

UK-HyRES Flexi Fund Call 4 (Challenge Call) – Q&A

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1 Eligibility

1.1 Eligibility of the host institution

Summary: The source of funding is from the EPSRC, so we are bound by UKRI rules. The host institution must be a UK institution that is eligible to receive UKRI funding. Further details are available here: [Check if you're eligible for funding – EPSRC – UKRI](#)

Question and Answer
Can the Challenge take place in two Universities within the project? Co-host together? Yes, it can, but you would need to speak with both universities about how this would work and obtain support letters to confirm this.
Can the applicant be at a university that is not part of the consortium? Yes – the host institution can be any eligible institution and we welcome applications based at insitutions not currently involved in UK-HyRES
Does the host need to be a university or are catapults (i.e. NCC) eligible to be the host? Anyone registered to receive EPSRC funding is eligible as the host.
Is the UK-HyRES Flexi Fund Call 4 award open only to applicants based in the UK or can international researchers also apply? The applicant can be international, but the award has to be held at an EPSRC eligible institution based in the UK, i.e. you will need to be based in the UK to carry out the project.
Is Call 4 open to industry-based researchers? To receive funding you must be based in a UK research-based institution eligible for UKRI funding (link in the call document with a list of all eligible institutions). If you are industry based outside of the UK, you could approach one of these institutions to conduct your research from there – and your industry role could also make you well placed to bring the challenge and partner requirement to the application.

Is a current PhD student, who is expected to have completed their PhD before the full proposal deadline (15th January 2027), eligible to apply?

A PhD student must have passed their PhD to be eligible for the funding. Ideally this would have been completed before the full proposal deadline to allow fair comparison with other submissions. If two proposals are considered of equal merit on the assessment criteria, but one candidate has already passed their PhD, or is established as an academic, whereas the other is 'expected to', the one who has already passed would be given preference, and in view of the time critical delivery of this round of projects, the timing risk around such challenges is very likely to prevent the proposal succeeding.

1.2 **Eligibility of the Project Lead**

Summary: Unlike Call 2, Call 4 is not restricted to Early Career Researchers (ECRs) – it is open to talented researchers and innovators at any stage. The eligibility rules from the call document are copied here:

Applicants must demonstrate that the resource and capacity needed to deliver the project is in place, or readily available, within the proposed project duration. The Lead Applicant (Project Lead, PL) does not need to have a current role at the intended host institution, but must have the support of the institution (a letter of support will do).

Question and Answer
What is the maximum number of years after PhD considered eligible? There is no specific number of years as this will depend on an individual's personal situation.
Regarding track record and expertise: are the fellowship looking on the overall career or hydrogen related research? In other words, are researchers from other areas that want to translate their research for hydrogen and liquid fuels competitive? Any relevant track record for the research being proposed will be considered. We welcome applications from those with skills from outside the hydrogen and alternative liquid fuel (ALF) sector but that are relevant to the hydrogen and ALF sector.
I am currently a postdoctoral researcher on a project funded by UK-HyRES. Can I apply for a Call 4 award with a different project? Yes. The Call 4 project must be your research that you are leading and driving, built around your own challenge and partner, not just the research you are already doing in the hub.
Since Call 4 is open to researchers at any career stage, does the resource and capacity requirement disadvantage people with caring responsibilities or other circumstances that affect their availability? No – the requirement is simply that you can demonstrate the resource and capacity to deliver the project is in place or readily available within the proposed duration. You are welcome to contact us to discuss your circumstances before applying, and we can advise on how best to present this in your application.
I am a PhD student in the writing-up phase and expect to graduate before the project starts (April 2027). Am I eligible to apply? So long as your host institution is happy to support your application, as the award starts well after submission. Applicants must have completed their PhD before the project starts and the host institution must confirm that they would support you. But note that the timing risk that such a situation presents is difficult to fully mitigate and this will make the proposal less compelling.

Is Call 4 open to industry-based researchers?

To receive funding you must be based in a UK research-based institution eligible for UKRI funding (see above). If you are industry based outside of the UK, you could approach one of these institutions to conduct your research from there.

2 **Partnership & Challenge**

Summary: Call 4 is a Challenge Call. Unlike previous Flexi Fund calls, there is no requirement for a mentor. Instead, a meaningful partnership with an industry, civic body or other end-user is a core requirement of the call. At Expression of Interest (EOI) stage you must identify the intended partner and the specific real-world challenge or opportunity your project will address.

A formal letter of support is not required at EOI stage, but you should already have had an initial conversation with the partner to validate the challenge before you apply. Evidence of meaningful co-creation is particularly useful. Applications that name a partner or challenge without evidence of engagement are unlikely to be competitive.

At full proposal stage you will need to set out a clear plan for the partner's engagement in the work and contribution, whether financial, in-kind (e.g. staff time, data, facilities, expertise) or another substantive form of engagement. Civic partners are not expected to provide cash or substantial in-kind support and will not be disadvantaged for this - but their meaningful engagement needs to be described.

If you are struggling to identify a suitable partner, please contact us and we can help.

Question and Answer
Does the partner have to be a company, or can it be a civic or public-sector organisation? It can be any of these – industry, a civic body (e.g. a local authority, NHS trust, or community organisation) or another type of end-user. Civic partners are not expected to provide cash or substantial in-kind support and will not be disadvantaged for this.
Do I need a signed letter of support from my partner at EOI stage? No, a formal letter of support is not required until full proposal stage. At EOI you do need to name the partner and the specific challenge, and you should already have discussed this with them so you can describe it credibly.
Can I use an existing industry contact as my partner, or does it need to be a brand new relationship? Existing relationships are welcomed – the four-week EOI window is designed to let you confirm and articulate a partnership you already have, not to build a brand-new one from scratch.
What counts as a meaningful partner contribution at full proposal stage? This could be a financial contribution, in-kind support such as staff time, data, facilities or expertise, or another substantive form of engagement. Cash contributions from industry partners strengthen the case, but are not mandatory for all partner types.
Can my own company or a company I previously worked for be the partner? Yes, provided it is a genuine external partner able to define a real-world challenge and engage with the project. You will still need an eligible UK host institution to hold the award.
How much does the choice of partner and challenge count in assessment? It maps to Criterion 2, Meaningful partnership and non-academic impact, one of the assessment criteria applied at both EOI and full proposal stage. Reviewers will look for clear identification of the partner and challenge at EOI, and evidence of co-creation and a credible contribution plan at full proposal.

3 Project themes

Summary: Research must align with the UK-HyRES hub themes and must not duplicate research already being funded. Note that UK-HyRES can only fund projects on green hydrogen and ALFs, and that both blue hydrogen/ALFs and fuel cells are out of scope.

To ascertain whether a production route is green, please look at the UK Low Carbon Hydrogen Standard (<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6584407fed3c3400133bfd47/uk-low-carbon-hydrogen-standard-v3-december-2023.pdf>).

Question and Answer
Do you consider hydrogen–material interactions a potential research area? Absolutely, consider the use of the material and allocate it to the relevant theme
Would biofuels production be considered as part of green alternative fuels? The funding is not intended to support synthetic hydrocarbon production that is a direct replacement for a traditional fossil hydrocarbon, as this is covered by other UKRI investments. If you can make a strong case for why a particular fuel should be considered a green ALF, then please email us to check eligibility with your justification.
Considering "end use" - are Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) eligible? If it is novel research about Hydrogen in ICE then, yes it would be eligible but be aware of existing HyRES funded projects in this area
Do you consider Methanol as an alternative fuel? Could a proposal focus on Methanol? Methanol can be considered an ALF but it needs to be green. UK-HyRES cannot fund projects on blue/grey hydrogen or ALFs
I worked on synthesising catalysts for hydrogen production during my PhD. I am now considering synthesising new materials and testing them in an electrolyser. Does UK-HyRES fund synthesis and testing of new catalyst / electrode materials? Yes. Make sure it doesn't duplicate ongoing work in the hub and demonstrate why it's relevant.
Do you consider hydrogen produced from biomass using gasification as green hydrogen? UK-HyRES can only fund projects on green hydrogen and ALFs. Biomass production routes can be classified as green, but only when strict sustainability and emissions criteria are met. We suggest referring to the UK Low Carbon Hydrogen Standard (v3, December 2023), which sets out definitions and eligibility criteria for biomass-based pathways and low-carbon hydrogen more generally: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6584407fed3c3400133bfd47/uk-low-carbon-hydrogen-standard-v3-december-2023.pdf .

4 Costing related

Queries relating to the costing of the project are contained below:

Question and Answer
Is detailed costing by the department required at the 1st EoI stage? We need to know what you are requesting, so you will need permission and a draft budget to get permission from your institution.
Is there any guidance on the FTE for the lead applicant/fellow? This depends on your role and the research you are proposing and is entirely up to you. For example, if you are currently on a fixed term contract then you will likely request all/most of your working hours. If you are on a permanent contract then you might request a lower FTE for you, to fit around other commitments, but also request time for a PDRA, or you might use the funding to buy yourself out of other commitments and request a high FTE for yourself. It is important to discuss the FTE with your host institution.
Can we have a Co-I for the Call 4 project? Yes, there is the option to include this on the application. Consider what they do and what they can bring to the project, particularly if they have a different skill set to widen the research.
For lecturers who wish to apply, can we use the funding to support a PDRA? And if we have a named PDRA, can we include them in the application? Yes, you can pay for PDRA time and you are welcome to name a PDRA if applicable.
Regarding the costing: what if a system is made of few parts, each one is less than £10k, but the whole system itself may exceed £10k - for example A data acquisition system made of different modules. Equipment is not eligible for this funding, which according to UKRI standard rules is items > £10k. Talk to your host institution to ensure that any consumables or small items requested meet EPSRC requirements or consider if you can access a facility that provides this. Talk to us if you would like help identifying potentially useful facilities.
Are the costs associated with using relevant central or national experimental facilities for fabrication/characterization eligible under 'Consumables'? Yes, access to facilities can be included in the costing and should be fully justified as with other costed items.

5 Miscellaneous Question

Question and Answer
How many awards will be made under Call 4? Up to 3 awards will be made, each up to £150,000 (80% FEC, i.e. up to £187,500 at 100% FEC).
After my PhD in 2018 I researched in biomass gasification in my own company, we can produce biohydrogen and bioDME through the patented process, can I apply? I still need to find an academic host university. Can my own company be the industry partner for the challenge? Yes, you will need a UK host university (or other eligible institution) to hold the award, but your company can act as the industry partner and provide the real-world challenge required under Call 4 (see the Partnership & Challenge section above).
What is the ideal (or maximum) start date for this project? I recognise that the start date can be defined by the applicant, but is there a recommended start period? When will be the latest start time after the award is granted? Start date no later than mid-April 2027. You will be notified of the outcome of your full proposal by end of March 2027 (EOI outcomes are communicated by 13th November 2026).

6. Questions raised during the Challenge Call webinar

Question and Answer
Could the industrial partner provide their in-kind contribution via techno-economic modelling? Yes. This has a real, attributable value and, depending on how the project is constructed, could be a genuinely important part of it.
Is an Early Career Researcher (ECR) within the hub eligible to apply for this call as an individual PI? Yes, in principle. The main consideration is deliverability: the ECR needs to have the space, time, and remit to take this on without jeopardising their existing duties. If part of their time is being costed to the project, they need a contract in place that covers the remainder of their time so they can still deliver within the project period.
Are industrial partners allowed to cost their contribution to the project (i.e. receive payment), or does their support need to be provided in-kind? Partners can be costed into a project as a subcontractor under normal EPSRC rules. However, this needs to be clearly justified: reviewers will be looking for a research team that genuinely delivers the work itself. Projects must be academically led, and any partner funding needs a clear rationale, for example, facilities or expertise that are not realistically available within the academic consortium.
Is there a list of ongoing research projects so applicants can avoid duplication? Yes. Flexi Fund 1, fellowship, and Sprint project highlights are published on the UK HyRES website, including within each technical and cross-cutting theme page, and a more comprehensive list will be added. Applicants can also contact the Admin team directly for detail on a specific project if they're concerned about overlap — the concern is duplication at a granular research level, not simply working in the same broad area (e.g. electrolysis).
Can an industrial partner participate without receiving any funding, rather than as a co-applicant? Yes, an industrial partner can participate as a partner without funding, rather than as a co-applicant.
Should industrial partners be UK based? Not necessarily. A partner providing in-kind support can be based anywhere, and partners from anywhere relevant are welcome to get involved or help co-develop projects. However, UK HyRES funding itself cannot leave the UK, so partners outside the UK cannot receive funded costs.
Can an applicant build on a prior application (e.g. a Sprint project), or is this call aimed at new applicants and teams? Yes, this is allowed and encouraged where appropriate, growing the network with new researchers, groups and universities is welcome, but it isn't a requirement. If a Sprint project has uncovered something promising and now needs a bigger project to take it further, that's a good fit for this call, but the application needs to clearly justify why this funding is needed and what it will deliver beyond what has already been achieved.
Fuel cells are excluded from the call, are electrolyzers also excluded? No, electrolyzers are not excluded and remain in remit. The hub already funds a significant amount of electrolyser research, so applicants need to be careful not to duplicate existing work. The exclusions set by EPSRC for the hub (and therefore the Flexi Fund) are fuel cells and blue hydrogen, not electrolyzers.
Is the new funding only for new applicants or universities? No, as above, this call is not restricted to new applicants or institutions.

Do partners need to be from industry only, or can they be academic as well? Academic partners should be included as co-applicants rather than as "partners" in this call. The partner category here specifically refers to end users, industry, or civic organisations.
Can catapults be added as a partner? It depends. If a catapult is eligible for UKRI funding, it may need to be treated as a co-applicant, similar to a university, rather than as a partner — this can vary between catapults. Applicants unsure of the right approach for a specific catapult should contact the UK HyRES team to check.
By "civic partners," do you mean councils too? Yes, local authority councils count as civic partners.
If a project is on storage, and the hydrogen could come from green, blue, or other sources, is it eligible? Yes. The green-only requirement applies specifically to the production of hydrogen. Once hydrogen has been produced, its onward storage or use is not restricted by the colour/source of the production method.
If a project is on green hydrogen from organic waste, is it eligible? Yes, provided it is genuinely green. The hub cannot fund carbon capture and storage, so if producing hydrogen from organic waste requires carbon capture, it would fall outside remit. If the process does not require carbon capture, it is likely in remit. Applicants with a specific case should email the team with more detail for confirmation.