**Business Interaction Voucher Guidance**

**1.    What are BBSRC Business Interaction Vouchers?**

The purpose of Business Interaction Vouchers (BIVs) is to foster collaborative partnerships between academic researchers and industry professionals within the remit of the INFORM Hub. The INFORM Hub is one of six hubs funded by the BBSRC in 2022 as part of the Diet and Health Open Innovation Research Club (OIRC).

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

1.  Instigate an interaction.
2.  Test the potential for a substantive interaction.
3.  Lead on to new research technology transfer projects.

**2.    How much funding is available?**

For BIV applications, the INFORM Hub will provide at least ten awards of up to £50,000 (100% fEC) throughout its lifetime.  Funding is paid to the academic partner addressing an industry-relevant problem.  While industry contributions (cash or in-kind) are encouraged, they are not mandatory for BIVs.

**3.    Who is eligible to apply for the funding?**

Funding is available to:

1.  Applicants who are eligible to receive BBSRC funding
2.  Applicants based at a UK institution eligible to receive BBSRC funding when carrying out the Project

Industrial partners should ensure they are not violating current Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), including the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), as BIVs represent small subsidy amounts.  Guidance on state subsidy rules, value thresholds, and recording can be found here.

BIVs prioritise collaborations with UK-based partners to benefit the UK research base and economy. In exceptional cases, when no suitable UK company exists, collaborations with overseas partners may be considered. These projects must provide a clear justification, foster international collaborations, and demonstrate potential for inward investment and benefit to the UK.

**4. What activities will the funding support?**

BIVs will support collaborative research projects of industrial relevance for a maximum duration of **6-months**.

Priority is reserved for new and existing partnerships that provide a clear pathway for advancing Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) in alignment with the focus of INFORM Hub.

Project costs: The INFORM Hub primarily aims to support research activities (Directly Incurred costs) and encourages Directly Allocated costs to be kept to a minimum and capped at 20% of total project costs.

The following costs are not eligible for funding:

- indirect or estate costs at the research organisation
- any costs relating to intellectual property protection, including but not limited to registering, maintaining, or supporting patents or property rights
- equipment with a value of £10,000 or more
- Undergraduate or Postgraduate activities, training, or core PhD training, including tuition or bench fees.


**5. What is the application process?**

The applicant should complete an online application form via the INFORM Hub website.

The application form requests the following details:

1. Applicant details (including details about the industry partner company)
2. Project details (including relevance to INFORM, the value of the Project to the Industry partner, and the benefits of a longer-term partnership)
3. Project Financial details (including completion of financial overview template)
4. A letter of support from the applicant's university
5. A letter of support from the industry partner(s), if applicable

All applications will be checked for completeness and acknowledged within ten working days following the formal submission deadline.


**6. What is the review process?**

To ensure a balanced perspective, applications will be peer reviewed by four INFORM Hub Steering Committee (SC) members. Each panel will include one member from the INFORM Hub Management Team, one industry representative, and two academic representatives. Peer reviews of applications are expected to be completed within a six-week timeframe following the application closure date.

Following completion of the Peer Review process, application review reports are produced and issued to the applicant for the opportunity to respond to peer review comments. Applicants are provided with ten working days to respond.

Applications, Peer Review Reports and any application responses to peer review comments will then be reviewed, assessed and scored by the Hub Management Committee. The applications will be ranked relative to their score from highest to lowest. The rank order will represent the order in which the proposals will be funded.

Criteria for assessment will include:
1. Quality of science
2. Relevance of application to the [remit of the INFORM Hub](#)
3. Relevance to the funding call (where a specific theme exists)
4. Compelling industrial relevance (Responsible Research and Innovation, RRI)
5. Potential for building future collaborations and expansions to the Project
6. Value for money

*Note that the entire application review process can take 8-12 weeks. Please consider this with the potential project start date on your application.

### 7. How and when will the award be paid?

The successful academic, co-applicant(s) and industrial partner(s) must **join the INFORM Hub** ([apply for Hub Membership](#)). They will agree on a start date and need a signed agreement before the Project commences.

IP and collaboration agreements should be drawn up by the respective partnering organisations (Academia and Industry), and the Hub Manager will require evidence that these are in place before releasing funds.

The University of Reading Contract teams will draft and issue a formal offer letter (including award 'Terms and Conditions and Financial Arrangements') to the successful applicant. Applicants must sign and return the formal offer letter to the INFORM Hub Manager before any work commences on the Project.

The Award Holder shall invoice the University of Reading (UoR) quarterly in arrears based on actual expenditure against specified budget headings. UoR shall pay the awardee within thirty (30) days of a valid invoice, subject always to receipt of funds and subject to the satisfactory completion by the awardee of any due diligence checks as may be reasonably required by the Awarding Institution or BBSRC.

The final invoice should be sent to Reading within one (1) month of the end of the Project with the addition of a cost statement (a template will be provided). The cost statement should include the breakdown of the indexed fEC figures and the actual sums claimed.

The awardee should submit a final expenditure claim within **one month of the Project ending** as part

of the Project Completion Report (a template will be provided).

## 8.    What reporting will be required?

The awardee should submit a Project Completion Report (authorised by the industrial partner for use in the public domain), including a final expenditure statement (authorised by the academic organisation), within **one month of the project ending**.  All reporting documentation should be sent to the INFORM Hub Manager (INFORMHub@reading.ac.uk).

Briefly, the Project Completion report includes:
1. Summary of project outcomes
2. List of outputs, e.g., papers, patents, new products or processes, prizes, collaborations
3. Testimonial(s) ideally from the industrial partner(s)
4. Image(s) (with legend(s)) related to the science carried out
5. Technology Readiness Level (TRL) for research pre- and post-funding (see BBSRC definition of TRLs)
6. Future plans
7. Financial expenditure statement and evidence (a template will be provided).

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

The awardee should acknowledge the support of the BBSRC award on papers and other forms of media communications, including press releases, conferences and media appearances.

The awardee will act as an ambassador for the science area represented by the INFORM Hub and the wider UK Industrial Biotechnology and Bioenergy sector by attending and contributing to events within relevant areas at the request of BBSRC.

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

## 9.    What data protection and data sharing policies are in place?

Please read the INFORM Hub Privacy Notice before completing an application form.

Contact the Network Manager: INFORMHub@reading.ac.uk if you have any questions.

Copies of proposals will be made available to the INFORM Hub Management Committee in confidence.

The administrative staff of the University of Reading will use the information provided in the application for processing the proposal, the award of any consequential funding, and the payment, maintenance and review of the BIVs.

To meet BBSRC obligations for public accountability and dissemination of information, details of grants (including successful BIV 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 the transfer of funds, statistical analysis in relation to the evaluation of BBSRC OIRC Hubs, and study of trends and policy and strategy studies.

## 10. Who do I contact if I have any questions?

If you have any questions regarding the application process, please get in touch with Fiona Lee, the Hub Manager:

f.l.lee@reading.ac.uk or INFORMHub@Reading.ac.uk