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Welcome



WOMEN IN INNOVATION

Going beyond boundaries

Women in Innovation 2025/26

Assessor Briefing

Date: 23 February 2026

The Webinar will start at 14:00

- We are currently on mute, whilst waiting for more people to join.
- This Briefing will be recorded.
- Process Briefing slides and recording will also be shared.

Welcome & Introductions

Dawn Manser

Competition Manager

Lucie Kanaa

Innovation Lead

James Curren

Head of Corporate Reporting

All assessors are required to receive this briefing prior to assessing on this competition.



Agenda

- Our Expectations
 - Assessor obligations
 - Use of AI
 - Approved Browsers
 - Conflicts of Interest
 - Dos and Don'ts
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- Competition Specifics
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Our Expectations



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Innovate UK Women in Innovation Awardee
Dr. Layla Hosseini-Gerami, Co-Founder of Ignota Labs

Assessor obligations

When assessing on a competition assessors should raise concerns to the Competition Delivery Executive via the competitions.admin@iuk.ukri.org email address if they:

- have assessed a similar application before
- feel there is insufficient information within the application to provide a valuable assessment
- are unsure if they have a conflict of interest with a person or an organisation mentioned in an application
- are concerned about the eligibility for grant funding of a person or organisation within an application



- Declare and update your Conflicts of Interest regularly
- Accept or reject your assessments by 5pm on 25 February 2026
- Submit your assessments by 12 midday on 5 March 2026
- Refer to the new Process Recording for clarity
- Contact us if there is anything you are unsure about
- Highlight to us if the applicant has breached any of the rules around what has been asked for in both their answers and appendices
- Use only the information provided as part of each question in this competition to make your assessment



- Download applications or work offline
- Submit your assessments after the deadline unless authorised by IUK
- Consider any information that wasn't requested as part of the guidance for each question
- Consider any information from external sources as part of your assessment
- Follow any links provided within an application or appendix unless asked to do so by IUK

IUKs advice on the use of AI in applications

With the advances in AI technology it is only natural that applicants will use AI to support them in applying to our competitions. Whilst we don't recommend or advise against it, we make applicants aware of the following which could potentially impact their project.

Pros

- Removes barriers for people with disabilities and non-English speakers
- Allows applicants to rephrase their content to meet the word count in a question
- Ensures all aspects of a question are answered
- Can aide a better understanding of:
 - intended/wider market
 - best practice in project management
 - complimentary technologies and advances in the industry
 - expected project impacts

Cons

- It is not always accurate in its assumptions and can get things wrong
- AI learns from the information it is given as well as what it has already learnt
- May provide a generic response meaning an application could use similar phrasing to others
- AI can be detected as non-human as it lacks expression and insight as it relies on logic to summarise information based on the question asked
- By sharing their ideas with AI **they are potentially sharing their idea with the world** therefore care should be taken when doing so, as they have no control over how it is later shared once it has been shared.



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You should not mark down an application because they have used AI.

All applications should be marked based on the assessment criteria for each question.

****It is not permitted for assessors to use generative AI tools as part of their assessment. See our [policy](#).***

Approved Browsers

When completing your assessments, you must use one of the following browser pages and ensure that spell check is enabled.

You can find more information in the [Designing for different browsers and devices](#) guidance.

Operating system	Browser	Support
Windows	Edge (latest versions)	compliant
	Google Chrome (latest versions)	compliant
	Mozilla Firefox (latest versions)	compliant
macOS	Safari 12 and later	compliant
	Google Chrome (latest versions)	compliant
	Mozilla Firefox (latest versions)	compliant
iOS	Safari for iOS 12.1 and later	compliant
	Google Chrome (latest versions)	compliant
Android	Google Chrome (latest versions)	compliant
	Samsung Internet (latest versions)	compliant

Conflicts of Interest - Direct

Direct Conflict - Cannot assess on competition

You are named on an application as a project partner, subcontractor, or have any type of relationship with the individuals or organisations named on the application

You have been approached and agreed to be a member of a committee or board connected with the proposed project, for example an advisory group or steering committee/board.

You have been directly involved in preparing the project, including writing a letter of support

You are in close regular collaboration with any individuals named in the project, including investigators, research staff, collaborators, subcontractors and project partners, to an extent where you feel unable to give an unbiased opinion.

You stand to gain a financial advantage from a particular outcome of a project which you are asked to review, for example, you have stocks or shares in a company named in a project

You have a current personal, financial or professional relationship with any individuals named in the application where your neutrality could be compromised due to the nature of the relationship

You stand to gain professionally or personally from a particular outcome of a project which you are asked to review, for example; your status or reputation may be strengthened.

You work for a direct competitor of a company listed as a lead applicant or project partner.

Conflicts of Interest - Indirect

Indirect conflict - Can assess in the competition, but not applications with a conflict

You have worked for an organisation or individual named in the project in the last 2 years but no longer benefit financially.

You work for or with a company named on the application but have no knowledge, involvement, or do not stand to benefit financially or personally from the funding outcome of the project.

You have a close association with an individual involved in the project who has a financial interest.

You have a close association with an individual involved in the project who has a personal or professional interest.

- [UKRI declaration of interests: policy and guidance – UKRI](#)
- For further advice, please contact one of our Delivery Executives on competitions.admin@iuk.ukri.org.

Impact

- If you do not accept your allocated assessments by **25 February**, they will be reallocated to another assessor
- We will send you a reminder email 3 working days before the assessment deadline
- During the assessment process, please treat any emails from “[competitions.admin](#)” as a priority, especially those that are chasing a response
- If we cannot see any activity within IFS, we will assume that you are not undertaking the work and assessments will be reallocated



Competition Specifics



Assessment Timeline

Milestone	Time and date
Applications to assessors	Close of business: 23 February 2026
Assessor accepts or rejects	5pm: 25 February 2026
Assessment deadline	12pm Midday: 5 March 2026

Competition Eligibility

Total Competition Grant:	£4.5million
Open to:	Single applicants only
Project must:	• start on 1 July 2026 • end on 30 June 2027 • carry out all of its project work in the UK • intend to exploit the results from or in the UK
Total Grant Funding Request:	Up to £75,000
Project Length:	12 months
Lead Organisation:	be a woman founder or co-founder within a UK registered micro, small or medium sized enterprise (SME) that is registered on Companies House
Subcontractors:	Allowed - must not exceed 50% of total costs



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Eligibility Checks have been carried out by the Competition Manager, so all applications are eligible unless otherwise flagged.

Redesigning Application



Innovate UK has redesigned applications for competitive support to:

- ✓ Focus more on the innovation capability and capacity of businesses
- ✓ Make applying for support simpler, easier & fairer
- ✓ Bring consistency while reducing the administrative burden on applicants and assessors

To do this we developed a new criteria framework then worked with world leading social researchers to bring this to life in a Question Bank. This competition will be the first to pilot these new questions.

The questions are more specific to make it clear what we need and avoid duplication. This means you'll see more questions, but the overall effort to complete assessment should be similar to previous rounds. You won't be asked to give question-level feedback, instead providing overall feedback on the application.

We will be conducting a short survey to evaluate the pilot post-assessment.



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Application Questions

Application Form		Word Count	Appendix
Question 1	Applicant location (not scored)	150	No
Question 2	Minimal Financial Assistance declaration (not scored)	50	Yes – mandatory upload
Question 3	Animal testing (not scored)	Multiple choice	No
Question 4	Permits and licences (not scored)	Multiple choice	No
Question 5	International Collaboration (not scored)	400 words	No
Question 6	Export License (not scored)	Multiple choice	No
Question 7	Trusted Research and Innovation (not scored)	400 words	No
Question 8	Suitability checker (not scored)	Multiple choice	No
Question 9	Industrial strategy priority sector (not scored)	Multiple choice	No
Question 10	Business founder / co – founder (not scored)	Multiple choice	No
Question 11	Role Model Commitment (not scored)	Multiple choice	No

Application Questions

Application Form		Word Count	Appendix
Question 12	The problem	300 words	No
Question 13	The benefit (not scored)	Multiple choice	No
Question 14	Benefit detail	300 words	No
Question 15	Nature of the idea (not scored)	300 words	No
Question 16	The idea	300 words	No
Question 17	Design	300 words	No
Question 18	Customers (not scored)	Multiple choice	No
Question 19	Customer detail	300 words	No
Question 20	Market size	300 words	No
Question 21	Milestones	300 words	No
Question 22	Delivery	300 words	No
Question 23	Risks	300 words	No
Question 24	Video Pitch - Why this award and vision for the future (3 minutes)	N/A	No

Unscored questions

You are not being asked to score the first 7 standard questions. We ask these to gather information from the applicants, but their responses are not used to make funding decisions.

There are some questions we would like to draw your attention to:

Question 1: Applicant location

If an applicant lists an overseas project partner, they may require an export license and if so, non-UK based assessors are not permitted to assess the application. If you are a non-UK based assessor and see a non-UK address listed here, please contact us immediately

Question 5: International collaboration

As above, a project with overseas partners is not permitted to be assessed by a non-UK based assessor so if they answer yes to this question and you are a non-UK based assessor, please contact us immediately

Question 7: Trusted Research and Innovation

As above, if the applicant indicates they require an export license non-UK based assessors are not permitted to assess the application. If you are a non-UK based assessor and an export license is required, please contact us immediately

Why are we asking these questions?

These questions are part of every competition including those only open to single applicants as there may be overseas engagement or sub-contractors as part of their project.

The important take-away for us and to ensure Innovate UK is compliant with the UK export control guidance is that **anyone** accessing our systems must only access them from the UK if the application requires an export control licence.

These questions will help us establish if an applicant requires an export control licence.

If they do, we will need to get confirmation from anyone who will be accessing applications through our systems (IFS or via a CDDA site) that they will only access them from the UK.

If a project doesn't require an export control licence our systems can be accessed internationally, where appropriate.

Competition Scope & scoring

On all applications you will be asked to review, the competition scope has already been checked by the Innovation Lead by reading the applicant's response to the scope question only, you will not be asked to confirm this.

If on reading the full application, you feel the application is out of scope you must notify us via competitions.admin@iuk.ukri.org email and await our response. **DO NOT** add as a comment in your feedback to the applicant or submit your assessment before hearing from us.

You must review each application on its individual merits against the scoring criteria provided and write a **single overview of your assessment in the suitable for funding box** which will be released to the applicant.

As an example, if you have five assessments, please do not rank or compare them against each other, or make any reference to another application within your feedback.

Video Pitch

We ask applicants to produce a short video on Pitchtape (**no longer than 3 minutes**) as an answer to one of the questions. This should be scored in line with the Assessor Guidance and Scoring Matrix.

When assessing applications with a video question, you must **not**:

- comment on the appearance of applicant or the way they sound
- comment on the background or surroundings
- comment if it is audio only or subtitled

Any comments associated with the above could be deemed as inappropriate, discriminative and may result in an increase in applicant complaints.

Applicants must use Pitchtape to submit their video.

If a video is longer than 3 minutes – only assess the first 3 minutes of the video.

Applicants have the option of submitting a written response if they do not feel comfortable submitting a video.

Applicants can receive support from the Reasonable Adjustments Services team if they need support with navigating how to use and submit via Pitchtape.

How we review your assessment



Assessor Behaviour Analysis Report (ABA)

Following the assessment period, the following is looked at within the above report:

- Applications that have scored low/high but recommended/not recommended for funding
- Repeated feedback comments
- Feedback comments copied from competition guidance
- A large variance in scoring between assessors
- Low word count in feedback
- Swear words, derogatory and discriminatory language
- Gender terms
- Use of caps
- Lack of punctuation
- Use of question marks and exclamation marks



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Assessment results

Assessor	Scope?	Recc'd?	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q9	Q10		Total
Assessor 1		true			8	8	8	9	8	9	8	9	8	9		84
Assessor 2		true			8	8	8	9	9	9	9	8	9	8		85
Assessor 3		false			5	6	4	7	6	7	3	7	7	6		58
		Average			7.0	7.3	6.7	8.3	7.7	8.3	6.7	8.0	8.0	7.7		75.7
		Spread			3	2	4	2	3	2	6	2	2	3		27

The **green** box = one assessor's scores on an application

The **purple** box = set of scores for a particular question across each assessor

The **red** box = this assessment needs further investigation as there is a 20% difference or more between it and the next highest score

Exceptions

If an assessment requires further investigation, we will review the scores and feedback to identify if it is an **Exception**, according to our Exceptions Policy:

1. based on an assessor's comments they haven't understood what the project is trying to achieve
2. an assessor has used language that could cause a negative reaction from the applicant
3. an assessor has not assessed an application in the way they were instructed

If an Exception is identified, depending on the severity we will either reach out to the assessor to amend their feedback or arrange for the application to be reassessed.

Housekeeping

Please send invoices to competitions.admin@iuk.ukri.org using the invoice template provided

Your invoice must include:

- A unique invoice number no longer than 8 characters
- Your full name, company name (if applicable), and supplier number (beginning 8100 or SUP) to help us identify you
- Competition title and code
- No of assessments
- Bank details & VAT no (if VAT registered)
- Any receipts where applicable

If this is your first competition – a finance representative will contact you to verify your bank details

Invoices must be submitted within 30 days of the assessment close date/submission deadline.

Do not submit your invoice before this date.



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Competition Scope



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Scope

- Growth Sectors
- Business Stage
- Innovation



Scope: High Growth Sectors

The aim of this competition is to fund and support a diverse portfolio of women whose innovation is aligned to one of the following three high growth sectors defined in the Government's Industrial strategy:

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Digital and Technologies
- Life Sciences



Advanced Manufacturing

- **Automotive** – UK aims to lead in Zero Emission Vehicles (ZEVs) and Connected and Automated Mobility (CAM).
- **Batteries** – will power the transition to net zero and are central to the UK's clean energy and decarbonisation goals.
- **Aerospace** - central to the UK's ambition to lead in low-carbon aircraft technologies, advanced propulsion systems, and next-generation aviation innovation.
- **Space** - space technologies are part of the UK's ambition to lead in Industry 4.0, including: in-orbit satellite assembly, advanced manufacturing tools for space applications and integration with AI and automation.
- **Advanced materials** - UK manufacturers are leading the charge in developing next-generation components that are more sustainable and resilient and better suited for low-carbon applications.
- **Agri-tech** - pioneering revolutionary approaches to agricultural productivity and sustainable food production, supporting both domestic and global supply chains.



Digital and Technologies

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Supporting the development of foundation models and applied AI across sectors including health, finance, and manufacturing.
- **Cyber Security:** Strengthening national cyber resilience and promoting UK leadership in secure digital infrastructure.
- **Quantum Technologies:** Investing in quantum computing, sensing, and communications to unlock transformative capabilities.
- **Semiconductors:** Building strategic supply chains and domestic manufacturing capacity for critical semiconductor components.
- **Engineering Biology:** Advancing synthetic biology and bio-manufacturing for applications in health, agriculture, and materials.
- **Advanced Connectivity:** Expanding 5G and preparing for 6G networks, alongside satellite-based communications for remote areas.



Life Sciences

- **Biotechnology:** Supporting breakthroughs in areas such as genomics, nucleic acid based medicines, cell and gene therapies.
- **MedTech:** Accelerating development of AI-enabled diagnostics, wearable devices, and minimally invasive technologies.
- **Pharmaceuticals:** Driving innovation across medicines discovery and development and scaling sustainable manufacturing technologies. Utilising frontier technologies of AI, engineering biology and quantum.
- **Health Data & AI:** Integrating NHS data with AI tools to improve patient outcomes and enable personalised medicine.



Scope: Business Stage

We will support women innovators who have a late-stage start-up with ambitions to grow a scalable business which will involve raising considerable investment in the next 12 to 24 months.

By late-stage start-up, we would expect you to have:

- Built a basic version of the idea or product, service, solution e.g. a prototype or Minimal Viable Product.
- Received early interest from users, customers, or made some money.
- Know who the product is for and have started testing how the business will work.
- An understanding of realistic market opportunity.
- Started forming a team, going beyond original founders.



Scope: Innovative businesses

We will support women innovators whose businesses are innovative and by this we mean: **their business is developing a new or significantly improved product, service or business model that addresses a specific market need.**

Your solution must be either:

- New to the market (i.e. not currently available) or
- A significant improvement over existing solutions in terms of performance, efficiency, accessibility, cost or impact.



Key reminders

- Assessors will have 100 words **to provide an overall commentary on the application** by the 'yes/no to recommend' section. Please ensure commentary is constructive for the applicant and enables Innovate UK to understand whether you recommend / the value of the application.
- **Assessor Guidance for scoring applications** will be sent to you. Applicants have also had access to this document to understand how their application will be scored.
- **Video submissions** – applicants are asked to submit a 3 minute video via Pitchtape, but they can provide a written response.
- Please remember this competition is **piloting a selection of questions from Innovate UK's new standardised question bank**. If you have any queries about how to assess this new question set please contact - competitions.admin@iuk.ukri.org



Q&A



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Contact Details

Scope queries, conflicts, assessment issues, invoice submission or related queries :

Email: competitions.admin@iuk.ukri.org

IFS related queries and/or technical issues:

Customer Support Service

Tel: 0300 321 4357

Email: support@iuk.ukri.org

Our phone lines are open Monday - Friday 9am to 12pm and 2pm to 5pm, Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays).

Thank You



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