



ADVANCED  
MATERIALS  
RESEARCH &  
INNOVATION

# MATcelerate ZERO FUNDING CALL - Round 7

ROUND 7



# HENRY ROYCE INSTITUTE MATCELERATE ZERO

## ROUND 7 GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

### Section 1 Overview

#### 1.1 Summary

MATcelerate *ZERO* is a translational funding programme designed to bridge the gap between academic materials innovation and commercial application in the pursuit of net zero and decarbonisation. It offers a pathway for university researchers to translate their net-zero materials innovations into market-ready solutions.

The programme provides up to £80,000 in funding for selected proof-of-concept (PoC) projects to develop a Minimum Viable Demonstrator (MVD). This MVD serves to de-risk the innovation and make it more attractive for commercial investment. MATcelerate *ZERO* connects researchers with industry partners who offer expertise, guidance, and market knowledge. These partners help refine the MVD project, ensuring it aligns with industry needs and addresses potential commercialisation challenges. In exchange, industry partners benefit from facilitated access to the new innovative materials opportunities aggregated across twelve leading materials research universities.

The programme is aimed at university researchers who have developed transformational materials innovations with the potential to contribute to net-zero goals. This includes innovations in areas such as energy generation and storage, carbon capture, sustainable construction materials, and bio-based materials. The programme is particularly beneficial for researchers who need assistance in bridging the gap between laboratory-scale innovation and commercial viability. It offers them a unique opportunity to collaborate with industry leaders, gain valuable insights, and secure funding to advance their research towards real-world impact.

The programme provides innovators with a new route to garner industry input, while also giving industry partners early awareness of key materials innovations relevant to them and opportunities to support their commercial and technical development. More information is provided in Appendix A.

#### 1.2 Programme rationale

The UK's research base is globally competitive, yet persistent gaps remain between discovery and commercial impact. PoC funding plays a critical role in addressing this challenge by supporting the translation of early-stage academic research into technologies that are credible candidates for licensing, strategic partnerships or future spinouts. When deployed effectively, PoC funding increases the efficiency of public research and development (R&D) investment, strengthens private sector pull, and accelerates progress against national priorities.

This programme operates upstream of company formation, focusing explicitly on pre-spinout and pre-licence ready materials technologies addressing net zero emerging from 12 university technology transfer offices (TTOs). Its objective is not to maximise spinout numbers per se, but to ensure that materials research outputs that address net zero are supported to identify and pursue the most appropriate commercialisation pathway. By funding targeted technical validation of materials synthesis at greater than lab scale, prototype/component

testing and development, market testing and early business case development, the programme reduces uncertainty and risk at the point where promising innovations too often stall, creating commercially attractive opportunities.

A distinguishing feature of the programme is the structured and embedded role of the industry partners. Industry representatives are involved throughout the PoC process, including in proposal assessment, prioritisation, 'pitch' preparation and project guidance. This ensures that publicly funded PoC activity is aligned with real-world technical requirements, market needs and adoption pathways, rather than driven solely by academic or institutional incentives.

### 1.3 Scope

Projects with a TRL range of 2 to 4 detailing net-zero and sustainability focused materials innovation are within scope of the programme. These may include:

- Carbon Capture Technologies, e.g. chemical looping, biomass fuels, metal-organic frameworks
- Energy Generation and Storage Materials, e.g. nano composites, lithium sulphur, niobium tungsten oxide, perovskites
- Materials for Ammonia and Hydrogen Production, e.g. catalysts, fuel cells, membranes, solid-state electrolytes
- 2D Materials for Next Generation Electronic Devices, e.g. hexagonal boron nitride, molybdenum disulphide, graphene
- Low-embodied Carbon Construction Materials, e.g. green cement, biomimetic materials
- Bio-based Materials, e.g. lignin, cellulose, engineered proteins

Additionally, only projects looking to develop technology based on unencumbered IP are in scope for this programme and grant funding. The IP should be defined and protected, including clear ownership. Any challenges with accessing the core IP or Freedom to Operate must be stated. If the project will generate IP or add value to current IP this should also be specified.

## Section 2 Eligibility

### 2.1 Project size

This programme funds projects that have total project costs of up to £80,000.

### 2.2 Project details

Applications are currently only accepted from the following HEIs:

- Imperial College London
- Oxford Brookes University
- The University of Manchester
- The University of Sheffield
- University College London
- University of Bristol
- University of Cambridge
- University of Leeds
- University of Liverpool
- University of Oxford
- University of Salford
- University of Warwick

To be eligible, your project must:

- Start on 01 July 2026 and finish by 31 December 2026 (6 months)
- Be a collaboration between an HEI and its TTO (i.e. fully supported and only include unencumbered IP)
- Incur all Royce-funded costs within the project's duration
- Be a new project or activity that has not already started – please note that you can re-apply using a previously submitted unsuccessful application, as long as you have effectively addressed any feedback provided
- Be within the scope of MATcelerate *ZERO*
- Be led by either a researcher holding a permanent academic position (e.g. lecturer or equivalent) or a holder of an early career fellowship who is granted the same stature as a permanent academic staff member

## Section 3 Funding model and eligible costs

### 3.1 Funding models

The grant awarded to successful projects covers 100% of the total eligible project costs.

### 3.2 Eligible costs

All eligible costs must be incurred directly to the project and for research, development and innovation purposes only. All eligible costs should also be limited to those strictly necessary for the project or activity and incurred within the duration of the project.

The following costs are eligible:

Cost category	Notes
Staffing	May include researchers, investigators, technicians and should all be existing staff members.
Consumables	Consumables are used/consumed during the project (e.g. chemicals, reagents) and do not have a long-term lifespan.
Travel and subsistence	Travel that is essential in the delivery of the project is eligible, where this is completed within the project duration. Reasonable subsistence for any approved travel is also eligible.
Royce facilities	See section 3.6
Non-Royce facilities	For use of your institution's own facilities
Subcontracting	<p>Subcontracting is eligible where the work undertaken by the subcontractor:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is essential to the success of your project</li> <li>• involves expertise that does not exist within the project team</li> <li>• involves skills that it is not practical to develop in-house for your project</li> </ul>
Market research	Primary market research and customer discovery activities
Other	This category may be used for any direct project costs which are not covered in the above categories. An example of this would be third party laboratory costs.

All costs submitted as part of an application must be fully justified in the application form.

### 3.3 Examples of ineligible costs

Ineligible costs include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equipment, including IT</li> <li>• Software costs incurred outside of the project duration</li> <li>• Non-economy travel and accommodation over £125</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff training and development</li> <li>• PhD fees/stipends</li> <li>• VAT (where this is recoverable)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entertainment and marketing</li> <li>• Alcohol</li> <li>• Overheads</li> <li>• Indirect Costs</li> </ul>
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### 3.4 VAT treatment of grant income by grant recipients

UKRI grants are not considered to be payment for services. They are provided without expectation of any supply or direct benefit to the grant funder. As a result, VAT does not arise, and any invoices submitted by the grant recipient should not include VAT. They should be issued 'outside the scope' of VAT.

Please note this reflects the UKRI funding conditions for the grant and does not constitute VAT advice.

### 3.5 VAT treatment of grant expenditure

Recoverable VAT (i.e. where it can be reclaimed from HMRC via a VAT return) should not be included within grant claims as it is not a cost to the grant recipient.

HEIs can legitimately claim irrecoverable VAT incurred as part of their costs (i.e. VAT that is not reclaimed from HMRC). Organisations that are not VAT registered can include all VAT incurred on relevant expenditure within their claims.

### 3.6 Use of Royce Facilities

More information on the facilities available can be found [here](#).

Royce facilities costings should be obtained from the appropriate facilities manager. Contact details can be found in Appendix B.

## Section 4 Key dates

Date	Task/deadline
16 February 2026	Applications open
13 March 2026	Applications close
17 March – 2 April 2026	Review stage
7 April – 24 April 2026	Pitch preparation for shortlisted projects only
29 April 2026	Investment Committee (in-person presentations only)
w/c 04 May 2026	Award notification
01 July 2026	Projects start
31 December 2026	Projects end

## Section 5 Completing and submitting your application

Applications must be made through Royce's [Flexigrant](#) portal and comprise four parts:

### Part 1 Applicant details

You are required to include details on the applicant HEI (under Lead organisation) and the TTO (under Collaborator 1).

### Part 2 Project details

You are required to describe your project, provide its background, and describe how it meets the scope of the scheme. Applicants are responsible for ensuring their proposals are within scope of this scheme.

You are also required to complete a budget table with proposed project costs. Use of third-party services are encouraged, and projects are requested to have already established the scope, costs, dependencies and feasibility of any work prior to application submission.

### Part 3 Unmet need, commercial considerations, IP and market dynamics

You are required to outline how the proposed technology addresses unmet need, as well as detailing the market/competitive landscape.

### Part 4 Next steps for development after funding

You are required to detail what further work, if any, would likely be required at the end of the project to get the technology ready for licencing or spinout formation/funding.

In this section you will also be required to declare that you fulfil the scheme's eligibility criteria. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the proposal meets the requirements of this scheme, including completing the application form correctly and uploading any required supporting documentation.

## Section 6 Evaluation

Applications will be assessed for both eligibility and quality.

After the application deadline, all applications received will be assessed against the eligibility criteria listed in Section 2.

All eligible proposals will then be reviewed by the industry partners against the following criteria:

- The idea/concept
- Clarity of workplan
- Project resources and capabilities
- Impact and added value

Up to four projects are shortlisted and are invited to work with an industry partner to refine their PoC project and develop a slide deck presentation for the in-person Investment Committee (IC). Project leads have 10 minutes to pitch their project to the IC, followed by a 10-minute Q&A session.

The IC, comprised of industry partners, evaluates the presentations and recommends funding for a decision by the Henry Royce Institute.

As this is a competitive process, not all projects can be funded. Royce will provide all eligible applicants with feedback. Detailed scoring/ranking will not be provided.

## Section 7 Award

Projects awarded under this programme are jointly awarded to the HEI and its TTO. The HEI is responsible for delivering the project and receiving and administering project finances. The TTO is expected to maintain oversight of the HEI, is ultimately responsible for the satisfactory completion of the project and is responsible for meeting the project's reporting requirements.

Where you have been previously awarded funding by Royce, you must have completed any outstanding requirements of that funding to be awarded new funding.

If your application is selected for funding, you will be issued an award letter detailing the funding award offered and the conditions under which the award is being made. The conditions of any award are listed on the Royce website.

If awarded funding, you must:

- Confirm your acceptance of the grant on the Flexigrant portal.
- Sign and upload the award letter to the Flexigrant portal within two weeks after award.

Projects awarded under this scheme are also required to submit the following:

- A progress report
- A final report and case study within one month after the project end date
- Claims - the HEI is responsible for submitting claims for all project costs. Please refer to Royce's Grants Claims Guidance on the Royce website for detailed information on how to claim the funding award.

Failure in submitting these documents within the required timeframes may impact your eligibility for future Royce funding opportunities.

## Section 8: Provisional dates for MATcelerate ZERO 8 and 9

MATcelerate ZERO 8 is planned to launch on 4 May 2026 and the IC is planned to take place on 15 July 2026. MATcelerate ZERO 9 is planned to launch on 1 September 2026 and the IC is planned to take place on 18 November 2026.

Please note that these dates are provisional and may be subject to change.

## Appendix A Further information for researchers

### Decarbonisation requires materials innovation

Universities have the game-changing innovation, but scale-up and integration uncertainties make the commercial opportunity difficult to assess and too risky for industry to adopt at the end of the academic research phase.

Designing a Minimum Viable Demonstrator (MVD) that de-risks the innovation and creates a commercially-attractive opportunity requires knowledge and understanding of industry and market requirements that are often not found in academia.

MATcelerate *ZERO* provides the opportunity to pitch for up to £80,000 funding per MVD project and facilitated access to the expertise and knowledge of globally-leading materials companies to help specify the MVD that will turn your game-changing innovation into a commercially attractive opportunity.

### Industry Partners

A unique opportunity to partner with world-leading materials-intensive companies:

- Committed to innovating to achieve their net-zero, circular economy and sustainability goals
- That recognise that decarbonisation requires materials innovation and
- Are keen to partner with universities to help specify and guide de-risking MVD projects
- Have the potential to commercialise de-risked projects
- Include Rolls Royce, Johnson Matthey, Cambridge Display Technologies – A Sumitomo Chemical Group company, Evonik, Saint Gobain, Coca-Cola Europacific Partners, PA Consulting, Centre for Process Innovation (CPI), Materials Processing Institute (MPI), Glass Futures/Foundation Industries Sustainability Consortium (FISC), EGAT

## Appendix B Royce facilities

Information of all Royce facilities are listed [here](#). For access to Royce facilities, the appropriate facilities managers should be contacted by applicants to confirm equipment name, costings and time required to be included in your application.

- Cranfield University [royce@cranfield.ac.uk](mailto:royce@cranfield.ac.uk)
- Imperial College London [royce@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:royce@imperial.ac.uk)
- National Nuclear Laboratory [royce@uknnl.com](mailto:royce@uknnl.com)
- The University of Manchester [royce@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:royce@manchester.ac.uk)
- The University of Sheffield [royce@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:royce@sheffield.ac.uk)
- UK Atomic Energy Authority [royce@mrf.ukaea.uk](mailto:royce@mrf.ukaea.uk)
- University of Cambridge [royce@maxwell.cam.ac.uk](mailto:royce@maxwell.cam.ac.uk)
- University of Leeds [royce@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:royce@leeds.ac.uk)
- University of Liverpool [mifinfo@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:mifinfo@liverpool.ac.uk)
- University of Oxford [royce.access@materials.ox.ac.uk](mailto:royce.access@materials.ox.ac.uk)