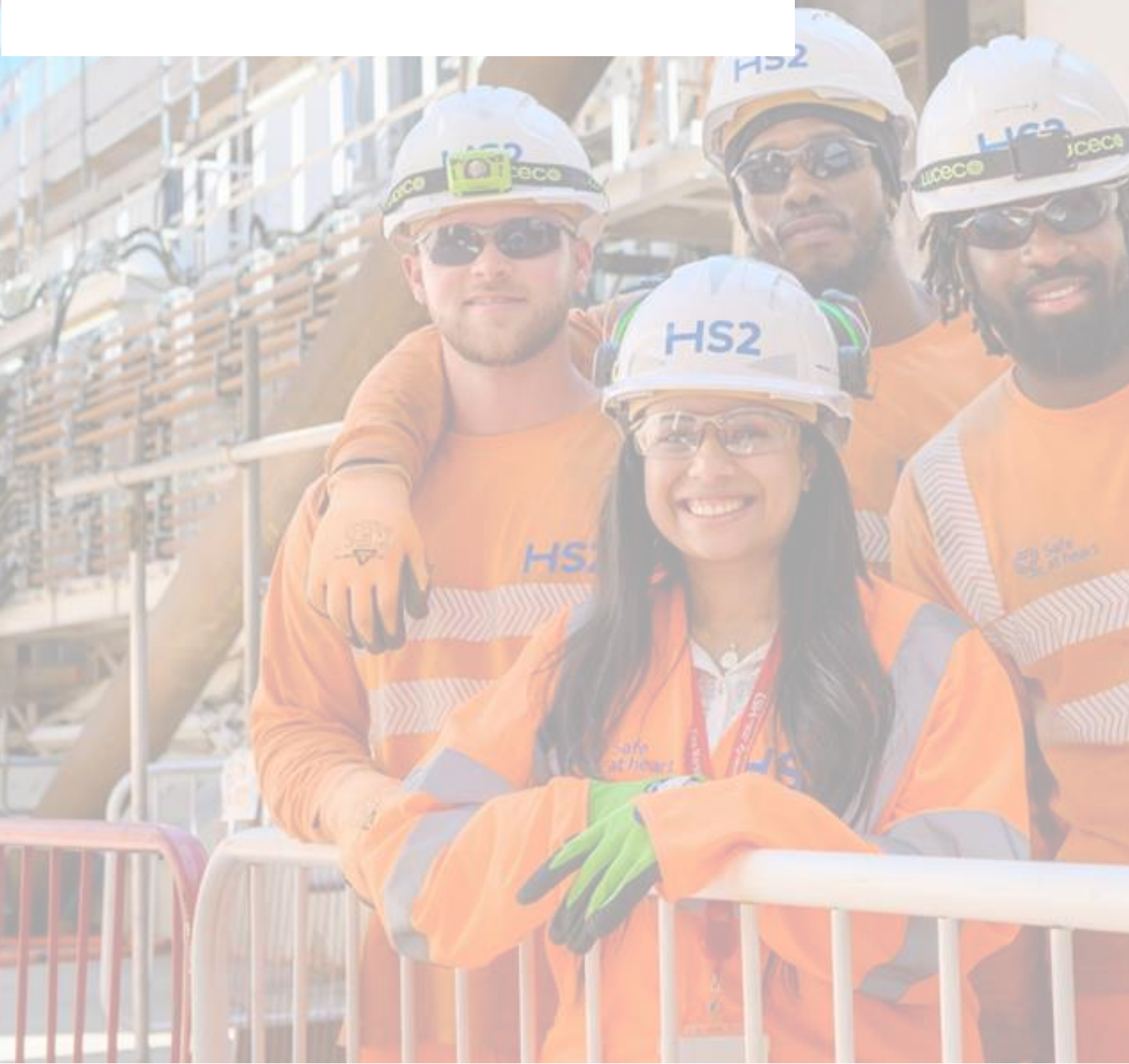


HS2 Accelerator 7.0

Application Guidance



Introduction

High Speed 2 Limited (HS2) Accelerator, delivered by Connected Places Catapult and in partnership with Department for Transport, has launched its search for six small businesses to develop new technology business cases and funded pilot projects for the rail scheme. The six successful SMEs will be accelerated through a bespoke 20-week programme involving:

- **Project scoping workshops** with domain experts and challenge owners from within HS2, the Department for Transport, and the wider industry.
- **Business case development** with support from HS2 innovation managers and programme mentors.
- **Investment readiness support** including opportunities to meet investors and coaching on raising investment and refining investment and financing strategies.
- **Bespoke business coaching** from a consortium of mentors and technical experts with specialisms in areas including marketing & branding, product development and commercial strategy.

Since its launch in September 2020, the HS2 Accelerator has supported 31 small businesses which have collectively secured 24 pilot projects across HS2 – with more to be expected in the upcoming months from our sixth cohort. These businesses have raised over £220 million in investment & funding, and more than doubled their team headcount since participating – creating over 430 new jobs for the UK.

About this Document

This application guide will provide supporting information to help applicants to complete and submit a high-quality application.

Eligibility

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible, applicants **must be**:

- A micro, small or medium sized enterprise (SME).
- Headquartered or based within the UK or Europe.
- Committed to attending in-person project scoping workshops, engagement activities, and programme events with sponsors and stakeholders across HS2 and supply chain.

Solutions **must** have a Technology Readiness Level of at least TRL 5. This means that the solution has been tested or demonstrated in its intended environment.

Application Guidance

General Guidance

1. Carefully read this guidance document whilst preparing your application.
2. Only the information included within your application form is subject to assessment.
3. Your application will automatically save so you can return to edit later.
4. Your application can be edited and completed by multiple members of your team. You can do this by clicking the 'Add Collaborators' feature on your application.
5. Applications must be submitted before midnight on the evening of 13 October 2024. Late submissions will not be accepted or considered.
6. Applications will be assessed from 14 - 20 October. Applicants will be notified of their assessment outcome on 21 October.
7. Shortlisted applicants will be provided with a 30-minute interview slot on 30 - 31 October. We ask all applicants to try to keep their diaries flexible on these dates as we will be unable to accommodate requests for specific timeslots.
8. Please review the assessment scoring criteria section in this guidance document as this will provide clarity of what evidence to provide in your responses to maximise your score.
9. Please ensure you have read and understood the Terms & Conditions set out on the website before submitting.

Assessment Scoring Criteria

After the competition deadline, only applications that meet the eligibility criteria and scope of the competition will be formally assessed. Connected Places Catapult reserves the right to declare applications as out of scope of the programme.

Applications that progress to the assessment stage will be reviewed by three assessors from the Connected Places Catapult and HS2. Assessors will have general knowledge and understanding of technology and innovation within transport and infrastructure, but applications should write clearly in plain language, avoiding acronyms and obscure jargon.

Scoring Criteria

This section details the criteria our assessors will use when scoring your application. Under each criterion there is a maximum score of 5 available.

Technical (25%)

To achieve the highest score under this criterion, your application should demonstrate the following to our assessment panel:

- **Impact** – The solution demonstrates extensive measurable commercial & social benefits and significant improvement to the status quo.
- **Feasibility** – The solution is completely feasible to deploy in this system environment (e.g. data, IT, users, compliance etc).
- **Novelty** – There is excellent competitive advantage and clear differentiation to other solutions available on the market.
- **Scalability** – The solution requires no or very minimal additional resources (time, cost, effort) to deploy or maintain.

People (25%)

To achieve the highest score under this criterion, your application should demonstrate the following to our assessment panel:

- **Skills** – The team is highly credible and demonstrates without doubt the necessary technical and commercial skills to execute this project.
- **Experience** – The team benefits from having multiple key members with extensive industry knowledge and previous project and/or entrepreneurial success.

- **Team Potential** - The team demonstrates great understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and how they will ensure team compatibility, capability, and performance as they grow.

Commercial (25%)

To achieve the highest score under this criterion, your application should demonstrate the following to our assessment panel:

- **Product-Market Fit** – There is significant evidence that the solution has been validated by its users, with significant measurable evidence of previous project success in construction & infrastructure sectors.
- **Business Model** – The business model is highly feasible and highly scalable for this market and/or application.
- **Market Potential** – The addressable market is large and growing, spanning many different sectors/industries, with no or very few barriers to entry.
- **Financial Risk** – The business is profitable, or if unprofitable, the remaining financial runway is very healthy (18+ months) posing no risk of dissolution or bankruptcy during the programme's lifespan.
- **ROI** – The commercial benefits of the solution would surpass the capital expenditure and operational costs to implement or scale.

Programme Fit (25%)

To achieve the highest score under this criterion, your application should demonstrate the following to our assessment panel:

- **Challenges** – The solution and proposal have a strong alignment with the challenge statements or wider programme objectives.
- **Technology Readiness** – The technology readiness level of the proposed solution is within the scope of this programme (TRL 5+).
- **Location** – The company are based and/or headquartered in the UK or Europe and have committed to attend in-person meetings, events and workshops.

ED&I

This programme celebrates Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (ED&I), not just because it is the right thing to do but because it leads to better decisions, better innovation and makes our working life more rewarding and more productive. All partners are committed to fostering ED&I in our workforce, our partners, suppliers, and innovators.

We hold ED&I to include the protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010 including Age, Sex & Gender Identity, Race & Ethnic Identity, Disability, Religion & Belief, Sexual Identity, Transgender & Non-Cisgender Identity, Marriage & Civil Partnerships, Pregnancy & Maternity, as well as other historic barriers to opportunity, such as nationality, dialect, education, and other forms of socio-economic exclusion.

The HS2 Accelerator programme is committed to upholding ED&I principles and does so through the following approaches:

- Provide equal opportunities for all innovators seeking to apply to participate in the programme by requiring anonymity on application forms.
- Implementing a standardised scoring criteria and assessment process.
- Cultivate diversity of thought throughout the programme by assembling diverse assessment panels during selection and selecting diverse mentors & specialists during programme delivery.
- Foster an open and inclusive environment for participants and alumni.
- Offer advocacy and collaboration opportunities to reduce barriers to innovation.

Dates and Deadlines

Please note the dates and deadlines for the competition below. These are indicative timings, and we will adhere to this schedule as best we can. The closing date for applications is fixed and will be 23:59 (BST) on 13 October 2024. We will begin assessing applications from 14 October 2024.

Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered. Extensions will not be granted under any circumstances.

Competition Opens	12 September 2024
Application Support Webinar	23 September 2024
Competition Closes	13 October 2024
Notification to Applicants	21 October 2024
Assessment Interviews	30 - 31 October 2024
Notification to Selected Finalists	4 November 2024
Feedback for Unsuccessful Applicants	11 November 2024
Welcome Day	3 December 2024

Notification of Assessment Outcome

Following the initial assessment, up to 18 applicants will be shortlisted for interview. All applicants will be notified of their assessment outcome on 21 October 2024.

If you are successfully shortlisted, you will also be sent a 30-minute interview timeslot and interview guidance pack. Interviews will take place on 30 - 31 October 2024. Regretfully we will be unable to accommodate specific requests for interview slots, therefore we ask that you keep your diary as open and flexible as possible on these dates.

If you are unsuccessful, you will receive feedback on your application no later than 11 November 2024. Only applicants that meet the eligibility criteria and programme scope will progress to the assessment stage and be given feedback on their applications.

Connected Places Catapult reserves the right to declare applications unsuccessful and out of scope. We regret that we are unable to accept appeals or offer follow-up meetings with unsuccessful applicants.

Contact Details

If you have any questions about the programme, please contact Jasmine Pollock, Accelerator Programme Manager [here](#).

We wish you luck with your application!