

Frequently asked questions

1. Who can apply for funding?

During the transition period from 1 April 2018 to 31 July 2019 before the Office for Students' (OfS's) Regulatory framework takes full effect, eligibility to submit bids through the OfS Challenge Competition must correspond with the current funding powers of the OfS, which reflect those that previously applied to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). This means that for the academic year 2018-19 the OfS Challenge Competition can fund projects at higher education providers previously funded by HEFCE, and projects related to the provision of prescribed courses of higher education in further education colleges and sixth form colleges.

2. Can mission groups and sector bodies apply for funding?

Mission groups and other sector bodies can be partners in proposals but the project lead must be an OfS-funded, eligible higher education provider. Bids will be assessed on merit and therefore proposals will need to demonstrate clearly what all partners will contribute to the project, the nature and scope of their involvement, the investment they are contributing and how the collaborations will work successfully to support English higher education, and to indicate how activity will be robustly monitored and evaluated.

3. Is there a minimum level of funding a provider can apply for?

While funding should be based on the needs of the project, given the scale of work anticipated through this competition we are not expecting bids for less than £250,000.

4. What is the maximum funding a provider can apply for?

Individual awards will be made at a minimum of £250,000 and up to a maximum of £750,000.

5. Will the OfS offer a lower amount of funding than has been requested?

The funding requested should realistically reflect the costs involved in the project. Recommendations will be made by an expert panel and final decisions will be made by the chief executive, involving the OfS board as necessary.

6. Is matched funding a requirement?

Yes, bidders must provide a minimum of one-to-one matched funding against the proposed OfS funding contribution. This means that, for every pound requested, at least one additional pound should be invested. This can be as cash or in kind (any contributions in kind will need a monetary value and to be clearly evidenced as part of the proposal).

7. Is there a maximum amount of funding or number of projects that will be funded?

There are currently no formal restrictions on how much of the OfS Challenge Competition budget will be spent on the competition, and therefore no set limit on how many projects will

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be funded. We are seeking high-quality proposals providing additional activity to address the priority areas.

8. Can research be funded under this call?

The OfS does not fund research. All activities within proposals must have tangible outcomes beyond research outputs.

9. When will successful projects receive funding?

Funding will start from April 2019.

10. When do projects need to start by?

Activities must commence by September 2019 and span two full academic years, 2019-20 and 2020-21, with time in autumn 2021 for final evaluation and reporting.

11. What is the minimum amount of collaborators?

There is no minimum number of collaborators.

12. Do projects have to be collaborative?

Yes. We expect all projects to have at least one partner but this does not have to be another higher education provider. For example, a partner could be a health agency such as the NHS.

13. How many bids can be submitted by a provider?

Providers may apply as the lead for one bid and as a partner for an additional bid (a maximum of two bids per provider).

14. What type of evidence are you expecting in relation to the funding and resource that all partners and stakeholders are committing to the project?

Where projects involve partners, letters of support clearly demonstrating their investment and commitment should be provided in one collated document.

15. Does every proposal have to cover all three key priorities?

No. Where appropriate and realistic, proposals can cover more than one priority but this is not an expectation or selection criteria.

16. Will you accept Expressions of Interest applications after the deadline of 1700 on 9 November?

Bids will not be accepted after the deadline without the prior agreement of the OfS.

17. My bid has exceeded the page limit. What are the consequences?

While due regard will be given to all applications submitted in the timeframe, the OfS reserves the right not to read any text beyond the set limit.

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18. What monitoring requirements will be involved?

The interim project monitoring report will focus on progress against key objectives and milestones, financial accountability and risk management. The end of project report will also seek information on the learning and key outcomes derived from the project.

As indicated in the competition documentation, all funded projects must be involved in evaluation and dissemination activities undertaken by the OfS. Further information on monitoring requirements will be set out in grant award letters.

19. How will providers be informed of outcomes?

We will inform bidders whether they have been successful and invited to the workshop no later than 30 November 2018. For those projects invited to submit full business cases, outcomes will be announced in March 2019 and we will agree award letters with all successful bidders.

20. I have contacted the OfS with a query on the call and not yet received a response. Is there a problem?

We will respond to all queries as quickly as possible. Should you have any difficulties in contacting a specific member of staff, contact OfS customer services on 0117 931 7317.

21. When do projects have to complete by?

Projects must not run beyond three years and must be completed by 30 September 2021. To capture the full impact of this funding, successful projects will need to continue to measure graduate outcomes beyond the life of the funding.

22. Where can I find out more about the Universities UK step change mental health framework?

Further details can be found on the UUK website at <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/stepchange>.

23. Where can I find out more about the University Mental Health Charter?

Further details can be found on the Student Minds website at <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/charter.html>.

24. When will providers be informed if a project is invited to the workshop?

We will inform bidders whether they have been successful and invited to the workshop by no later than 30 November 2018.

25. When and where is the workshop?

The workshop will be held on Tuesday 11 December in central London.

26. Who should attend the workshop?

At least one person from the lead provider and a representative from one of the collaborative partners should attend. Full details will be confirmed within the invite.

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27. What will the workshop entail?

We are using the workshop process to better understand and examine the types of activities and interventions that could be delivered, in order to secure the most impact for students. As well as the shortlisted bidders and their key partners, we will also invite to the workshop sector bodies, student representatives and mental health experts to enable further detailed discussion of and feedback on the selected proposals.

28. I can't make the workshop date – what should I do?

If you cannot attend the workshop your bid will not be able to proceed through the process.

29. Will expenses to attend the workshop be covered?

No. Providers are expected to cover these costs as part of demonstrating their commitment to this issue.

30. When will we know if our provider can proceed to a full bid?

We will contact all workshop attendees no later than 1700 on Friday 21 December 2018 to confirm the outcomes.

31. What is the deadline for the full business cases to be submitted?

Selected applicants will be invited to submit a full bid by 7 February 2019, from which the final projects will be selected.