

Innovate UK

Technology Strategy Board

COMPETITION GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

for
Innovate UK Competition:

Innovation Vouchers

April 2015

Contents

Summary 3

How to use this document 3

Part one – The Innovation Vouchers application process..... 4

 1. Process Overview – Eligibility and Funding4

 1.2 State Aid - EU de minimis rules5

2. Applying for Innovation Vouchers..... 7

 2.1 Introduction.....7

3. Innovation Voucher process..... 9

 3.1 How to apply for an Innovation Voucher10

 3.2 Multiple applications.....10

 3.3 Accessibility10

 3.4 Can I reapply?.....10

4. Your application 12

 4.1 Section 3: Agreements14

5. What happens if you are successful? 16

 5.1 Bank account details17

 5.2 Guidance on suppliers17

6. Project completion 18

7. How to find out more..... 20

Summary

The objective of Innovation Vouchers is to assist small and medium businesses (SMEs), including pre-start-ups, to help gain the knowledge they need to innovate and grow.

Potential applicants need to ensure Innovation Vouchers is right for their project. For this your idea will need to:

- (i) Help you obtain expert advice from a knowledge supplier you have not worked with before, not to fund general business needs such as training or equipment.
- (ii) You will need to be clear that accessing this knowledge will help your business address a real challenge, not just a small improvement or change on what you currently do.

Innovate UK is the main funder for Innovation Vouchers. Further funding by other Government Departments or partner organisations may be available for Innovation Vouchers.

Innovate UK will be running a continuous application for Innovation Vouchers – ‘responsive mode’.

The closing dates for Innovation Vouchers are announced on the Innovation Vouchers Portal at <https://vouchers.innovateuk.org>

A brief summary of how the scheme works is as follows;

1. You apply online for an Innovation Voucher
2. We choose successful applications by lottery
3. You use it for business advice that is innovative for you
4. You use a supplier registered in the UK that is new to you
5. You have 6 months to complete your project
6. You receive the supplier report and pay their invoice
7. You upload your claim to InnovateUK and we reimburse
8. We expect you to read the detail in this Guidance

How to use this document

This document contains the eligibility criteria, key dates, competition process and application form details specific to the Innovation Vouchers scheme. It is essential for to read this document before applying.

Innovate UK complies with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and is committed to upholding the data protection principles. Further details with regards to the collection, storage, processing and disclosure of personal information by Innovate UK is accessible from the above link.

Innovate UK Board main website

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/innovate-uk>

Business Support Group:

E-mail: support@innovateuk.gov.uk Tel: 0300 321 4357

Part one – The Innovation Vouchers application process

1. Process Overview – Eligibility and Funding

Overview Process

The following guidance applies only to the Innovation Vouchers scheme.

- Each three-monthly cycle will see a minimum of 100 vouchers of a value £5k awarded
- Funding will be spread across the year with a proportion of the annual funding available in each round. In this way, access to funds is continuously maintained.
- Additional funding may be available for Innovation Vouchers delivered in partnership with other organisations.
- Only **UK based SMEs** are eligible to apply – please ensure that your business meets the requirements of SME eligibility. It is your responsibility to make sure that you are eligible.
- You must be eligible under the EU de minimis rules – please see section 1.2
- An individual business or person may only submit one application per round provided they have not accepted any previous Innovate UK Innovation Voucher.
- It must be the first time you have worked with your chosen knowledge supplier
- The idea you are seeking help with must be a challenge for your business that requires specialist assistance.

Innovate UK offers a range of funding mechanisms and each will have a different application process. It is, therefore, important that you have the correct documentation for the process you wish to enter. Eligibility and rules for Innovation Vouchers will differ from other Innovate UK competitions (e.g. Collaborative Research and Development, SBRI, Smart) so you should ensure that you are applying for the most appropriate type of funding for your needs.

Innovate UK processes are subject to change. If you have previously entered into a Innovate UK competition, please do not assume the process and details are the same.

Please note: In addition to the eligibility criteria, if you are successful in receiving an Innovation Voucher, you will need to:

- pay any VAT incurred on the services you use with the voucher (A grant within the EU does not cover the VAT)
- have a business bank account into which we can pay your claim

Eligibility for funding

To be eligible for funding, the project must:

- Be based in the UK
- Present a clear case for business benefit
- You should not have received an Innovation Voucher from Innovate UK before. This includes Innovation Vouchers received by other companies you own or in which you have a financial interest.

And you must also:

- Meet all the requirements for submission detailed in this guidance.
- Be an SME as defined by http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/facts-figures-analysis/sme-definition/index_en.htm. Please note that this web link is correct at the time of publication of the guidance. You should ensure that you have checked for the latest version of this guidance.

1.1 SME eligibility

The main factors determining whether a company is an SME are:

1. **number of employees and**
2. either **turnover** or **balance sheet total**.

Enterprise category	Headcount	Turnover		Balance sheet total
Medium sized	<250	≤ €50 million	or	≤ € 43 million
Small	<50	≤ €10 million		≤ 10 million
Micro	<10	≤ €2 million		≤ 2 million

These ceilings apply to the figures for individual businesses only. An organisation which is part of larger grouping may need to include employee/turnover/balance sheet data from that grouping too.

To check if you are eligible as a micro, small or medium enterprise under the EU definition, please visit http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/files/sme_definition/sme_user_guide_en.pdf.

Please note that this web link is correct at the time of publication of this guidance. You should ensure that you have checked for the latest version of the EU definition. The document is also available on the Innovation Vouchers portal.

1.2 State Aid - EU de minimis rules

The Innovation Vouchers scheme runs under de minimis regulations – your business should not have received more than €200k (c.£165k) of public support in total in the last three financial years. The full regulations can be found at <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/europe/state-aid/de-minimis-aid-regulations>.

For the Agrifood sector, businesses that are solely engaged in primary production, the cultivation of crops and husbandry of livestock, are not eligible for support under de minimis, unless they are able to show that they have the capacity to undertake R&D activity that will have a wider impact within the Agrifood sector, for example by selling the product/service to other businesses, not just for use

on your own farm. If you are involved in any of the above activities, make sure your application shows us clearly how you will use the idea in this wider way.

2. Applying for Innovation Vouchers

2.1 Introduction

If you are intending to submit an application for an Innovation Voucher, the key points are below.

Innovation applications for funding consist of a single stage process – there is no expression of interest or ‘pre-qualification’ stage. Applications will be reviewed in round closes at approximately 3 month intervals. The round close deadlines will be published on the Innovate UK website.

Applications can be submitted at any time. There is no difference if you choose to submit at the start of a three month round period or at the end. Funding will be available throughout the year and applications selected for review are put through a lottery. You should ensure that your application is complete and of high quality rather than rush to submit early in the financial year, however if your project is dependent on seasonal factors or on access to oversubscribed lab facilities for example then it is worth checking with support@innovateuk.gov.uk for advice prior to application.

Please note that our submission deadlines are always at 12.00 noon.

Please note that once you press **submit** (i.e. commit the application for assessment), the process **cannot be reversed**. While your application is in draft you can change it as often as you like. Entries made during a session will be saved each time you press ‘next’ or ‘save’ and you can edit at your leisure.

Timeline Summary	
Applications for Innovation Vouchers open	announced on web site
Submission of application (close date)	announced on web site
Claim* to be completed by	6 months after close date

*The date for the claim cannot be extended, so before you apply please ensure you can complete the work in time.

Important Note: *Please do not leave your submission to the last minute.*

We strongly advise you not to leave your submission to the last minute before the end of the round deadline. If any technical difficulties arise there will be no extension and you will need to enter into the next round thereby extending the lottery by three months.

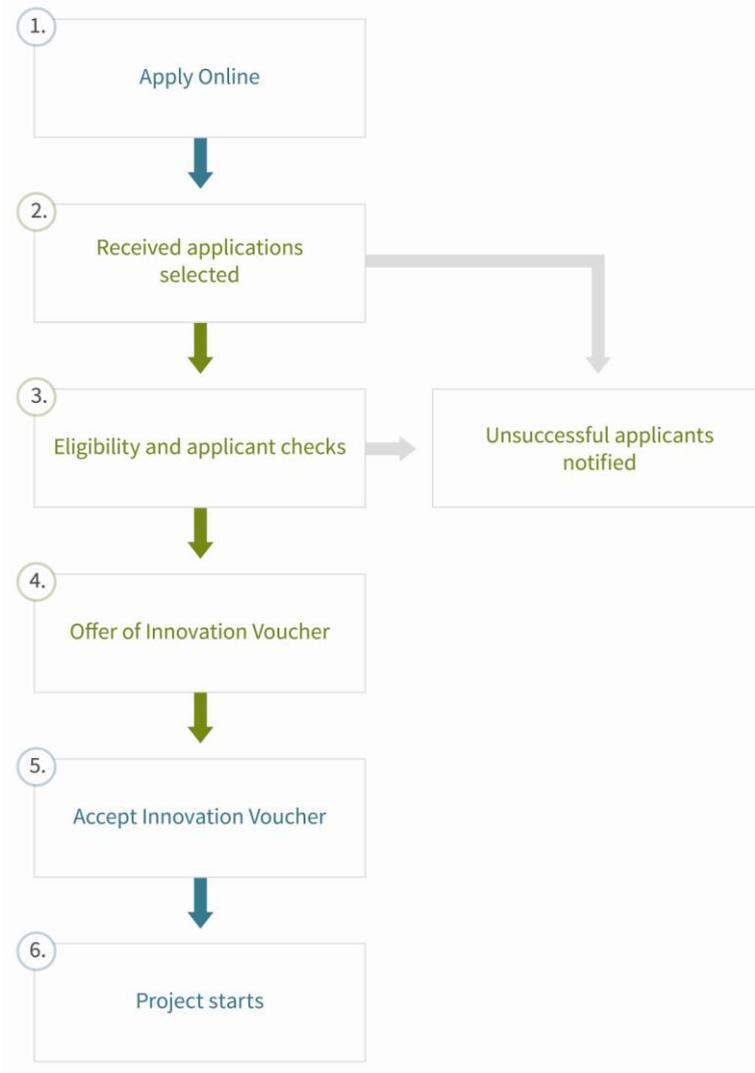
Please note that it remains your responsibility to ensure you follow the Guidance rules and in doing so to allow sufficient time to complete all of the requirements described in this document. There will be a short closure of the system to allow processing of each round before the next round of applications opens – typically the system re-opens on the Monday following the end of the previous round.

We close each round at 12 noon. Support from our Business Support Group (support@innovateuk.gov.uk or 0300 321 4357) is available but you should note that emails and calls

will be dealt in strict rotation and if you anticipate needing help you should call as early as possible. You should note that simply starting a conversation by email or telephone before the deadline is not a sufficient reason for the deadline to be extended. Innovate UK recommends at least one hour for the process of registering and uploading your Innovation Voucher application – but you should remember that the vast majority of applications are made in the 48 hours before the deadline and the IT infrastructure will be heavily loaded from that time until the deadline.

3. Innovation Voucher process

The Innovation Voucher process is set out below. The blue text (stages 1, 5 and 6) will need to be completed by the applicant, the remaining stages are completed by Innovate UK .



All applications are entered into a draw on the close date. A number are randomly selected and checked for eligibility up to the maximum available Innovation Vouchers in that round.

As part of the eligibility checks, we may ask you for additional information before making an offer of an Innovation Voucher.

Please ensure that all your details are correct on the application form as we will not contact you during the checks if any of the information is missing or is incorrect.

All applicants will be notified online with one of the following outcomes;

- (a) your application has been unsuccessful in the draw
- (b) your application has been selected in the draw *and* has passed our eligibility checks
- (c) Innovate UK require additional information in order to complete the eligibility checks on your application.

Please note: We do not send confirmation by email or by post.

3.1 How to apply for an Innovation Voucher

To apply for an Innovation Voucher, you must register via the Innovation Vouchers portal at <https://vouchers.innovateuk.org>.

Section 4 provides guidance on the application form fields. A separate step by step guide to assist you in submitting your application is available on the portal. Please note that there is help text boxes alongside most of the questions on the online application form.

3.2 Multiple applications

A business may only have one live application at any time. Multiple applications from individuals that are either of the following will be deemed ineligible applications;

- a) using different companies that they own or have a financial interest in
- b) applying as an individual *and* as a company

Our systems are set up to identify these multiple applications and will check for applications from the same email address and or contact name or address. If multiple applications are found within a round, we will enter into the draw **only** the application with the last submission timestamp.

Please note: When we make the business checks we will also look for relationships between businesses and check the director's holdings in other companies.

The above rules apply to all multiple applications. Therefore you should be mindful that if you apply on behalf of someone else into a round, for example another business that you have no formal relationship with but have offered to assist in the application process, that will invalidate your own right to submit an application into the round and subsequent rounds should that application be successful. **This means that once you have applied and so are listed as the applicant, your name cannot appear as the applicant in any other application**

The person submitting the application must be able to take responsibility on behalf of the business for accepting the Innovation Voucher if successful. **The person submitting the application is the "applicant" and that person has to be the same person as the person listed as the "Contact" in Section 1 of the application form - applying on behalf of someone else renders the application ineligible.**

3.3 Accessibility

If you have a disability which affects your ability to access the online application process, please contact us so we can discuss with you your particular needs and ensure that you are able to complete the information required to apply. Please contact us at support@innovateuk.gov.uk or Tel: 0300 321 4357

3.4 Can I reapply?

If your application is unsuccessful, you may re-apply to a later round. There is no restriction to the number of times you may re-apply. There will be an option for you to review your application and resubmit without having to re-complete all the information. However, please consider that an idea which may be current now, may not be as relevant as time passes. Please only re-apply if your idea is still timely.

PLEASE NOTE: If you have successfully accepted an Innovation Voucher from Innovate UK you cannot apply again.

4. Your application

This section explains the structure of the Innovation Vouchers application and offers guidance on the information to include in each section. The application must be completed and submitted online.

Some of the questions have character limits – you can type in as much as you like while you're working on the form, but when you submit the application you will need to edit down to the required length.

The Application is structured as follows:

- Section 1: Your organisation
- Section 2: Your idea
- Section 3: Agreement to terms and conditions

Section 1: Your Details	
Field	Guidance
Application ID	This is the unique application ID number allocated to your application. It cannot be edited. Please retain this number in case you need to contact the helpdesk regarding your application.
First name, Last name	The person making the application should be able to accept the Innovation Voucher on behalf of the business, so please ensure that the person named here has the authority to do so.
Job title	We would expect the applicant to be a senior member of the business able to take responsibility for accepting the Innovation Voucher if awarded.
Email	We will contact you via email to let you know the outcome of your application. Please check carefully that the email address provided is correct.
Phone number	Please give your normal work telephone number.
My organisation	If you already have one or more profiles on _connect this field will give you the opportunity to choose one of those profiles which will fill in some of your stored details. You can choose to fill in other details below if you prefer. Please do not apply using more than one of your organisations.
Organisation name	Please give the name of your business as it appears on Companies House if you are a registered company.
Organisation status	Please select from the list what stage your business is at – we are interested in how long your business has been operating.
Company registration number (if	If you are an incorporated business, please provide

applicable)	your Company Number – please check this carefully as it will be used to validate your details as part of the eligibility check. NB you cannot apply with a company that has been declared dormant.
VAT registration number (if applicable)	If you are registered for VAT, please supply your VAT registration number.
Address	Please give your registered office address and your trading address if it is different.
Please select the market area(s) in which your business generally operates	Please select from the list one or more market areas that you would consider describe the market in which your business currently works.
Please select the technology area(s) in which your business generally operates	Please select from the list one or more technology areas that you would consider describe the area in which your business currently works. This may be different from the market areas listed above.
Business size (number of employees) Business turnover (from most recent accounts) Balance sheet total	This information will be used to help to check if you qualify under the EU definition of an SME. To qualify, your business, including any parent company or other businesses in a group, must not exceed certain levels of number of employees and turnover/balance sheet figures. You will be asked to confirm that you meet these rules if you are offered an Innovation Voucher.

Section 2: Your Idea

The answers in this section will be used to check that your idea fits within the scope of the Innovation Voucher programme.

Question	Guidance
What is the idea or opportunity you need help with?	<p>Use this section to explain the idea you want to explore, making sure you show us how it applies to your chosen theme. The application is in confidence, so please explain as much as you can to help us understand your idea.</p> <p>There is a 1000 character limit.</p> <p>We will also use this section to check that your application is eligible for funding under the Innovation Vouchers scheme. You should show that this idea is a challenge for your business and could lead to an innovative development. Make sure you explain what you want to do with the idea – don't just describe a product or service with no commentary on how it will change.</p>

	Remember that we cannot fund training, equipment purchase or standard business advice. Off-the-shelf software and marketing and branding items are also ineligible.
How will an external expert be able to help you develop your idea?	Please explain in broad terms what you want the supplier to do to help you develop your idea e.g. I need to understand the underpinning science, I need help with prototyping, I need to develop an IP strategy for exploitation of this idea. There is a 500 character limit
What impact could this idea have on your business?	Focus in this section on what would happen to your business if the idea was successful. Could it lead to new sales, exports, improvements in efficiency? There is a 500 character limit
What kind of supplier are you thinking of approaching?	Please tell us where you think the advice you need is likely to be found. You can tick more than one box.
Have you already chosen a supplier?	You don't need to have chosen a supplier before you apply. But we're interested to find out how many of our applicants already know who they want to work with before they apply.
Public Description	If your application is successful, InnovateUK will publish this summary of your proposal to comply with government requirements. Provision of this summary is mandatory but will not be reviewed. Please ensure it is suitable for public disclosure. We reserve the right to amend the description before publication if necessary, but will consult you about any changes.

4.1 Section 3: Agreements

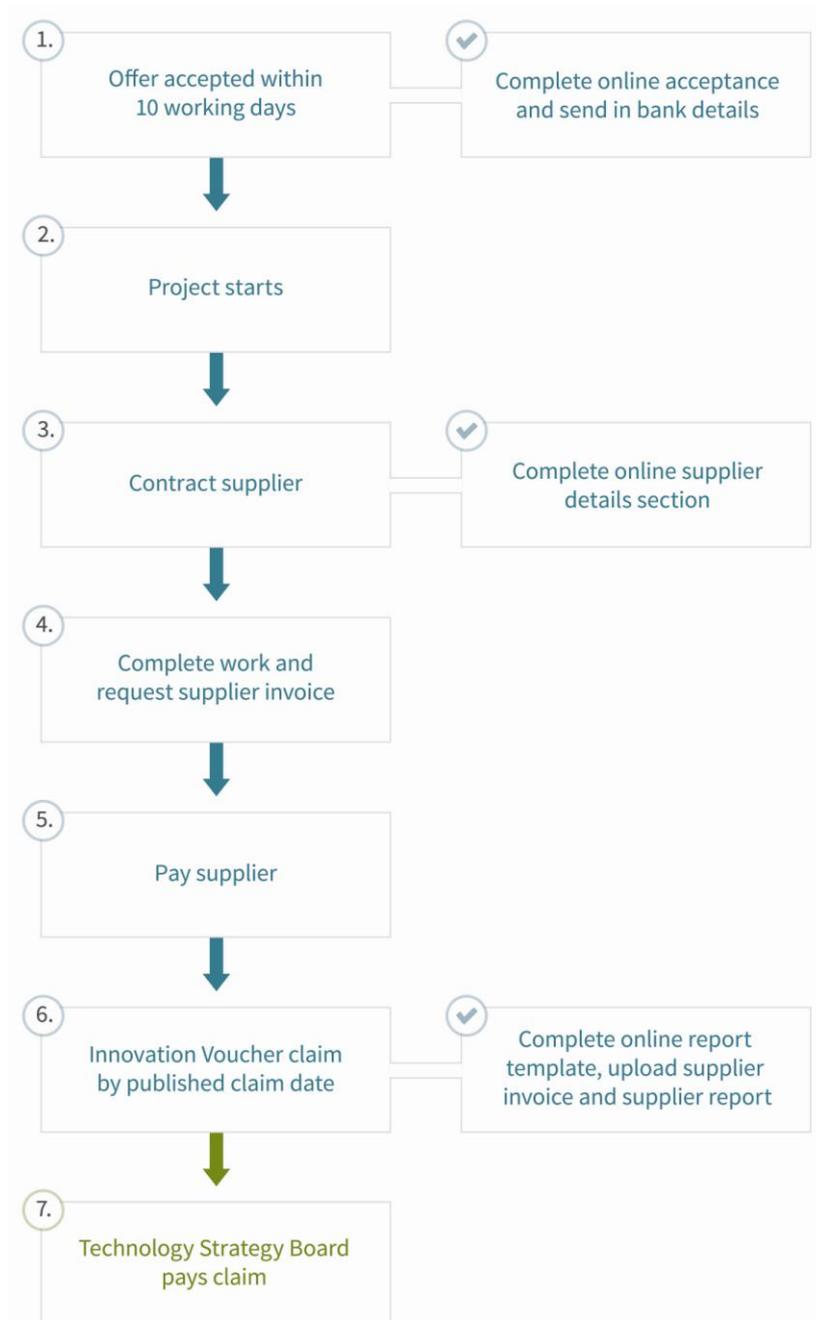
Section 3 of the application process will ask you to read and agree to a number of terms and conditions that will apply if you are offered an Innovation Voucher. It is important that you are aware of the terms and conditions before accepting an Innovation Voucher.

About my business	
The business is eligible to receive grant as an SME under EU rules.	See section 1.1 of this guidance to check you are eligible to be classified as an SME.
The business has not received support above the de minimis levels in the last three years	See section 1.2 of this guidance for further details on state aid and de minimis. It is your responsibility to make sure you have not exceeded the EU limits.

The business will provide business bank account details on headed paper showing the address of the business	We can only pay your Innovation Voucher claim into a business bank account, so you may wish to have one before you apply and send us details when you accept your voucher. You will only have 10 days to provide this information to us if you are made an offer, and that is not long enough to set up a new account. Please be prepared before applying.
About my supplier	
The business will select a supplier that I/we have not worked with before	Innovation Vouchers are intended to help you make new connections, so it is important that we know you have not worked with this supplier before. This means the whole organisation not just a new department in the case of larger suppliers. The Innovation Vouchers portal has more information on what this could mean for you.
The chosen supplier will be a public sector provider or a UK registered company or LLP	Universities and Colleges and some research institutes will be in the public sector or charities. If you choose a private sector supplier they must be a UK registered company (ie registered at Companies House) or LLP. You cannot select a private individual or non-registered sole trader to do the work for you.
I/we have no previous or current relationship with the supplier through family connection or employment	The supplier must be an organisation with which you have no current or previous personal connections.
The business will notify Innovate UK of the chosen supplier before completing the claim	When your project starts there will be a form online to fill in the details of the supplier which you can upload at any time during the process.
About my project	
At the end of the project the business will:	
complete an online claim and report on progress	A simple online process will be available to make your claim and make your report on progress
upload the supplier report and supplier invoice, signed to certify payment	Guidance on what should be in your supplier report is available on the website. Please make sure you sign all invoices to certify that they have been paid.
All relevant documentation will be uploaded before the published completion date	Make sure you can complete by the published completion date. The actual date will be on the agreements page. This deadline cannot be extended , and if your claim comes in after that date it cannot be paid.
Publicity	
I agree to Innovate UK using the public description of the project.	The public description provided in the 'your idea' section of the application will be made public if you accept an Innovation Voucher.
I agree to assist Innovate UK to develop a case study from the project	Case studies are important to promote the opportunity for support to other businesses with real examples of success. We may contact you after the project has finished to develop a case study.

5. What happens if you are successful?

This diagram shows the steps you need to take once you have been offered an Innovation Voucher. All steps in blue text (1-6) are for your business to complete.



If you are successful in being offered an Innovation Voucher, it is important that you act quickly to accept the offer.

We will notify you online that you have been successful with your application, and you will need to confirm your acceptance of the offer of an Innovation Voucher within 10 working days.

If you do not accept the offer, it will lapse after the deadline.

If you do not accept the offer, you can enter a later round of the competition by resubmitting your application which will go back into the draw. Once you have accepted the offer, you will be unable to re-apply to the scheme even if you do not use your Innovation Voucher.

Please Note: The steps you will need to complete the process after **you** have accepted your offer are:

- Complete the online Supplier Form, once you have selected your supplier.
- When the work has been completed, get your supplier to complete a report on the work undertaken and submit an invoice to you.
- Pay your supplier's invoice.
- Complete the online Claim Form, which includes a short report from you on the impact of the work. You will need to attach to the Claim Form the supplier's report and a copy of the supplier's invoice certified by you as having been paid.

All Forms are completed on _connect in "My Applications". Go to the IV website, <https://vouchers.innovateuk.org/>, sign in using the same email and password that you used to upload your application, and then click on "My Applications". This will take you to your application form, next to which will be a link to whichever form you next need to complete.

You will receive NO email reminders and it is your responsibility to check _connect regularly for application status updates.

5.1 Bank account details

When you confirm your acceptance of the terms and conditions we will ask you to send in details of your business bank account on business headed paper showing the registered and/or trading address of the business.

We need this information as part of the checks we are required to do to prevent money laundering and we will not be able to pay your claim at the end of your project unless we have this information.

It can take some time to open a business bank account because of the checks that the bank will want to make. You may wish to start the process of opening one before you apply, as you will only have 10 days to accept our offer and send us your bank details if you are successful, and that may not be long enough for the bank to process your request.

5.2 Guidance on suppliers

Innovation Vouchers can be used to pay for the costs of advice from a wide range of suppliers.

There are a few restrictions:

- The supplier must be registered and operating in the UK
- If the supplier is a private sector provider, they must be registered with Companies House either as a registered Company or a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP)
- You can use a University or other educational establishment – they are not required to be registered at Companies House
- You must choose a supplier you have not worked with before – if it is a University or large supplier with several departments it is the overall supplier that must be new to you, not just a new department.

Some research institutions may operate as charities or Community Interest Companies. These are also eligible.

If you are offered an Innovation Voucher, you will be asked to upload the details of your supplier online.

The key aim of an Innovation Voucher is to help businesses access knowledge and to work with a supplier for the first time. We appreciate that you might have started talking to your supplier before applying or as part of applying for an Innovation Voucher, and it might help you to decide how to focus what you write if you have an initial discussion with them. However please remember that you should be choosing a supplier that you have not worked with formally before, so limit how far you develop that relationship until after you have the offer of your Innovation Voucher. The application should be in your own words and clearly show that this is a new collaboration.

You can choose to do a project in excess of £5k with the supplier, however please note that it will be **your responsibility to pay the supplier** before you can submit your claim to Innovate UK. Please ensure that the supplier cost is within a limit that you are able to afford.

InnovateUK will reimburse up to **£5k only**. Your claim must not include VAT – if the supplier charges VAT your business will need to pay that from your own resources.

You should not start work with your supplier until you have an offer of an Innovation Voucher from InnovateUK and have accepted that offer. Any work done before your official start date can't be claimed for later.

If you are not sure how to go about finding an expert to help you with your idea, some guidance is available on the Innovation Vouchers Portal at <https://vouchers.innovateuk.org>.

6. Project completion

When your selected supplier has completed the work to your satisfaction, you should ask for a report from them and an invoice on their headed company paper showing their company number if applicable. You should then pay the invoice before making your claim to InnovateUK. You can make your claim as soon as the work is finished and the invoice has been paid – you do not need to wait until the final completion date.

At the end of your project, you will be asked to:

- upload supplier details (if you have not already done so)
- complete a short report online on what you have used the Innovation Voucher for
- upload the paid invoice from your supplier, signed by you to certify it has been paid and
- the report from the supplier

We will check your claim and that you have provided all of the supporting information above. We will then aim to make payment within 15 working days – subject to your claim being complete and that the work has been undertaken as explained in this Guidance document.

If your supplier has given you staged invoices, please sign each page and scan them into a single document for uploading.

Guidance on what should be included in the supplier report is available at:

<https://connect.innovateuk.org/documents/3084336/3815358/Supplier+Report+Guidance.pdf>

You must complete your project, pay your supplier and make your claim to us by **the published completion date**. This will be clearly shown on the terms and conditions that you agree to and is in this guidance in section 2. Any claims received after the completion date cannot be paid.

7. How to find out more

Please visit the Innovation Vouchers Portal for more information <https://vouchers.innovateuk.org> or join the Innovation Vouchers group on _connect <https://connect.innovateuk.org/web/innovation-vouchers>.

We have developed some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) that may assist you with any Innovation Voucher queries.

This guidance refers only to InnovateUK Innovation Vouchers. There are other innovation voucher schemes available, and a list of those that we know are active is available on the Portal.

If you require further information or have a query regarding Innovation Vouchers, please contact the Business Support Group on:

E-mail: support@innovateuk.gov.uk

Tel: 0300 321 4357