The Water Discovery Challenge – Entry Clinic

16/03/2023

Key:

CP = Caecilie Hougaard Pedersen

EP = Elettra Pellanda

AG = Arlene Goode

RJ = Rose Jolly

CW = Caroline Wadsworth

MH = Marc Hannis

CP: Welcome everyone. We're just giving a minute for everybody to join, and then we will get started.

Okay, so I think we will get started just while everybody is still joining. We'll get us kicked off, so welcome everyone. We are very excited to be back online with you today, we're gonna recap on, kind of, all of the information about the Water Discovery Challenge, which is still open for entries. But we are due to close in three weeks on the 5th April. So feel free to introduce yourselves, where you're joining from, your organisation in the chat, so that everyone can get to know each other.

I also wanna do a big welcome to all of our speakers, thanks for being here today, and I will let all of you introduce yourselves in order. So, starting with myself, my name is Caecilie, and I am joining from Challenge Works, which is one of the delivery partners on the Ofwat Innovation Fund. And we are, kind of, leading on the delivery of the Water Discovery Challenge, and I'll hand over to you, Arlene.

AG: Thanks, Caecilie. Hi, I'm Arlene Goode and I'm from ARUP, also working with Caecilie as part of the Delivery Team. Associate Director, I run our Innovation Advisory Team and have many years of experience in the water sector. So welcome to the session. Rose?

RJ: Hi everyone, so I'm Rose Jolly and I work in the Innovation Team at Severn Trent and I've been in the water sector for 10 years now, I'm really passionate to get involved in this.

CW: Hi, everybody, I'm Caroline Wadsworth. I'm Head of Strategic Partnerships at Isle Utilities. We're one of the delivery partners in the team that are delivering the challenge. We've worked very closely with our partners at Challenge Works and ARUP to develop and design and deliver the programme, and I'm really looking forward to seeing all of the entries that we receive.

EP: Hi, everyone. My name is Elettra, I'm also one of the Delivery Team. I work at Challenge Works and for the Innovation fund, I specifically look at our outreach activities.

CP: Great. Thank you, everyone. So just before we get started, just a little bit of housekeeping. So, and if you have any issues during the webinar feel free to use the chat. We have a team there that's ready to help you and they're also going to be sharing lots of relevant, kind of, materials and links throughout the presentation, so do keep an eye on the chat.

At the end of the webinar, we will have plenty of time for a live Q&A.

So we will be using the platform Slido, the platform is live already, so you can use the QR code that you can see on the screen or you can use the link that is being posted in the chat and add any questions that you might have. You can also add questions, sorry, during the Q&A as well as during the presentation, and we're going to address them, kind of, like on a first come first basis, and we hope to get through all of them. But if you have any questions at the end of the webinar that is still unanswered then do feel free to email them directly through to us, and we can address them that way.

If your question is for a particular speaker then do add that in your question and then we can, kind of, ask them directly on the Q&A. But otherwise, we will open your question up to our full panel.

So, what are we going to cover today? So today is a little bit of a recap on everything on the Water Discovery Challenge and getting you, kind of, ready to submit a strong entry. So we are going to cover like a recap and an introduction into the Water Discovery Challenge, the aims for the challenge and the, kind of, full innovative journey.

We are then going to continue to, kind of, put a spotlight on the various aspects of the challenge. So the first stop is, kind of, looking at the financial award and the non-financial support. Looking at the, kind of, sector led mentoring package.

That will then be followed by a quick spotlight into our eligibility and assessment criteria, and then looking at the actual entry process, and then we will finish off with plenty of time for our live Q&A.

So we will get us kicked off, kind of, like looking at the aims and the themes of the challenge and the innovative journey, so I'll jump straight in with the next slide.

There we go, perfect.

So we need a water system that works for all, so Ofwat launched the Innovation Fund as a pilot back in November 2020 and throughout the, kind of, pilot period delivered three big competitions that were particularly, kind of, focused on water companies directly.

So the fund very much aims to grow the water sector's capacity to innovate by enabling it to, kind of, better meet the needs of customers, society, and the environment. And following on from the review of the pilot period and an open consultation Ofwat announced the launch of this new 4 million open challenge that would support early stage innovation and be open to entries from anyone, with no requirement for organisations to partner with the water company to enter. And that's how the Water Discovery Challenge was then launched.

So we are looking for fresh solutions to urgent challenges, so bold innovations, bold solutions that can really help solve some of the biggest challenges that are facing the water sector today and also in the future. And we are very much welcoming entries from any sector and any type of organisation, we want to really draw on the knowledge from other sectors. So there are lots of sectors, energy, cities and transport, construction, agriculture, digital data, and a lot of these sectors are facing very, very similar challenges, and we want to draw on the innovative thinking and the solution from these sectors to, kind of, accelerate solutions within the water sector.

Let's change the slide.

Great. Yes, so discovery very much aims to accelerate that discovery, the development and the adoption of innovations by the water sector. So we aim to very much achieve this by directly supporting organisations who have these innovative solutions and then facilitate their engagement with water companies, so innovators from outside the sectors, organisations that haven't worked in the water sector before. So we want to bring together a real blend of financial and non-financial support that will support the entrance and the innovators to, kind of, launch and succeed within the water sector in England and Wales.

So very much since the fund's launch, all entries to the fund competition have had to align with one or more of the Ofwat innovation themes which are very much intended to, kind of, highlight all of the key areas where innovative thinking is really needed within the water sector.

So for the Water Discovery Challenge as well any solution and entry should very much align with one or more of the themes, meaning that your entry should support the sector in, kind of, responding and adapting to climate change.

They should protect and enhance the environment and the natural systems. They should very much look to deliver long term operational resilience for the sector and/ or entries should be testing new ways of conducting core activities. So we very much recognise that for a lot of entrants to the Water Discovery Challenge that a lot more detail on these areas of innovations are very welcome.

And Ofwat and the water companies have worked really closely together to, kind of, provide additional guidance on these areas of where innovation is particularly welcome.

It's this guidance is in no way, kind of, meant to distinguish between the importance of these different innovation areas, but it's just an additional support for organisations outside the water sector to get a bit more information on what the sector is particularly looking for. So if you are really interested and you are looking to see if your entry is connecting with some of these innovation themes then do have a look in the Innovator Handbook, in there as well as in the annexe to that handbook you'll find lots more information of how the water sector have, kind of, mapped out key challenges and opportunity areas for innovation.

I think...great. I can just see that the link has just been popped in the chat, so that's perfect. So you can find that handbook directly in the chat now.

And then just very much before I will hand over to Arlene and Rose for the very first spotlight, just very quickly talking through like the overview of the full innovative journey if you are successful in your entry. So, as we mentioned when we launched the webinar, we are closing on the 5th April at 12 o'clock noon.

That's 12 o'clock noon, I think it's British summer time at that point, right, so on the 5th April. So just be aware of that. And then we will select up to 20 finalists, which will be announced at the end of June, early July, and these entries will then enter what is called the finalist stage, which runs from July until the end of November with an award of up to 50,000, and then a five month package of support which will include, kind of, some support to produce your development plan for submissions along with the, kind of, sector led mentoring programme.

Finalists are required to submit a development plan, which is kind of like an updated entry form in November, and then the selection of winners is based on the submission of the development plan and a lot more details on that will be provided directly to finalists once those are selected in June.

Then we have up to 10 winners selected, which will be announced in February 2024 and these 10 entries will then enter what is called the winner stage, which will run from February to August in 2024, with an award of up to 450,000. And then a continued package of support, including continued mentoring and support and the acceleration and development of their solution.

And it's just worth mentioning, I guess, just very quickly that finalists and winners will be kind of, like, asked to meet some reasonable kind of monitoring and reporting requirements, so that we can just keep track of what is being developed, how a solution is being accelerated, and what kind of solutions are coming out of the challenge. But again, a lot more information will be provided directly to finalists once we have those selected in June.

And I think with all of that, that was a very quick kind of run through, but I will pause, and then I will hand over to Arlene, who will take us through the next spotlight. And any questions on anything that has been shared so far pop it in the Slido and we will pick it up in the Q&A.

Thank you.

AG: Thanks, Caecilie. So and that leading, I think, what you've just provided there is very useful. So let's have a look at what you can win, just building a little bit on what Caecilie said there. So in the Water Discovery Challenge, as she said, there will be two entry stages where you can win up to £500,000 and it's split between the finalist awards, where £50,000 will be awarded, and a winner's award for up to £450,000 will be awarded. Up to 20 finalists will be awarded that £50,000 as initial funding to develop the innovation or innovative solution, and this will also be assisted by a range of expert support and access to mentoring from water companies, which is really, really useful. And the purpose of that award is to develop the entry solution and any funds requested from that must be committed by the start of the winner stage in June 2023 to January '24. It's gonna be paid in advance as a single lump sum payment in pounds.

The challenge can cover 100% of the project development cost, but we're also open to initiatives that have secured funding externally, whether it's private or public, provided that there's no duplication of existing fund awards. So at the finalist stage funds can be used to fund any reasonable costs related to developing the innovation, including labour and working through suppliers and any direct costs, including within overheads.

We would not expect finalists at this stage to fund unspecified overhead costs, except for where these are supplier charges. But that is all defined within the entry documents.

Following that and following the development of that first £50,000 stage, a finalist may then seek additional funding during the winner stage, where Ofwat will award up to an additional £450,000 to up to 10 winners.

Finalists and winners will also receive that non-financial support, accelerating the development of their solution and increasing the potential for adoption which Rose is just going to touch on now. Thank you, Rose.

RJ: Great. Thanks, Arlene.

So I'm just going to touch a little bit more on the mentorship side of the programme. So it's fair to say that Ofwat has worked really closely with the water companies throughout the process of designing the discovery challenge, and one of the key parts of what will come out in terms of support, for anyone who is a finalist or a winner, is strengthening and accelerating your development through mentorship. So each of the finalists and each of the winners will be given mentoring from water companies, water or waste companies.

And in terms of what we'll offer is that mentoring, you'll be given the space, support and guidance, insights into the water sector, feedback on your innovation and also giving you an idea of what demand there would be within the water industry. So we're not just representing our own companies, what we're interested in is, actually, what do we see in the water sector and where the opportunities are for you. And as part of that we do sign posting, so if there's relevant and technical experts that can support you into developing that, whether it's within our own company or wider and also outside of the water companies within the water sector generally, we will help to do some of that sign posting for you.

And then in terms of the actual hours that are dedicated to mentoring, so in terms of finalist stage, you'll be allocated a mentor at random, but they'll be giving you up to 20 hours of support, so that'll be a split across two mentors giving you 20 hours of support at the finalist stage.

And then for those that are successful as winners you'll then be given an additional 20 hours of mentoring. But at that stage it will be a matched mentor, so we'll look at the strengths of your product and what you're looking to get out of it in terms of the mentor, and I won't sorry, but in terms of Ofwat and the discovery challenge you'll then be mapped to a water company based on what you're looking for in that mentoring

CW: Super. Thanks, Rose. We'll now move into the next spotlight, which is looking specifically at the entry form eligibility and the assessment criteria.

So next slide please.

So just to reiterate what Caecilie said at the beginning of this presentation, we are looking for innovations of any kind and from any sector, any type of organisation, and from anywhere in the world. In particular, we're looking for innovations that have the potential to have a positive impact towards customers, society and the environment and that align to one or more of the four innovation themes that's Caecilie mentioned earlier as well. So the innovative solutions could be anything from a technology or a digital solution to a process or people focused and can include ideas from concept proofing, testing, early feasibility studies, development, and verification within the water sector.

We therefore have specific focus on solutions that are around the equivalent maturity level of two to three. Or if you're more familiar with the term TRL, or technology readiness level of three to six, and more details of those can be found in the Innovation Handbook that's already been shared in the chat.

But please do note that whilst the ideas can be from anywhere, to be eligible to enter organisations entering must be a UK incorporated entity. You must hold a UK business bank account upon entering, and not be a regional water or waste water company in England or Wales.

Next slide please.

So the entry form itself is made up of four different types of questions. There's the eligibility criteria that I've just run through, and they are there just to determine that you are indeed eligible.

Then there's a section on unassessed questions, and these questions are used to allow us to manage your entry and support the portfolio level decision making and to enable monitoring and evaluation of the challenges as we progress through, and to also help us to create publications and announcement materials if your entry is successful.

We then have the assessed questions section and the first questions in the assess section are to collect general information about the entry that you're submitting, and will provide some context for the assessors, the sector reviewers and the judges without being directly scored against the assessment criteria.

The final part is then they assessed questions or the assessment criteria specific questions. These are the questions that are assessed against the assessment criteria by a group of technical assessors and judges, and I'll provide some more information on all of these questions specifically over the next few slides.

For anybody wishing to have a look through the entry form before completing the online version there is a PDF available on the website, and hopefully a link will be dropped into the chat in a minute, so you can have a look at that, download it and see what's required. But please do note that the entries must be submitted via the online submission form via the Submittable platform.

So before submitting your entry, please ensure you do meet those eligibility criteria, hopefully, then you will move on and find the rest of the entry form straightforward.

So I've already mentioned the eligibility criteria a few times, and they're shown again on this slide, it's really we can't reiterate enough how much you must make sure you meet these criteria. And again, reiterating that we do welcome all of the entries from all of the sectors around from anywhere around the world; so long as you meet those eligibility criteria.

And just to provide some clarity around what we mean by UK incorporated entity, this includes any private limited company, a limited liability partnership, or an incorporated territory, and a company. Sorry. A community interest company which is incorporated in part of the United Kingdom.

It's important to note that sole traders and unincorporated partnerships are excluded from that criteria. But if you're in any doubts about your incorporated status, please do check with the delivery team, and you can do that by emailing via the email address that will pop into the chat in a minute, but also note subsidiary of international organisations are welcome to enter so long as they have a UK registered arm and have a UK business bank account.

If you're from a university, most universities in the UK are incorporated charities or incorporated by the Royal Charter and are therefore eligible to answer. But again, we really strongly advise you to check with your institution directly as to their

incorporation status, as they themselves will know the specifics from a legal perspective.

Touching on partnerships that was mentioned earlier, entering organisations are welcome to form partnerships and supply relationships to support you through this process, but please note you must not be in a formal partnership or collaboration with a water company in England or Wales if you are planning to submit an entry into the competition.

And whilst partnerships with entities other than the English and Welsh water companies are allowed, there's certainly not an entry requirement, you can enter this as a single entity.

If you are successful in reaching the finalist stage of the competition and receive the funding the funds received through the discovery challenge should not be paid towards companies during the final stage as a partnership or a supplier agreement. And this is because the regional water companies in England and Wales will play an important role, as Rose has already described, in supporting the delivery of the challenge by providing that mentoring approach.

If you are already collaborating with a water company you might want to consider entering the fourth round of the water breakthrough challenge instead, this opens in September 2023. And please check out our website to see more details of that.

Next slide please.

Great. So, moving onto the assessment criteria.

All eligible entries will be assessed against each of the assessment criteria that I'll run through now, more details of all of these can be found on the website and in the Innovator Handbook.

If you haven't done so already we do strongly recommend that all entrants view the entrance support webinar series that we've created. All of those are now available as videos on the website, but also do please read through the Innovator Handbook.

So from your entry form the assessors will be looking to understand whether your innovation addresses a relevant need for the water sector in England and Wales. Whether your innovation has the potential to deliver positive benefit for customers, society and the environment, and whether the innovation has the potential to deliver impact against one or more of the Ofwat innovation themes that Caecilie introduced.

So this slide shows the first assessment criteria, which is positive impact towards customers, society and the environment. And this is worth 40% of the total marks available.

Under this assessment criteria we're looking to understand the benefits and innovation seats to deliver for customers, society and the environment, and we ask entrants to describe what kind of impact they envision their initiative could have, and why that impact is important. So specifically we'll be looking to understand whether the

innovation does address a relevant need in the water sector in England and Wales. Whether the innovation has the potential to deliver the positive benefit, and whether the innovation has the potential to deliver impact against one or more of the Ofwat innovation themes.

A strong entry at this point should be able to explain how their proposition addresses a need or opportunity within the water sector, and what kind of impact it would have.

Next slide please.

So the second assessment criteria is focused on innovation enablers and innovation solutions, and this is worth 20% of the total marks available.

Under this assessment category we're looking to understand what is novel about the proposed innovation, and how this differs from business as usual approach currently adopted by the water companies in England and Wales.

We're asking entrants at this point to explain what is innovative about the initiative, both in terms of the innovation itself, but also about any new or different ways of working which are really the innovation enablers that we're trying to draw out.

So specifically we're looking to understand is the innovation new for the water sector in England and Wales? And is it better than what the current alternatives are that are already available?

So, just to summarise that the entrant should be able to explain how the initiative is new, and how it's innovative within the water sector in England and Wales; and this could include experimentation with new solutions or approaches, adapting an existing innovation and practices from another sector, or applying a proven approach that hasn't yet been tried at scale.

And really we want those proposed solutions to draw inspiration and/or take talent from other sectors and areas that we've not yet seen within the water sector.

So the third assessment criteria focuses on capacity, capability, and commitment to deliver. And again is worth a further 20% of the total score.

Under this assessment category we're looking to understand if the entry team is likely to be able to deliver what they've actually outlined in the entry. So we're asking entrants to describe their commitments and outline the teams, roles, and responsibilities, and clearly set out why their experience and expertise will support the successful delivery of the entry.

The assessors will be looking to understand the delivery teams' experience, skills and capability, the timeline and delivery plan envisioned by the team, and how the team will spend the funds awarded should they be successful.

Next slide.

Super. So the final assessment criteria is ability to succeed, to be sustainable and/or gain wide adoption across the water sector. And this, again, is worth 20% of the total marks available.

So under this assessment criteria or category, we are looking to understand the innovations, feasibility and viability within the water sector of England and Wales, as well as the risks and challenges to the entry that are foreseen by the team at that point in time.

So we're asking entrants to describe their vision of how their innovation could be applied at scale across the water sector in the future. And specifically, we're looking to understand whether the innovation is likely to be feasible and viable, is the innovation technically possible? And does it have the potential to be financially sustainable in the longer term and whether the innovation has the potential to be widely adopted across the water sector in England and Wales?

So overall the entries should demonstrate at this point that they have considered potential opportunities and challenges along with any anticipated risks, outlining mitigation measures, while also identifying areas of support required, aligned with their scale of ambitions and associated risks.

So that is a whistle stop tour through the assessment criteria, and I will now hand over to Elettra, who will take you through the next slides. Thank you.

EP: Thank you, Caroline. So today I'm guiding you through the entry process, so what we actually need to do in order to enter.

Once you are ready to enter, you just need to head directly over to our online entry platform, Submittable. In Submittable you can work on your entry and save it as a draft, so that's useful to have. You can also work on your entry offline if you prefer. But it's really important that you ensure you submit on Submittable by the 5th April, at 12:00 noon.

If there are any reasonable adjustments that would support you to enter, we are committed to enabling a diverse range of entries, so do let us know by emailing us and we will try and make the best we can do to support you.

In terms of the support available we have been delivering this discovery webinar series that has covered a variety and a wide range of topics, so that you can have the foundational understanding that you need to understand the water sector and the opportunities it holds for innovation.

So, as you can see on the screen, we have ranged from opportunities for innovation to delivering for customers and the challenges of climate change, and many more. All of those webinars have been recorded and the materials are available on the website in our past events page on the website.

And alongside that, as Caroline has mentioned before, we also had downloadable versions of the entry materials, including the Innovator Handbook, the entry form

questions and the FAQs. So links will be shared in the chat, so you can go in and have a look at those.

And today, of course, we've got this entry clinic where we're running through the whole process for entering and the innovator journey, and we're now going very quickly to move to the next slide so that we can head to the Q&A in a short time.

So in terms of what's happening after you have submitted your entry on the 5th April we will go through an eligibility screening to ensure that your entry meets the eligibility criteria. Once that's complete, we're then going into the assessment period, so all of the eligible entries will be reviewed by assessors against each of the four assessment criteria.

In the case we have a big number of entries, the entries that are assessed to perform poorly against the first assessment criteria, so, for the benefits for society, customers and the environment, may not be assessed against the other criteria.

Then we'll have moderation, and a short list of the entries that are determined to be the best meeting the assessment criteria will progress to the next stage, which is the sector review.

In sector review, a short list of the entries will be reviewed by the reviewers who are representatives of the regional water companies in England and Wales, and they will be looking at answering the three questions that you see on screen in the speech bubble.

In answering these they will try to respond either yes, no, or I'm not sure, and they will also provide a written rationale, and in that same time period we might get in touch with you, so check your inbox frequently as we carry out due diligence on your entry and organisation.

Once that's complete, we are going to go to Ofwat for the decision on who the finalists will be. So while the scoring will be part of the process, of course, in making the decision Ofwat will also consider the opinion of the sector reviewers, and it will seek to ensure that we have a diverse portfolio of entries in terms of the themes that are covered, the solution types, entrants and also geographic location.

And Ofwat will also publish their decision and its reasons for awarding funding while, of course, taking into account the preferences that you have expressed in relation to confidentiality.

Once the decision is made, we will get in touch with all of the entrants to let you know if you have been successful in reaching the finalist page by the end of June 2023, and we will also make a public announcement.

Successful entrants will also receive a finalist award agreement that you must sign before you can progress to the finalist stage.

And once the announcement has been made, we will also get in touch again with all of the unsuccessful entrants, providing standardised feedback that will outline why you have not been successful at this time.

So after this run through, we are now going to jump into our Q&A. Just before we do that I will ask Laura to please launch the poll, so please do take 30 seconds to tell us if you have found this presentation useful. And now I will just ask everyone, the panellists, to come back on screen and join me for the Q&A.

And for this part of the session we also are joined by Marc. So you've met all of the other speakers already today, but Marc, if you want to give a quick hello and introduce yourself to the audience?

MH: Yeah, hi, everybody. My name is Marc Hannis and I oversee the Innovation Fund from Ofwat's perspective.

So if it's a specific question you might have on Ofwat and why we're doing this, how we're managing it, etc. please do put my name and put to those questions when you put them on Slido. Otherwise, I will chip in when required. Thank you.

EP: Thank you very much. So I think we can start with a first question that has come from Slido. The link has been shared in the chat. But yeah, do keep on asking your questions there, I can see the Slido is already quite busy. The first question that we've had is something I will speak to Caecilie how much of a detailed budget is expected at this stage?

CP: Yes, okay, I'll take that one, the first one that came in. So we are not at the, kind of, entry point now. We're not expecting a very detailed budget. Ofwat's very much recognising the, kind of, need for some no strings attached kind of funding at this very early stage.

So for the up to 50,000 for the finalists, initial entry, we're not looking for a massively detailed budget, we are looking for entrants to outline what they are intending to use the funding for. So I think it's question 3.1 in the entry forum on the kind of criteria three where we're asking them how they intend to use the funding provided at the finalist stage, only looking at the up to 50,000. So there's 300 words available for that one. So it's a very brief description. But some thinking on how you intend to use it, and how it will benefit your entry is needed. But we're not looking for like an elaborate spreadsheet that, kind of, outlines all of the spend.

EP: Thanks, Caecilie. We also have a question about how do they need to? Sorry. Let me rephrase that. The question is, do we need a fully defined and output in this application?

We know our aims. We know what methods we will use, but we want to use the finalist stage to refine the output. Is that okay?

Caecilie would like to chip in on this one.

CP: Yes, I can. I can chip in on that one as well. No, a fully defined output is indeed not needed at the stage. You know the aims, you know the methods, but the finalist stage is very much a space for you to be working with the sector on, kind of, refining your solution and getting it ready, testing if it's viable, working with the sector on kind of accelerating that solution.

So no, no kind of final output is needed. But again, going back to the entry form, Caroline, you might remember it exactly off the top of your head, but in the section for assessment criteria four, we do ask entrants to, kind of, look at beyond the competition. What is the long term, kind of, ambition of the solution and how is it viable, kind of, long term within the sector? So we're asking that in the assessment criteria. But it is looking at, like, what's your thinking at this stage? Being very aware that that this entrant might not be that familiar with the water sector.

So it's not to say that you're not allowed to pivot, or you're not allowed to slightly adapt the application or the solution, that is what the final stage is for.   Caroline, feel free to jump in if there's additional things to add.

CW: I think you covered everything perfectly there, Caecilie. I think, just to reiterate that we're not anticipating that the solutions that will come forward at this early stage will be perfectly formed, with very clear routes to market and clearer end applications. That's the whole purpose of this challenge is to help grow and define those end outputs in collaboration with a number of different experts across the sector to help you accelerate that process. So yeah, just to reiterate that this it's about learning and refining as you go through.

EP: Thanks both. We had a question from a water company, as a water company and sewage company can we support the wording of an application?

They are not part of the entry, they want to specify that, but want to know if they can be supporting the wording? Caecilie, do you want to chip in on this one?

CP: I can jump in very quickly, Caroline. Again, I'll hand over to you from an assessor's perspective. Yeah, yes. The answer is like, yes, you can be supportive if you're not in a formal partnership. It's not necessarily like recommended I would say, like, if you are receiving direct support from a water or water sewerage company it makes that company ineligible in terms of their sector reviewer. So it will limit the kind of reviewers that will be able to look at your entry and kind of make the process quite complicated.

So obviously, sector reviewers are there's a strict kind of conflict of interest and confidentiality clauses in the agreements that we have with sector reviewers. So if you are receiving support they would have to notify us of that, and then they wouldn't be able to review the entry once it is submitted.

But if you're not in a formal partnership there isn't any, like, direct kind of rule to say that they're not allowed to look at it, it just makes them ineligible to review or work with the entry throughout the challenge. Caroline, feel free to, and Marc as well, feel free to jump in if there's more.

CW: Nothing really to add from my side other than just the conflict of interest issue is the key concern from an assessment perspective and we've designed this whole challenge to be robust and fair. So at the heart of all of those decisions that we're making, we have to be very aware, and ensure that the governance of those conflicts of interest is firmly in place.

So that is a key consideration for us, and I think my advice would be to think very carefully about what benefits you gain from engaging in that level of discussion at this stage.

MH: Yeah. And I'll just chip in from an Ofwat perspective, I think what's been described is absolutely right, I think our preference would be that there isn't that role taken by the water companies. If that's avoidable, please avoid it, because as described it does complicate things and makes the process a little trickier to work through for all parties.

EP: Thank you, Marc. And just for everyone's awareness, we have just relaunched the poll now because it was a technical hiccup when we launched it the first time, so please do take five seconds to answer those questions. And in the meantime we will continue with the next one for academic spinout, is it possible to apply as the university if a spinout is not yet a registered company? Caecilie, I will bring this to you again.

CP: These are some convoluted questions.

Yes, but it means that if your academic institution or your university is entering then the entrant would be the university, and not you. Then the university might partner with you, and you're delivering it, but we deal with the person who is entering and the person or the organisation that is entering needs to be eligible. So if that is the university, then our direct relationship would sit with the university, and not necessarily with this kind of spinout that hasn't yet become registered.

It becomes a little bit convoluted that way, and I wouldn't necessarily recommend it, but it's not completely excluded. I will, however, say that registering as a company in the UK is not a very difficult process. So if you have, kind of, left and you are a spinout, and you are looking to incorporate, doing that ahead of submitting your entry would be easier and a more straightforward solution than applying via a university, and then being a subcontractor to the actual entrant.

EP: Thank you. There is also a question about the confidentiality of the information shared in the entry, so can they share it confidentially for information in their entry form?

CP: Yes. I'm assuming that was pinged over to me again. So yes, entry forms are confidential, there's also an option to say in your entry if you consider your answers confidential, or whether they are a free to a kind of freedom of information request. But assessors who are looking at it, sector reviewers, delivery team, Ofwat, there are kind of strict confidentiality clauses in all of their agreements so there's no real risk in, kind of, sharing confidential information on your solution in your entry form.

EP: Great. Marc, the next one is for you. Are there any restrictions on what the funds can be spent on? For example, salary, consumables, travel costs, external validation services, and so on.

MH: Not particularly. So we've had this question before as well, and things like overheads have been covered, and what we're interested to use this money for is just as described really, advancing your solution, the thing that you're trying to develop. So that there'll be a whole range of costs that are associated with that.

And without going into war and peace, we will want you to just give some sense of what those costs are going to be like but there are no restrictions per se put on what you spend this on.

EP: Thank you. And there is another one that you might want to respond to. Are these protected by NDAs from being adopted by water companies without a bid submitter?

MH: Well, I think Caecilie just mentioned that everyone who signs up to the process signs confidentiality agreements, and so we are hoping that everyone who intends to enter will be protected through that means.

Obviously, there are the early stage of this competition which then advance to latter stages there partnerships between water companies and the innovators will develop and they will increase, and they'll be strengthened, and there will be opportunities then for potentially the innovators to discuss the future arrangements around the solution that they're developing. So in those early stages, certainly, and you can. Basically, it is within your gift as to what extent you want to share your information with these parties, but they are bound by confidentiality agreements. Yeah. So I think that answers it.

EP: Thank you very much. We had a question about getting examples of answers to the questions to see what format we want. I would suggest that you have a look at the Innovator Handbook and the entry guidance available there because we will have examples of what we want to see in terms of what a strong entry looks like. So it's not about the format, but really the content of your entry and how it aligns with the assessment criteria. So do take a look at the assessment criteria in the Innovator Handbook.

Next question. Questions 0.5, 0.6 and 0.7 have unlimited word count, these are the questions that are not assessed but still visible to assessors. Any advice, any guidelines on how to respond to these questions? Caroline, you'd like to take this one?

CW: Yeah, it's a good question. And I think the best answer here is we're not looking for war and peace, this is about setting the context and allowing the assessors and the judges to understand your current starting position and thinking and thought process. So it's providing sufficient information to provide that context.

But this application form shouldn't be overburdened, so the idea is that this is a relatively quick process for you to go through in terms of writing the actual entry form.

So if you're finding that you're spending hours and hours writing a response to these three questions you are probably going into too much detail.

These are elements of the entry that we will anticipate to mature and change as you're going through the process anyway, as you learn more about the water sector, and who the end uses and where the end uses of your innovation could be. So specifically, those questions or the responses to them may change as you go through.

Beyond that, Caecilie, I don't know if you want to add anything else, but there's not really much more guidance I can provide other than not war and peace, but please do set context.

CP: Yes, no, it's echoing that. And just also take a look at the guidance that is provided, because there's is very explicit guidance provided for each simple question, for each individual question. So if there is no word count that's because we don't want to restrict, or we don't want to set an expectation for how much should be submitted because it just depends on where you're at and what your knowledge level is at this stage. But there is a very clear, specific kind of guidance on what it is that we're looking for in the answer.

EP: Thanks both. We also have another question on asking for advice on the entry form. This one in particular is about images that are part of the entry, any advice on what images they should upload? Caecilie?

CP: Yeah. So you can attach, kind of, an image or diagram that's relevant to your entry. Again, there is very clear kind of guidance on each place in terms of like what it is that we're looking for, so it can be you can, kind of, reference it in your answers to the questions but the diagram or the image itself will have minimum text. There should be no kind of narrative text in that one, any kind of additional text that you are putting in there won't be reviewed by assessors or judges, so you cannot use the image to enhance your answer in a certain way where you provide the 300 words in one answer, and then you add another 300 to a slide that you then upload, that kind of text will not be reviewed by the assessors. So it will, kind of, be mute for you to upload that.

But it could be organograms or visuals of your solution, or anything that might kind of enhance or provide clarification to an assessor would be something that you could upload, but nothing that's kind of additional to what's already being said in the answer. So supporting the answer that you've already done, not adding anything new, I think is probably the right guidance. Caroline?

CW: Yeah, I totally agree. And I think actually, if you read going through the Innovators Handbook there's clear descriptions of the kind of things that we're looking for at each of those opportunities to upload an image, so follow the guidance.

EP: Thank you both. So we've had a question that I'm going to combine two questions together here. We had a question about collaboration and partnership, so the question is, do we need to have collaborators in our proposal? And can we use the finalist stage to identify collaborators?

There's also a question that asks if small and medium enterprises can be sub-contractors of the main applicants. So I kind of, yeah, I think that these two could be answered jointly. Caroline, do you want to give us a start on this one?

CW: Yeah, sure. So in terms of do we need to have collaborators? The answer is, no, you can enter this as a single entity.

Where you do decide you want to form some form of partnership or collaborator think through what benefits they're bringing, how are they helping you to be more sustainable or viable? Or how are they going to help you deliver with the relevant expertise?

But bear in mind that that partner or collaborator cannot be a water company from England or Wales.

What's the second part? That can other SMEs be subcontractors of the main applicant? Yes, you can have sub-contractors. There will be one main entrance, and that as Caecilie mentioned earlier, is the organisation that we will as a delivery team deal with. What you do then subsequently is up to you to determine, and that goes back to what Marc was saying in terms of the initial up to £50,000 that's awarded because there aren't really any ties or strings attached to that money in terms of how you spend it, if you choose to spend that on a sub contract so that will help you accelerate the development of your solution, then that is permissible within this programme.

Caecilie, I don't know if you want to add anything to that?

CP: No, I think that covers it all.

EP: Thank you. And one more for you, Caroline, about the TRL. Is there a desired TRL level that entrants need to be at or reach?

CW: Yeah. So as I mentioned in the slides, the sweet spot as such as TRL 3 – 6, but we wouldn't dismiss entries either side of that. In terms of where you need to reach through this programme that's far harder to determine and I think, actually, this is just about achieving a realistic acceleration to say that we wanted a submission to go from TRL3 to TRL6, as an example, is an impossibility and is not to be expected. We want to see progress through those development steps not tied to a specific TRL or maturity level. Hopefully, if that answers the question.

EP: Thank you. I was just looking to see if, yeah, Caecilie, did you want to add anything on this? Oh, good. Okay. So we're gonna go to the next one, I will ping this one to Rose first, and then maybe Arlene and Caroline you are welcome to chip in as well. So, in addition to mentoring for water companies will technical advice and expertise be offered by other delivery partners?

RJ: Yes, I think it depends on what the make of that project is and who those other partners are. So I can probably only really answer on behalf of water companies and say that mentorship can definitely include technical expertise and can certainly put you in contact with a technical expert that can help to guide you in terms of does your product match what we're looking for in terms of our problems that we need solutions

for? Or if it doesn't, why not? And give you that constructive feedback to say what needs to be different to help it work as a solution.

I think in terms of all the partners in the water companies, I don't know, Arlene, if you want to pick up that up or someone else?

AG: Yeah, thanks, Rose. Yeah. So we recognise and want to try and help accelerate the development of some of these solutions that come through. So we are looking at the moment about what that could look like in terms of non-financial support; that will be defined at the sort of finalists on boarding stage.

EP: Thanks, Arlene. I might ping the next one to you again and to Caroline, so who completes the initial assessment before applications are sent for sector review and decision by Ofwat? So is it the people from the delivery partner organisation? Maybe, Caroline, do you want to start giving an answer here? And Arlene can chip in if useful?

CW: Yeah. Sure. So the assesses are a group of technical experts who have a long standing within the various technical areas and thematic areas that we're hoping to address within the challenge. And they come from across the delivery partner teams, and they're all independent and not involved in the development or delivery of any of the actual entries themselves.

Arlene, I don't know if you want to add anything?

AG: No, I think that's it, thanks.

EP: Thank you. The next question is maybe, for Caecilie or Marc to address. If we need a site to install and pilot an innovation, do we need to have this agreed in advance with a water company, or this will this be part of the support?

MH: Shall I go first, Caecilie? No, you don't need to have that organised in advance with the water company, this is exactly the reason why we're inviting these sort of entrants at this stage, and why the water companies we hope will play such a central role in this. And I think as you progress through the finalist stage, if you're lucky to get that far, that's when we will start having conversations about what your, sort of, winners stage submission will look like. The, sort of, requirements that you might have at that stage, and that will inform some of the partnering up that may take place in that timeframe too. So yeah, don't need to have worked on that at this point, plenty of time to work that up through the process.

EP: Thanks, Marc. And Caecilie, did you want to add anything to this one?

CP: No conscious of time, so I think that covered it all.

EP: Perfect. The next one. Actually, I might ping to you and also Rose feel free to chip in if you want to give a water company perspective. But if the water company has agreed to host a pilot, is this considered established partnership under this call?

CP: Well, unless there is like a formal partnership agreement in place then nothing is really considered a formal partnership. I will, however, say that if a water company has already, kind of, agreed to host the pilot it's likely that, obviously, they would have a

deep insight into the project already making them, kind of, ineligible at least for sector reviews and selection. It also means that the need for this entrant to go through discovery might be mute, because they already have an in. They're already working with the water company. They're already excelling their solution, kind of, outside the challenge. So I think it might be really worse for this entrant to, kind of, consider what is it that they're gonna, like, gain and need from the discovery challenge if they're already, kind of, in a…if not a formal partnership, but in some kind of, like, agreement in terms of who is going to accelerate their solution.

RJ: Yeah, I mean, I think just to add from a water company perspective, and can only really base that answer on Severn Trent's process at the moment, but if we were in the process of going through a trial with you we would be entering a collaboration agreement as part of that. So I think, just based on that, you wouldn't be probably looking to go into the discovery fund for the same project, because you'd already be going through a legal process with us to have a collaboration agreement.

EP: Precisely. Thank you both. So the next question is, the application form seems to focus a lot on phase one, basically, the finalist stage. How do you recommend that we best communicate longer term solutions and plan, Caecilie?

CP: Thank you. Yeah. Sorry, Caroline, I'll ping it back over to you. I have my hand up for this one. So some questions will focus very specifically on phase one. For instance, exactly like the question was like, how are you planning to spend this 50,000, potential 50,000, which is in in criteria three? But criteria four, for instance, does specifically ask the questions about, like, what is your ambition for the innovation kind of within the water sector? What's your plan for achieving this ambition?

So it is looking at following the success of the delivery of the entry throughout the challenge, like, what is your ambition kind of long term? Describe like what, kind of, risks you've seen, the support that you think that you'll need, so criteria four is very much looking a lot more long term on the overall ambition, and what your plan is for achieving that. Caroline?

CW: I think you've answered that perfectly. I think the only thing I would add is that this is, obviously, the first phase application form. It is an application or an entry form, should I say, for the finalist stage, once the final stage has been completed and you enter the development plan process to become a winner you have the opportunity to refine your thinking, and those longer term plans and ambitions. And we hope that the five month development period for the finalists will help inform you of where those endpoints are.

So, whilst we want to see that you have an appreciation and ambitions that are realistic already, they will change during that process, I'm sure. And then the opportunity comes then at the development plan phase to refine those plans and re-articulate where you want to be and how you plan to get there.

EP: Thanks, Caroline and I'm conscious we've just reached 1:00 pm, so I think we're going to stop the Q&A here for now. But if any of your questions haven't been answered

feel free to email us at waterinnovation@challengeworks.org and we'll try and make the best and answer all of the questions that have been unanswered.

The session has been recorded, so there will be a recording available by early next week. And yeah, all of the other recordings from previous webinars are already on the website, so we do recommend you go and check those out to get a good understanding of the water sector and its various areas of work.

I'll hand over to Caecilie for the last minute words. But yeah, thank you very much everyone for joining.

CP: Yeah, no, I think everything has been covered. I think there's just maybe like two things just to make a note of that I've noticed in some of these questions, and that is like obviously to be aware that in the entry form what the assessors and the sector reviewers will look at is the actual answers that are in there, typed in there. So don't put in, like, links to your website, links to videos, social media links, unless we are specifically asking for links, because the entry form does not facilitate that. An assessor cannot click on a link and watch a half an hour video, and then assess your entry on that. So you have to fill in the entry form as it is on Submittable.

And I think, like, secondly, just to note that we are trying to capture all of the questions that have come in on Slido across the various webinars, we are capturing those, and we're currently putting together a bit of a document where we'll try and answer all the questions in written form. And we'll make those available on the entrant support page on the website as well. We'll try and cover those in a supporting document as well.

And just a massive thank you to all of the speakers and all of the people who have joined. And thank you very much, I think that's it for today.