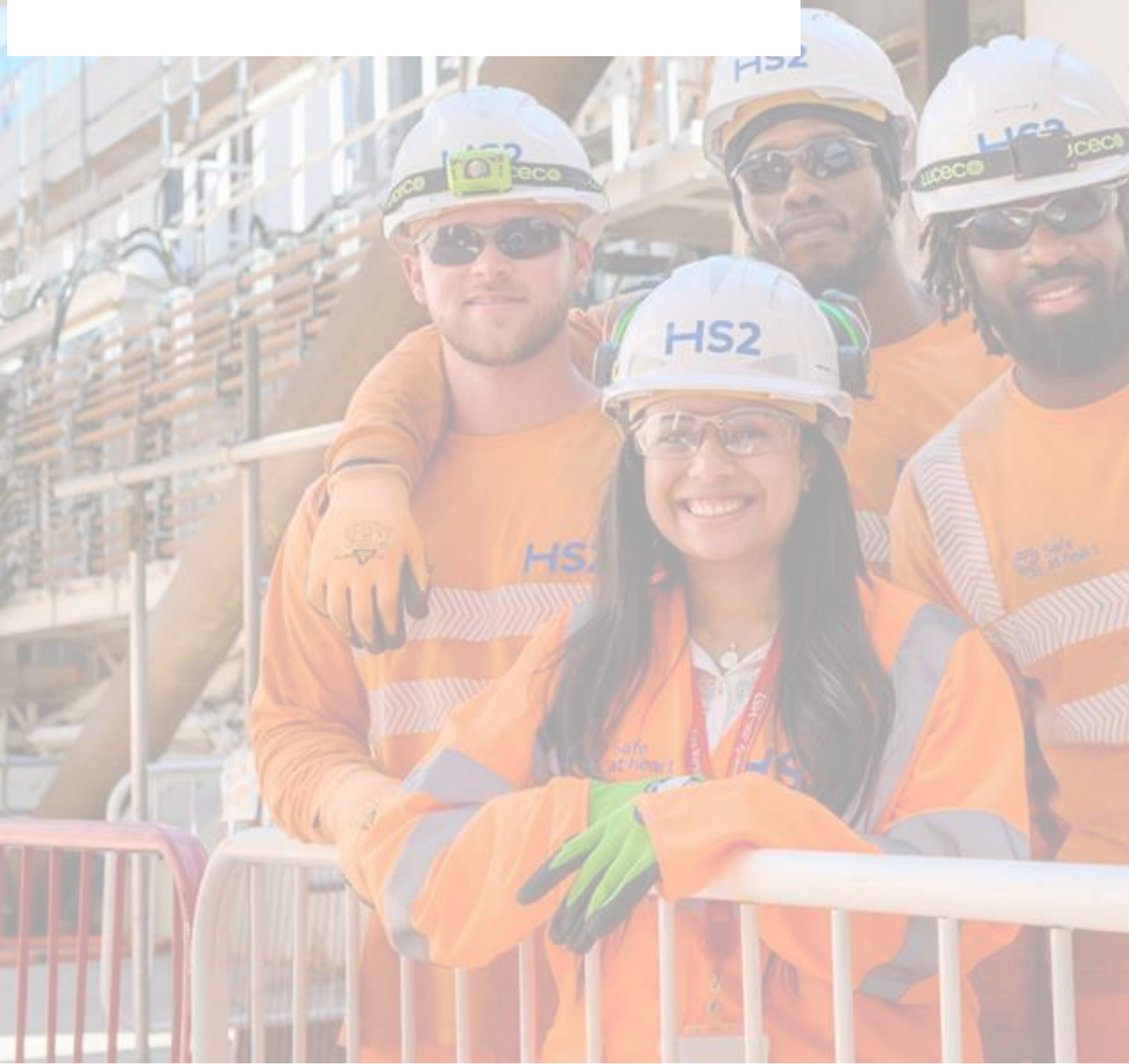# HS2 Accelerator 6.0
Application Guidance

Introduction

Connected Places Catapult, in partnership with HS2 Ltd and the Department for Transport, has launched its search for six small businesses to develop new technology ideas for the rail scheme; to be selected for trial and funded by HS2 and its main contractors.

Since its conception in 2020, the HS2 Accelerator programme has supported 25 small technology firms who have collectively secured 23 pilot projects across HS2, and more than 50% of the firms are now procured on contracts across the supply chain. The participating SMEs have subsequently raised over £220 million investment & funding and more than doubled their headcounts, creating over 420 new jobs.

Six successful SMEs will be accelerated through a bespoke five-month programme, including:

- **Business development opportunities** across HS2 and construction firms involved in the project, including Sir Robert McAlpine, VolkerFitzpatrick, Bouygues Construction, Balfour Beatty, VINCI, Skanska, Costain, STRABAG, Eiffage, Kier, Ferrovial Construction and BAM Nuttall.
- **Project scoping workshops** with domain experts and challenge owners from within HS2, the Department for Transport, and the wider industry.
- **Investment readiness support** including opportunities to meet investors, and best practice advice for raising investment and refining investment strategies and plans.
- **Bespoke business coaching** from a consortium of mentors and technical experts with specialisms in areas including Marketing & PR; Product Development & Strategy and Procurement & Bid Writing.

About this Document

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

Eligibility

Eligibility Criteria

- Applicants must be a micro, small or medium sized enterprise (SME).
- Applicants can be headquartered outside of the UK; however, they must be able to engage fully with the programme, including attending in-person activities and events.
- Applicants must have a solution which is technical readiness level (TRL) 5 – 8. This means that the solution has, at least, been tested or demonstrated in its intended environment and, at most, has been deployed as a first-of-a-kind commercial system.

Application Guidance

General Guidance

1. Carefully read this guidance document whilst preparing your application.
2. You can access the application form on the [Programme Page](#).
3. Your responses to questions in the **Solution**, **Team**, **Traction** and **Working with HS2** sections should not disclose your name, your company name, or name of any person(s) working at your company. Complete anonymity reduces the potential for bias and discrimination during the application assessment process and ensures that evaluations are based only on the credibility and suitability of your responses for this programme.
4. Only the information included within your application form is subject to assessment.
5. Your application will automatically save so you can return to edit later. You can access this on your [Profile Page](#).
6. Applications must be submitted before midnight on 28 April 2024. Late submissions will not be accepted or considered.
7. Applications will be assessed from 29 April – 2 May 2024. Shortlisted applicants will be contacted by 3 May 2024 and provided with a 30-minute interview invitation on 8 - 9 May 2024.
8. Please keep within the maximum word counts noted in each of the sections of the application form. Any content that exceeds the word count limit will be excluded from your submission.

9. 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.
10. 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 at least three expert assessors from the Connected Places Catapult. Assessors with a broad technical knowledge across different areas of transport and technology will mark your application. You should therefore 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:

- Technology – The technology is unique, and it offers significant added value compared to the status quo.
- Business Model – The business model is highly feasible and highly scalable for this market and/or application.
- Market – The addressable market is exceptionally large and/or rapidly growing with no significant barriers to entry.
- Competition – There is huge advantage and clear differentiation between this solution and other competitive solutions available on the market.

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 execute this project.
- Experience – The team benefits from having multiple key members with extensive industry knowledge and previous project and/or entrepreneurial success.

Commercial (25%)

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

- Customer Engagement – There is significant evidence of qualified leads and/or engagement from customers within relevant sectors or markets.
- Product-Market Fit – There is significant evidence of commercial validation resulting in successful projects (including proof-of-concepts) with measurable benefits for their customers.
- Financial Risk – The remaining financial runway is extremely healthy (12-18 months) and supported by robust revenue models posing very low risk of dissolution or bankruptcy during the programme's lifespan.

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 fit to one or more challenge statements.
- Feasibility – The proposed project would be highly feasible to deliver within the scope of this programme (time, resources, budget).
- Impact - The proposed project would produce extensive commercial and social benefits and demonstrates significant improvement to the existing approach.
- Technology Readiness – The technology readiness level of the proposed solution is within the scope of this programme (TRL 5-8).
- Location – The applicant is based in the UK, or if based overseas, the applicant has committed to attending in-person events or project meetings (where appropriate).

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 midnight on 28 April 2024. We will begin assessing applications from 29 April 2024.

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

Competition Opens	14 March 2024
Application Support Webinar	18 April 2024
Competition Closes	28 April 2024

HS2 · Department for Transport

CATAPULT Connected Places

Notification to Applicants	3 May 2024
Assessment Interviews	7 – 8 May 2024
Notification to Selected Finalists	10 May 2024
Feedback for Unsuccessful Finalists	12 May 2024
Welcome Day	11 June 2024

Notification of Assessment Outcome

Following the initial assessment, up to 16 applicants will be shortlisted for interview. Interviews will take place on 7 – 8 May 2024. You will be provided with a virtual joining link and interview guidance no later than close of business 3 May 2024 if you are successfully shortlisted. Regretfully we will be unable to accommodate specific requests for interview slots, therefore it is imperative that you try to keep your diary as open and flexible as possible on these dates.

Only applicants that progress to the assessment stage will be given a breakdown of the scores achieved for each section of the application form. Connected Places Catapult reserves the right to declare applications unsuccessful and out of scope. Once the selection decisions have been made, we regret that we are unable to offer follow up meetings or further feedback for 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!