HENRY ROYCE INSTITUTE

ADVANCED MATERIALS RESEARCH & INNOVATION

MATCELERATE *ZERO*

Round 8

ROYCE

Guidance Document

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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 £50,000 funding for selected 6-month 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 on pre-spinout and pre-licence ready materials technologies addressing net zero emerging from 12 university technology transfer offices (TTOs). In preparation for Royce Phase 3, it seeks materials innovations that the TTO supports as credible commercialisation opportunities, including licensing, industrial adoption or spinout formation. Applicants should explain the intended commercial pathway and how the funded work will advance it; an immediate spinout is not required. 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. Use of third-party services is encouraged.

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. Net-zero impact is not limited to circularity or recycling: materials that reduce energy use or emissions in manufacture or operation can also contribute. Applicants should explain the relevant net-zero benefit and, where applicable, alignment with the National Materials Innovation Strategy and the Modern Industrial Strategy. These projects 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

Round 8 spotlights

Alongside the broad scope above, Round 8 particularly welcomes projects in the following areas. These spotlights guide project identification and are not additional eligibility restrictions.

- Critical materials recovery, separation and circular processing, including materials and processes that improve recovery and reuse of valuable resources

- New uses for platinum group metals, plus recovery, separation and more efficient use in catalytic applications
- Energy storage materials, thermal storage and efficient cooling, including materials that reduce energy losses or improve thermal management
- Low-energy semiconductors and electronic materials, including materials innovations that reduce energy use in devices or their manufacture

TTOs should use these spotlights to identify relevant projects with researchers and discuss uncertain scope with the MATcelerate *ZERO* team before ruling a proposal out. Round 8 outreach remains through the university TTOs. More detailed thematic direction and wider university participation are intended for subsequent calls, with arrangements to be confirmed.

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.

Eligibility

2.1 Project size

This programme normally funds eligible project costs up to £50,000 for a 6-month project.

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 May 2027 and finish by 31 October 2027 (6-month projects up to £50,000).
- 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

Funding model and eligible costs

3.1 Funding models

The grant awarded to successful projects covers 100% of the eligible costs agreed in the award letter. Applicants should identify any other funding supporting the wider commercialisation plan and distinguish it from costs requested from Royce.

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. Accommodation costs are limited to £250 per night in London and £150 per night elsewhere in the UK. Reasonable subsistence costs incurred during approved travel are eligible, subject to a maximum of £12 for breakfast, £15 for lunch, and £30 for dinner, inclusive of VAT.
Royce facilities	See section 3.6
Non-Royce facilities	For the use of your institution's own facilities
Subcontracting	Eligible when the work undertaken by the subcontractor: • is essential to the success of the project • involves expertise that does not exist within the project team • involves skills that are not practical to develop in-house for the project

Cost category	Notes
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.

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:

• Equipment, including IT • Software costs incurred outside of the project duration • Non-economy travel and accommodation	• Staff training and development • PhD fees/stipends • VAT (where this is recoverable) • Licence fee to access third-party IP for the project	• Entertainment and marketing • Alcohol • Overheads • Indirect Costs

3.4VAT 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.

3.5VAT 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 Equipment & Facilities - Henry Royce Institute. Royce facilities costings should be obtained from the appropriate facilities manager. Contact details can be found in Appendix B.

Key dates

Date	Task/deadline
02 November 2026	Applications open
18 December 2026	Applications close
04 January – 12 February 2027	Review stage
15 February – 5 March 2027	Pitch preparation for shortlisted projects only
10 March 2027	Investment Committee (in-person presentations only)
w/c 15 March 2027	Award notification
01 May 2027	Projects start
31 October 2027	Projects end

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. Explain the intended commercialisation pathway, the TTO's support for that pathway, and how the proposed MVD will address a specific technical or commercial uncertainty.

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 licensing, industrial adoption or spinout formation/funding. Identify the next development milestones and potential sources of follow-on support without assuming that subsequent programme funding or investment is guaranteed.

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.

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.

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.

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. Hence the use of third-party services is encouraged.

MATcelerate *ZERO* provides the opportunity to pitch for funding up to £50,000 for a 6-month 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
- 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, Out The Back Ventures, Eigen Ventures, Studio 2050, and Cambridge Future Tech (CFT).

Appendix B Royce facilities

Information of all Royce facilities are listed here Equipment & Facilities - Henry Royce Institute. 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
- Imperial College London royce@imperial.ac.uk
- National Nuclear Laboratory royce@uknnl.com
- The University of Manchester royce@manchester.ac.uk
- The University of Sheffield royce@sheffield.ac.uk
- UK Atomic Energy Authority royce@mrf.ukaea.uk
- University of Cambridge royce@maxwell.cam.ac.uk
- University of Leeds royce@leeds.ac.uk
- University of Liverpool royce@liverpool.ac.uk
- University of Oxford royce.access@materials.ox.ac.uk