Do you have a maximum value you are expecting bids to come in at and can costs change between outline and full?

A: UKRI has £25million available for this call. The main priority is for applications to include the amount they need and make a strong case for value for money. The panel will assess it on this basis. Costs can change however will need to be justified according to your training model. We will need to see and agree significant changes made between the outline stage and full proposal submission.

Q: How much detail is required about individual PhD projects and supervisors at the outline and full application stage?

A: We do not require a list of PhD project titles – we are investing in vision and capability to deliver research and venture creation. For supervisors, we need indication that supervisory capacity is available to ensure an adequate environment for the students.

Q: How many applications do you intend to take through to the full stage and subsequently to interview?

A: This will be judged based on the number of expressions of interest.

Course structure

Q: How should applicants balance the breadth of IS-8 sector coverage with the need for student cohort cohesion and identity?

A: We appreciate that there could be very diverse research areas within a cohort. We expect the common focus to be the entrepreneurial element of the programme and ask applications to demonstrate how they will facilitate the cohort identity, for example through training and social activities.

Q: How do you envisage the balance between meeting the threshold for a PhD award and developing a business?

A: It is expected that all students will exit the programme with both a doctoral qualification and sufficient training and experience in entrepreneurship and enterprise to work within that sector post-graduation. Doctoral degree assessment can be innovative: thesis, portfolio, artefact or other suitable formats, but must meet UK doctoral quality standards. Prospective applicants are best placed to describe how this balance will be achieved within their applications.

Q: Is there a requirement to be a strong link between the topic of the doctorate and the emerging venture?

A: We would expect there to be a link between the research performed in the doctoral project and the commercialisation activities underpinning the new venture creation. However, we appreciate that the nature of this link may vary depending on the requirements of the emerging venture.

Q: In the call, you have said that a minimum of 60% of students must go through the 'full' programme. What is considered to be the difference between the 'full' and 'non-full' programme?

A: You may choose to extend aspects of training and support to students not following the full venture doctorate programme funded by this award, where those students have strong entrepreneurial ambition and their research has commercial potential. However at least 60% of students must go through the full venture doctorate programme, and meet the expected outcomes set out in the funding opportunity.

Q: The opportunity requires the lead organisation to provide the principal base for a minimum of one student per year of intake. Could you clarify what "principal base" requires in practice, and whether this obligation attaches to the lead organisation specifically or can be shared with collaborating organisations?

A: It is expected that a minimum of one student per year of intake will be based at the Project lead, meaning that one student per year will spend the majority of their time at this RO. Other students are welcome and encouraged to be hosted by your collaborating organisations (project co-leads).

Q: Is UKRI expecting these Doctoral Focal Award schemes to be managed by academic leads or commercially focussed leads (or a hybrid version)?

A: There are no specific requirements about who leads. Applicants should put together a team that delivers the expertise, experience, infrastructure, and networks required to deliver the proposed vision and operate the training programme. This includes the business, investor, and

innovation ecosystem connections needed to support the creation and growth of new ventures in the UK.

Q: What are you anticipating in terms of employment outcomes for venture doctorate students after completing the course?

A: Our expected outcomes are more about the skills students will gain, rather than their future specific employment roles. Awards should support students into a diverse range of future career destinations including but not exclusively working in their future venture.

Q: Can the first cohort of students start in September 2028? That is the very end of the 2027/28 academic year, but provides as much time as possible to allow for collaboration agreements to be signed and diverse recruitment efforts

A: As per the guidance, the first cohort of students must start within the 27-28 academic year, so providing that students start on or before 30th September, this would be permissible. Student numbers can also ramp up over time, as long as the model proposed is achievable.

Q: To accommodate the five years maximum funding period for students, would UKRI fund the student after submission, for example to spend on post doc / spin out?

A: There are models in our current EPSRC CDTs where we do fund an equivalent to this, and we would be open for you to put this forward as part of your preferred model at this stage. A requirement will be that you still operate within the boundaries of subsidy control.

Use of funding

Q: Can the Venture Doctorates fund professional delivery roles to facilitate cohort management, industry engagement, mentoring and venture-development activities?

A: Yes, delivery roles should be described in your application and be inclusive of FTE and expected cost.

Q: Can the leveraged investment include the salary of the venture doctorate candidate if an industry partner wants to sponsor a full-time employee through the programme, and at what level (gross or net salary) could this investment be recognised?

A: There is no formal requirement that proposals must include secured co-investment of any value, so there is no target to hit or specific rules about what counts/doesn't count as leverage. However, any leverage should be specifically linked to the application and not expenditure that the project partner would have made anyway e.g. continuing to employ their own staff to do work for that company.

Q: How are costs associated with an industry collaborator's participation expected to be covered? Are industry partners eligible to receive any funding directly through the grant for the provision for example of training or organisation of a mentorship scheme? If direct funding is possible, what costs are eligible and through what mechanism would these be claimed?

A: All costs from the grant which are being distributed to partners not typically eligible to receive UKRI funding must be covered by the subsidy control and/or sub-contracting guidelines outlined within the funding opportunity and UKRI terms and conditions of grants.

Q: Can the award fund a position to run commercialisation activities (e.g. 0.5 FTE) in addition to a programme manager post?

A: Yes, funding from the grant may be used to support activities and personnel to deliver venture doctorates including training and support for commercialisation, but taking into account areas we will not fund set out in the funding opportunity.

Q: Which commercialisation costs are eligible?

A: Commercialisation training and specific commercialisation activities integral to the Venture Doctorate are eligible, provided justification is included. Examples of commercialisation activities (not an exhaustive list) that could be supported include:

- advancement of existing research outputs toward real world applications
- development of prototypes
- product, process or service design including user testing and feedback
- activities that contribute to refining routes to markets, users or audiences
- development of the business model including future financial sustainability
- development of product, process or service value chains including scale up requirements
- development of understanding of market, user or audience segmentation and positioning
- development of intellectual property strategy
- establishing or demonstrating freedom to operate
- developing regulatory or standards requirement needed to reach user or audience
- confirmation of market validation and product or market fit
- establishment of and test value proposition with target market or audience
- validation studies including viability studies
- prototype design and demonstration
- ‘technical’ and real-world concept optimisation

Explicit exclusions are direct costs associated with applying for IP protection (including patent filing costs) and company incorporation, and estates and indirect costs.

Q: Is there a maximum limit for the RTSG fund.

A: There is no limit. We would expect you to think through what the students are likely to need, and there is flexibility to be specific according to the particular student's project. Funding for commercialisation might be student-specific or across a cohort.

IP and commercialisation

Q: How developed must the initial commercial opportunity be when students are recruited? Could students begin with a promising research problem and validate the appropriate venture pathway during Year 1?

A: Applicants are welcome to propose early stage ideas or research problem attuned to a specific venture pathway with the aim to validate both the research idea and its application with robust commercialisation appraisal and demonstration, provided it meets the requirements in the funding opportunity.

Q: Is there any expectation on the number of spin outs that will come out of the scheme?

A: While we expect all students entering this programme to have the intent and support to start a new venture, we understand that not all students will successfully spin out a company notably if the market opportunity, business model or IP position is not suited to establishing a new company. Therefore, there is no formal expectation of a set number of spin outs per student or per award. However, we expect to see how all applicants will attempt to generate commercial values initially through new ventures with funding received from this opportunity. UKRI supports development of a variety of commercialisation routes pertinent to different assets which may result from this funding opportunity notably if venture creation is not the most appropriate route, including licencing, industry adoption or scale up.

Q: In the collaboration agreement required before student projects begin, how does UKRI expect background IP brought into the consortium by a partner to be treated, as distinct from foreground IP arising from the programme?

A: UKRI does not normally need to see the MOU or collaboration agreement associated with your programme. We do expect any collaboration agreements to be in place before the students start their research projects. Any IP arising as a direct result of funding from UKRI should be handled in line with our [published online guidance on IP](#) and our grants terms and conditions.

Q: Can students work together on commercialisation opportunities?

A: Yes – as long as students meet the individual requirements for their doctoral award.

Q: How will the success of the company be judged within the context of the doctorate?

A: We recognise that the true success of companies may not be seen for many years, so it is the longitudinal assessment of outcomes that will ultimately be considered. From the actual programme itself, we are looking to see how many companies are incorporated and raising money.

Q: Is spin out the only measure of success?

A: In an ideal world, all students going through this programme will come out with a spin out company and a doctoral qualification. We expect that all students will exit the programme with both a doctoral qualification and sufficient training and experience in entrepreneurship and enterprise to work within that sector post-graduation.

Q: What happens if students don't start their own business after being through the process?

A: We recognise that not all students will start a company. We will consider support mechanisms that were in place to support the student, their skills and experience developed through the programme and whether there were any other commercial outputs.

Q: Given that the work from the PhD student could be designed with the aim of commercialisation, this may affect the student's ability to publish their work pending IP protection. Is this an issue?

A: As long as the work is published in the end, additional time can be taken to get the IP in place, up to a year.