

BBSRC Elemental Engineering Biology Mission Hub Business Interaction Vouchers (BIVs)

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What are BBSRC Elemental Mission Hub Business Interaction Vouchers?

BBSRC Engineering Biology Mission Hub Business Interaction Vouchers (BIVs) are to encourage and support collaboration between academic and industrial partners within the remit of the [Engineering Biology Hub for environmental processing of metals; from contaminated land to industrial biotechnology in a circular economy \(ELEMENTAL\)](#). ELEMENTAL is one of [six Engineering Biology Mission Hubs](#) funded by BBSRC as part of the UKRI National Engineering Biology Programme.

The vouchers will help resource small, confidence-building activities between an academic partner and industry-based partner(s) that are likely to:

- Instigate an interaction
- Test the potential for a substantive interaction
- Lead to new research technology transfer projects

Elemental Metal Hub Business Interaction Vouchers allow industry to work collaboratively with a research partner to support research, innovation, technology transfer and business growth. Elemental is expecting to make awards of up to £50,000 (at £100% full economic cost (fEC) including VAT). Projects must include a UK-based industry contribution, cash or in-kind, ranging

from 20% to 50% of the grant value, with larger, more mature projects expected to contribute around 50%, and smaller or early-stage projects around 20%.

The vouchers will give businesses access to the leading researchers in engineering biology for environmental processing of metals. They are designed to help overcome the challenges that may be facing a business and realise opportunities through research and innovation.

The vouchers will be redeemed by the partner research organisation, and in applying for a Business Interaction Voucher, you are entering a competitive process.

How much funding is available?

Elemental is expecting to make awards of up to £50,000 (at £100% fEC). Projects must include a UK-based industry contribution, cash or in-kind, ranging from 20% to 50% of the grant value, with larger, more mature projects expected to contribute around 50%, and smaller or early-stage projects around 20%.

BIVs are awarded at 100% fEC (including VAT). Grant funding is paid directly to the academic partner who is tackling a problem of industrial relevance.

Industry Contribution Guidance:

- Projects that are larger in scale, longer in duration, or involve more mature work (e.g. higher TRLs) are expected to secure an industry contribution of approximately 50% of the grant value.
- Smaller, shorter-term, or early-stage projects (such as feasibility studies or exploratory work) may be eligible for a lower industry contribution, typically around 20% of the grant value.

What counts as in-kind contribution (not an exhaustive list):

- Labour to assist in the research and attend meetings
- Consumables either provided to the collaborating research facility or used in complementary work outside of the research facility
- Travel and subsistence

Who is eligible to apply for the vouchers?

Funding is only available to:

- [Elemental Metal Hub members](#) who are eligible to receive BBSRC funding ([Check if you're eligible for funding](#)).
- Academics based at a UK institution when carrying out the project.

- All researchers and industry partners applying for these BIVs must be members of the Elemental Metal Hub <https://elementalhub.org/home/join-us>.

Research Organisations

Proposals for projects to be led by an early career researcher (ECR) or another non-permanent member of staff are also encouraged. However, such bids should include a senior academic as co-investigator. Alternatively, the ECR's or other non-permanent staff member's Line Manager should confirm by signing the form that they approve the submission of the BIV application. Any non-permanent Research Organisation applicants including ECRs will need to provide confirmation from their Research Finance Department that their post's funding conditions allow them to deliver the project within the proposed timeframe and that contracts of employment will be put in place for such staff for the duration of the proposed BIV project.

Industry Partner(s)

Elemental BIVs are subject to the UK Subsidy Control framework. Industrial partners receiving vouchers must ensure they are not in breach of subsidy control rules by accepting the voucher and will agree to this before the application is submitted. Industrial partners should ensure they are not in breach of current Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) including the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) as BIVs represent small amounts of subsidy. Guidance on state subsidy rules, value thresholds and recording can be found [here](#).

Business interaction vouchers should focus attention on UK-based partners where there is benefit to the UK research base and the UK economy. In exceptional circumstances, where there is not a UK company to exploit the research, a business interaction voucher may be awarded to an overseas partner company. The application should provide a clear justification for working with an overseas partner company and outline how the project will lead to building international collaborations, how the project will be taken forward leading to inward investment and the benefit back to the UK.

To be eligible to a Business Interaction Voucher the business applicant must:

- Be a business based in the United Kingdom
- Partner with a research organisation listed above

Please note:

- There is no limit to the number of applications submitted per academic Principal Investigator (PI).
- There is a limit of one voucher per business per funding round.

A business may be involved in up to three applications per round, provided that:

- They are the lead industry partner on one application, and

- Act as a sub-partner on up to two additional applications.

What activities will the voucher scheme support?

Funds will support a collaboration that can be any defined piece of work by an academic partner relevant to industrial partner(s) for up to 12 months duration. New collaborations will be prioritised; however, existing collaborations will be prioritised too if it aids going up the technology readiness level (TRL). The work must be relevant to the [remit of the Elemental Metal Mission Hub](#) including industrial engineering biology as defined by the [BBSRC](#).

Examples of projects include generating new experimental data, data analysis, technical consultancy, and extended exchange visits. The vouchers are not intended to fund PhD students (details and nature of consultants will be subject to University and RCUK guidelines), pay for service contracts or be used for equipment purchase.

Priority will be given to proposals that meet one or more of the following:

- Aid technology transfer.
- Work towards solving a technical problem for industrial partner(s)
- Adapt existing technology for a new application.

Types of projects particularly aligned with these priorities include:

- Progressing products and services up the Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) scale
- Developing a new process, practice, or technology
- Produce scientific or technical data for product or service development.
- Technical and scientific consultancy from the research organisation

The vouchers will help resource small, confidence-building activities between an academic partner and industry-based partner(s) that are likely to:

- Instigate interaction.
- Test the potential for substantive interaction.
- Lead to new research technology transfer projects.

Examples of suitable projects for this purpose include:

- New product or service development
- Product validation and small-scale prototyping
- Proof of concept or feasibility studies

The list above is not exhaustive, if you have a project in mind please get in touch and we can explore how we may be able to help.

Projects we will not fund:

- Projects that are not led by a BBSRC eligible research organisation
- Projects that do not involve Elemental Mission Hub members.
- Equipment purchase is not an eligible cost.

When are the funding calls?

The BIV scheme will operate with Funding Calls announced in stages during the lifetime of Elemental Hub. The call for applications for the BIVs will be advertised on [Elemental Metal Mission Hub website](#) and by email to members as well as other outlets such as [LinkedIn](#), [BlueSky](#) and [X \(Twitter\)](#) to ensure wide coverage of the opportunity.

What is the application process?

The applicant should complete an application form available on the [Elemental Metal Hub website](#).

The research partner is responsible for filling and submitting the application form in consultation with the industrial partner(s).

The application form will ask for the following details:

- Applicant details (including details about the industry partner company)
- Project details (including technology readiness levels)
- Finance details (including details of the industry contribution)
- Any ethical or social issues
- A letter of support from the industry partner and CV of the PI.

The completed application form, PI CV, and letter of support should be emailed to the elemental team: elementalmetalhub@kent.ac.uk.

Only applications submitted via the Elemental Metal Hub email address will be accepted. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be accepted.

The Elemental team will check whether the application meets the criteria and has the required information and will contact the academic principal investigators' research office to confirm eligibility of the applicant to receive BBSRC funding.

A Companies House search for industrial partners will include confirming the presence of a UK base, the incorporation date (to see how long the company has been trading) and if accounts have been filed on time. Further due diligence checks may be made when academic partners

are also company directors. The University of Kent's due diligence process (based on UKRI recommendations) will be followed for industrial partners.

What is the review process?

Once applications have been received, they will be sent on to the assessment panel for review and to decide on whether it should be funded. The assessment panel will make their decision and applicants informed of the outcome via email. Eligibility checks on the business will be undertaken based on the information included in the application form.

At this point, applicants may be asked for further information to support the application and may request amendments to the application to grant the funding. The decision will be communicated by email to the named business and research partner.

The Elemental Metal Mission Hub BIV review panel will evaluate applications. Criteria for assessment will include:

- Relevance of application to the [remit of the Elemental Metal Mission Hub](#), including engineering biology ([BBSRC Engineering Biology](#))
- Quality of science
- Potential industrial relevance (Responsible Research and Innovation, RRI)
- Potential for building longer-term relationships.
- Value for money

The assessment panel reserves the right to turn down any application that does not meet the required criteria or overall purpose of the scheme.

Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application within four weeks of submission.

This is a competitive application process. Funding will be awarded to the highest-scoring applications. Projects will be scored on their fit within the aims and scope of the [Elemental Metal Hub project](#).

How and when will the award be paid?

The academic, co-applicant(s) and industrial partner(s) will agree on a start date and will need to have a signed agreement in place prior to commencing the project. IP and collaboration agreements will be drawn up by the respective partnering organisations (academia and industry), and the Elemental Project Manager will require evidence that these are in place before releasing funds.

A formal offer letter (including Award Terms and Conditions) will be issued to the successful applicant. A final expenditure claim must be submitted no later than 1 month after the project ends along with the final project [report](#). Funds will not be released until the expenditure claim and report are submitted.

The total number of Elemental Metal Hub Business Interaction Vouchers is limited.

Each voucher will cover the costs of the research organisations services provided to the beneficiary business partner. Vouchers cannot be used to fund any expenditure incurred by the company as part of the delivery of the project.

What reporting will be required?

A project [report](#) (authorised by the industrial partner for us in the public domain) including a final expenditure statement (authorised by the University) must be submitted no later than 1 month after the project ends and should be sent to the Elemental Project Manager (elementalmetalhub@kent.ac.uk).

A form will be emailed to each PI, and the project report will contain:

- Summary of the project outcomes
- Future plans
- Testimonial(s) ideally from the industrial partner(s)
- Image (with legend) related to the science.
- List outputs, e.g. papers, new products or processes, patents, collaborations etc.
- Technology Readiness Level (TRL) for research pre-funding, for research post-funding, and details of how the funding has helped to advance the TRL of the research (if applicable). <https://www.ukri.org/publications/activities-associated-with-different-technology-readiness-levels/>
- Financial details of the actual expenditure of the project.

The report will be used to create a case study available in the public domain (e.g. Hub website and BBSRC publications).

A full audit trail must be in place for all expenditure incurred on the project. BBSRC will not expect to see this evidence, but it should be in place and can be checked if the RO is subject to a funding assurance visit.

The awardee should acknowledge the support of the BBSRC award (BB/Y008456/1) on papers and other forms of media communications including press releases, conferences, and media appearances.

What data protection and data sharing polices are in place?

Please read the Elemental Metal Hub [privacy notice](#) before completing an application form.
Contact the Hub Project Manager: elementalmetalhub@kent.ac.uk if you have any questions.

Copies of proposals will be made available to the Elemental Metal Hub evaluation panel in confidence. They will use information provided in the application for processing the proposal, the award of any consequential funding, and the payment, maintenance and review of the voucher funds. In order to meet the BBSRC obligations for public accountability and the dissemination of information, details of awards may also be made available on the research councils' websites and other publicly available databases, and in reports, documents and mailing lists.

BBSRC will use this information for research-related activities, including but not limited to, transfer of funds, statistical analysis in relation to evaluation of the BBSRC Elemental Metal Hub, study of trends and policy and strategy studies.

To meet the Research Councils' obligations for public accountability and the dissemination of information, details of grants (including successful BIV awards) may also be made available on the Research Councils' web sites and other publicly available databases, and in reports, documents and mailing lists.

Who do I contact if I have any questions?

If you have any questions, please contact the Hub Project Manager:
elementalmetalhub@kent.ac.uk