

Catalyst stream

Version 1, 8 September 2025



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Introduction

About this handbook

Welcome to the Entrant Handbook for the Catalyst stream of the sixth round of the Water Breakthrough Challenge (**Breakthrough 6**). This document, alongside the [terms and conditions](#), will provide you with all the information you need to enter the Catalyst stream of Breakthrough 6. (Information about the Transform stream can be found in the [Transform stream Entrant Handbook](#)). This handbook includes the following information:

- background to the Ofwat Innovation Fund ('the Fund'), including Breakthrough 6;
- information about the Catalyst stream, who can enter and how;
- what is required to take part in the Catalyst stream; and
- what support is on offer for entrants to the Catalyst stream.

All entrants should read this handbook along with the full [terms and conditions](#), which are the rules entrants are required to agree to before entering the Catalyst stream.

We have also created a list of [frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#), highlighting information from this handbook and other resources to answer the most commonly asked questions about the Fund and previous Breakthrough rounds. If you have read the handbook and the FAQs and have more questions, please contact the team at waterinnovation@challengeworks.org.

To aid entrants who have entered previous rounds of Breakthrough, we have highlighted in green any material changes to this entrant handbook since the previous round (excluding dates).

Ofwat Innovation Fund overview

Ofwat, the Water Services Regulation Authority for England and Wales, has established a £600 million Innovation Fund to grow the water sector's capacity to innovate, enabling it to better meet the evolving needs of customers, communities and the environment. Since its launch, the fund has awarded over £190 million to 109 projects involving almost 300 partners, including water companies, universities, environmental charities, local governments, civil society organisations and other utilities.

In July 2025, Ofwat published its third annual report, reflecting on the progress of the Fund to date and their ambitions for the future. You can download this report from the [Fund's website](#).

The Water Breakthrough Challenge is an integral part of the Fund. Through this competition, we aim to support ambitious water company¹ initiatives that demonstrate bold new

¹ In this document, reference to a 'water company' means a water and/or sewerage undertaker or infrastructure provider holding an appointment under Chapter 1, Part 2 of the Water Industry Act 1991.

approaches to innovation, going beyond the sector's business-as-usual innovation practices, and that can create significant value for customers, communities, and the environment.

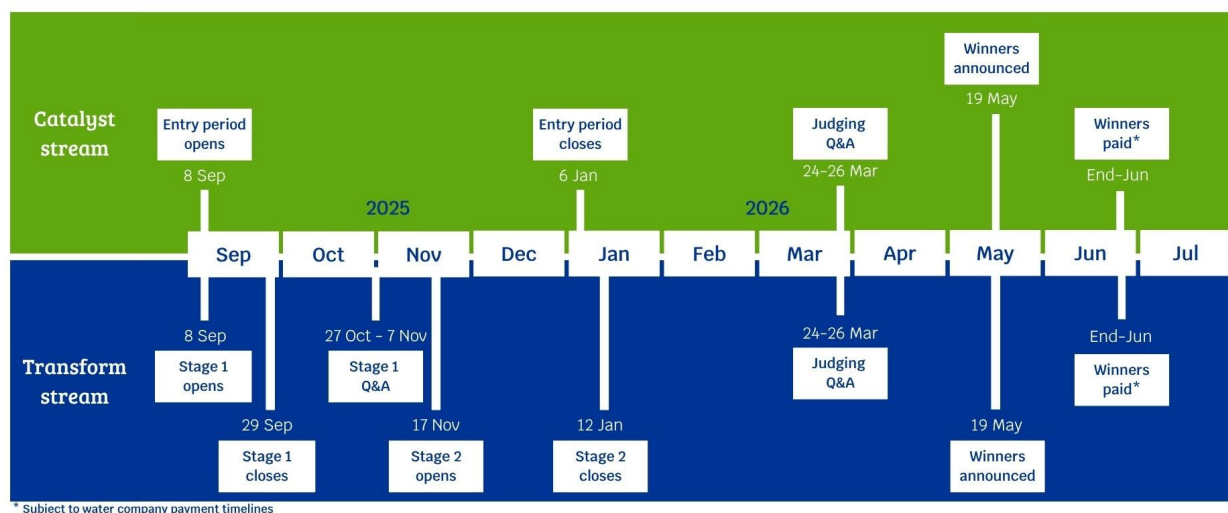
The sixth round of the Water Breakthrough Challenge (Breakthrough 6) comprises two streams: Catalyst and Transform. Approximately £50 million in funding is available across the two streams.

The **Catalyst stream** will award [innovative](#) water company-led entries between £150,000 and £2 million per entry through a single-stage entry process. Solutions can be of any level of development, provided they are innovative. Due to its smaller funding amounts, the Catalyst stream can provide a pathway to test early-stage innovations, developing their value proposition before seeking further funding elsewhere (for example, future rounds of the Transform stream).

The **Transform stream** will award [innovative](#) water company-led entries between £2 million and £10 million per entry through a two-stage entry process. While the Fund welcomes a range of innovation stages, entries to the Transform Stream should be at a stage of development where the concept is supported by evidence and progressing toward real-world application. Very early-stage concepts with high levels of uncertainty or limited testing may be better suited to the Catalyst Stream. If successful, such entries are welcome to seek further funding through future rounds of the Transform Stream².

If you are a water company or are working in partnership with a water company, the amount of funding you seek should determine which stream of Breakthrough 6 you enter.

An outline of the timeline for Breakthrough 6 is shown below:



For more information on the Fund, please visit [our website](#).

² Subject to certain conditions, Ofwat is open to accepting entries bidding for greater than £10 million. Please see [Entry Requirements](#) section for more details.

Breakthrough 6 delivery partners

The Fund is being delivered collaboratively by Ofwat together with Challenge Works, supported by Arup and Isle.



Ofwat, the Water Services Regulation Authority for England and Wales, launched the Ofwat Innovation Fund in 2020. Ofwat is a non-ministerial government department established in 1989, when the water and sewerage industry in England and Wales was privatised. Ofwat regulates the water sector in England and Wales. [Read more about Ofwat's duties on their website.](#)



At [Challenge Works](#), we design and run challenge prizes to spark innovation in science, technology and society. Challenge prizes offer a series of incentives in return for solving a defined challenge - creating breakthrough innovations, helping innovators thrive and unlocking systemic change. Since 2012, we've run over 100 prizes, awarding more than £250m to global innovators. We partner with governments, philanthropists and businesses to deliver high-impact competitions focused on frontier tech, climate, cities, health and international development. As innovation experts, we combine research, lived experience and sector insights to create real-world change. Challenge Works is part of Nesta, the UK's innovation agency for social good.



Dedicated to sustainable development, [Arup](#) is a collective of designers, consultants and experts working globally. Founded to be humane and excellent, we collaborate with our clients and partners using imagination, technology, and rigour to shape a better world.

Together we help our clients solve their most complex challenges – turning exciting ideas into tangible reality as we strive to find a better way and shape a better world. With a community of over 1800 water professionals, Arup is leading global thinking across key areas like innovation, resilience, net zero carbon and sustainable water management.



[Isle](#) are a global consultancy, partnering across the water system to accelerate the water environmental transition.

Our [services](#) and [platforms](#) help de-risk the development, commercialization, and adoption of technologies, creating value and accelerating innovative solutions.

About the Catalyst stream

The **Catalyst stream** will award [innovative](#) water company-led entries between £150,000 and £2 million per entry through a single-stage entry process. Solutions can be of any level of development, provided they are innovative. Due to its smaller funding amounts, the Catalyst stream can provide a pathway to test early-stage innovations, developing their value proposition before seeking further funding elsewhere (for example, future rounds of the Transform stream).

Timeline & key dates

The Catalyst stream of Breakthrough 6 uses a single-stage entry process, illustrated in the figure below.



The Catalyst stream opens on **8 September 2025 at 12 noon (BST)** and will close on **6 January 2026 at 12 noon (GMT)**.

Following the closing date on 6 January 2026, entries will be checked for eligibility and assessed.

A diverse portfolio of entries that best meet the relevant [assessment criteria](#) (detailed in [Entry questions, assessment criteria, weighting, and guidance](#) below) will be shortlisted and shared with the judging panel for review.

A single, unified judging panel will review entries to the Catalyst and Transform streams. This increases visibility across the streams and ensures a streamlined approach to portfolio recommendations based on gaps in the market and various levels of innovation risk.

The judging panel will convene in late March 2026. Shortlisted entries will be invited to a live Q&A session with the judges during the judging days. Please note that entrants will not be requested to pitch to the judges during these sessions.

The judging panel will recommend to Ofwat a diverse portfolio of entries for funding that they consider best meets the relevant assessment criteria and have the potential to deliver tangible positive benefits for customers, communities, and the environment. Ofwat will then make the final decision on whether to award funding.

Further details on the selection process can be found in the [Entry Process](#) section below. If you are successful in winning funding, you can expect to be notified by late April 2026.

What you can win

In this round, individual entries to the Catalyst stream can bid for funding between £150,000 and £2 million.

As such, we expect to receive entries into the competition with a total financial cost of from £165,000 to approximately £2.2 million, inclusive of the 10% mandatory financial contribution (see [Entry requirements](#) for more detail below).

Intellectual property rights (IPR)

To receive funding from Breakthrough 6, you must agree to the IPR conditions within the [terms and conditions](#).

The terms and conditions set out the default position on IPR and also provide an opportunity for entrants to propose alternative IPR arrangements. In respect of either of the options, you will be required to answer questions on your IPR proposals.

Default IPR Position

For the purpose of the default position on IPR, the terms and conditions differentiate between general background IPR and specific background IPR.

Specific background IPR is background IPR which has been specifically identified in the entry and is such background IPR that may be licenced on terms including a royalty and/or other appropriate forms of remuneration.

We recognise that specific background IPR may require adjustment during the delivery of your entry, and therefore, the terms and conditions allow for the possibility of later designation at Ofwat's discretion.

General background IPR is any and all background IPR that is not specific background IPR. In your entry, you will be asked to set out how this arrangement will not result in restricted benefits to customers of water companies and to confirm that, ultimately, any additional costs to customers in respect of charges for the use of background IPR will represent value for money for customers.

In all instances, you must set out how and why you consider that the proposal or the process by which you may charge future users is fair, reasonable, and non-discriminatory. We recognise that it may be more difficult to provide this information for initiatives that are at an early stage of development. Where this is the case, you should clearly state what information you can and cannot provide at the point of submitting your entry and why.

More details are set out in [section D of the unassessed entry questions](#) below.

Alternative IPR Proposals

In setting out alternative IPR arrangements, you must be able to meet the following conditions:

1. The entry will not result in restricted benefits to all customers of water companies; and
2. Demonstrably, the alternative arrangements will not result in additional costs to customers.

Ofwat will consider on a case-by-case basis whether these conditions have been met.

Regarding all options available, you will be required to answer questions on your IPR proposals. We may seek further clarification on these proposals following the submission of your entry.

Sharing knowledge and foreground IP

Alongside questions on IPR arrangements, entrants will be asked to provide additional information about the knowledge and intellectual property they expect to develop through their project, and how they will share this with the wider water sector. **We strongly encourage entrants to consider how they will capture and share critical knowledge** and ensure benefits/learnings can be widely and rapidly accessed and digested by other innovators and practitioners.

Entry requirements

There are four eligibility criteria in the Catalyst stream of Breakthrough 6, detailed below:

- Lead entrant
- Funding requested
- Financial requirements; and
- Terms and conditions

Lead entrant

The lead entrant to Breakthrough 6 must be [an appointed 'Water Company' \(a water and/or sewerage undertaker or infrastructure provider\)](#) (i.e. Tideway) in England and Wales.

We strongly encourage lead entrants to enter Breakthrough 6 in partnership or consortia.

For the Catalyst stream, partners other than the lead entrant can submit the entry form on Submittable.

Funding requested

The minimum amount of funding that can be requested from the Catalyst stream is £150,000, and the maximum that can be requested is £2 million.

Financial requirements

A maximum of 90% of each entry's financial costs will be provided by funding from Breakthrough 6. Entry partners must provide the remaining 10% of the entry's total financial costs as a mandatory 10% financial contribution.

In Breakthrough 6, we continue to look for further granularity in the financial information provided. Entrants need to specify the source of funds for their contributions in the entry form, divided between:

- The amount of financial contributions entry partners are committing from sources other than charges to water company customers.
- Any amount of financial contributions entry partners are committing from charges to water customers. There is no requirement for entries to include additional financial contributions from charges to water customers. However, if any such contributions are included, entrants should specify this in the entry form.

We do not consider that customers should bear all the risk of initiatives funded through the competition and believe this encourages strong project management. **Entry partners can decide how the 10% contribution is funded, as long as it is not funded by charges to water customers in England and Wales** (i.e. it must be from the organisation's own funds). There is

no requirement for this contribution to be shared equally between partners. Entry partners may also consider how they could bring funding from other sources.

We welcome any additional financial and/or non-financial contributions beyond the minimum 10% and have seen many entries do this in previous rounds. Non-financial contributions should be excluded from the total financial cost of the entry.

We are open to initiatives that have secured additional external public or private funding. Entrants must confirm that there is no duplicative or double funding and that they are not restricted by their current funding source when applying for additional and alternative funding through this Fund.

Terms and conditions

All entry partners must agree to abide by the [terms and conditions](#).

What we are looking for

Areas for innovation

We are looking for your ideas that address the big challenges facing the water sector. We aim to fund a wide range of entries that will showcase a diverse mix of innovative ways of working and solutions and deliver benefits to customers, communities and the environment.

We also invite entries which can enable and accelerate further innovation in the water sector. These kinds of initiatives will support the Fund's ambition to embed innovation practices and knowledge within water companies, and the broader sector, for the long term.

We have identified a number of innovation enablers that will be particularly critical to growing and sustaining the water sector's capacity to innovate. The Fund will consider supporting initiatives that demonstrate and further strengthen these enablers, including but not limited to:

- **Collaboration:** building and strengthening collaboration and partnerships across companies, the supply chain and outside the water sector.
- **Openness:** to sharing data, insights, and ideas within the water sector and with other sectors. All projects supported by the Fund should use an “open by default” approach to data and learning.
- **Adaptability:** flexibility and openness to trying out new ways of working.
- **Innovation risk management:** delivering value from all innovation projects, particularly more experimental projects, even if they fail.
- **Scalability & deployability:** improving the ease of scaling up and rolling out of proven innovations within the sector.
- **Long-term view:** taking both a longer-term and broader perspective to better meet the evolving needs of customers, communities, and the environment.

Characteristics of entries

Benefits to customers

One of the priorities for Ofwat's Innovation Fund is enabling the water sector to better meet the evolving needs of its customers. This is focused on **household customers** because the Fund is financed by household water and wastewater customers in England and Wales.

Benefits to non-household customers are also encouraged. **All entries that propose primarily to benefit non-household customers must also demonstrate how the proposal can benefit household customers.** Entries should clearly explain how the proposed innovation will make a difference for customers – for example, by lowering costs, giving them insights to help them plan their water use, or improving their experience of their local water environments.

Entry delivery timelines

We are open to a wide range of project delivery timelines, from less than a year to multi-year periods that continue beyond 2031. There is no requirement for project delivery to be completed within the current asset management plan (AMP) period.

We expect entries to the Catalyst stream that are awarded funding to start within six months of being notified of the award. However, we recognise that particularly complex entries may require a longer mobilisation period.

Based on past winners' experience and feedback, **we strongly encourage entrants to consider the following points in advance of the project start to avoid delays** if the entry is successful:

- Ensuring you've agreed on how the project will be governed, and the role of each partner.
- Ensuring you have started discussing contractual arrangements with partners, including developing collaboration agreements and allowing sufficient time in the project plan for these to be completed (if they aren't already in place).
- Considering your procurement needs and possible supply chain delays
- Considering any regulatory requirements: you may wish to reach out to [StreamLine](#), **the regulatory advice service for innovators in England and Wales**, run jointly by Ofwat, the Drinking Water Inspectorate and the Environment Agency. Early-stage innovations should have a clear plan in place for how they would engage regulators should they be successful. We would expect a greater degree of compliance planning for more developed innovations, including, for example, engaging regulators as partners in entries that require regulatory change to succeed.
- Considering resourcing requirements for each stage of the project, with mitigations in place for any changes.

Approach to risk

We are seeking truly innovative solutions that deliver greater value than current practices in the sector; advance the water sector's understanding; and could not otherwise be funded (see [our definition of innovation](#) for more information). We encourage water companies to adopt an open risk appetite within their Fund entries, supported by strong risk management with a clear plan to share data and learning, regardless of the outcome. We recognise that some projects may not deliver the expected direct benefits, but by taking proportionally mitigated risks and sharing learning across the water sector in a regular, timely and accessible manner, customers will stand to benefit.

Further detail about the Fund-level risk principles can be found [on our website](#) but for Breakthrough 6 entrants should demonstrate that they are able to recognise and respond appropriately to issues and opportunities as they arise. This may include:

- Making decisions about how to adjust delivery if the initial benefits can no longer be realised.
- Demonstrating strong project management with robust controls (e.g. appropriate contingency and inflation budgets; environmental risk assessments; capable teams, including senior engagement; clear project plans).

- Adopting an approach of ‘early failure’.
- Having a clear plan to proactively manage compliance and regulation including engaging with the relevant regulators.
- Thinking widely about possible benefits from their initiative, beyond the project’s intended outcomes.
- Including solid success criteria in the project scope, allowing understanding of what they are testing and why, and how they will know if they have succeeded or not (and what happens if not).
- Considering how learning and insights from the delivery of their initiative can best provide value across the sector, with a clear pathway towards successful implementation and wider scaling, both internally (amongst the lead and partner water companies) and externally (amongst the rest of the water companies and wider sector stakeholders where applicable).

We actively encourage entrants whose projects move across several innovation stages to use stage gates as part of their governance plans to mitigate innovation risks. This is an established approach to innovation and project management. Entrants will be responsible for managing delivery against milestones and adapting delivery to realise the intended impact most efficiently and effectively, with the support of Ofwat and the Breakthrough 6 delivery partners. Please note we are unable to offer partial funding, so the decision to fund or not fund is made against the entire entry.

Monitoring and risk management

Entrants will be asked to provide information on their approach to risk in their entry. Entrants will be responsible for:

- Managing delivery and reviewing progress against milestones.
- Adapting delivery to realise the intended impact most efficiently and effectively.
- Sharing significant changes to delivery with Ofwat and its delivery partners.

Ofwat and its delivery partners will monitor the progress of successful entries, including seeking updates at delivery milestones. The monitoring and involvement of Ofwat and its delivery partners will be proportionate to the size and risk of initiatives. In all cases, winning entrants will be responsible for reviewing progress and deciding the best course of action for their entry to deliver its intended impact.

In exceptional circumstances, Ofwat and its delivery partners may intervene if we have concerns that a project is moving materially away from delivering on its intended impact or if there are any concerns about misuse of funds.

Entry value and delivery costs

Entrants to the Catalyst stream can bid for between £150,000 and £2 million.

We expect entries to demonstrate cost efficiency and good use of customer money, with a clear case for any costs included in the budget.

Reasonable costs are eligible to be funded, including dedicated staff time and fair associated overheads.

The budget, set out in the entry form, should include inflation allowances and applicable taxes, which are not recoverable, reflecting the actual costs of the initiative. Where taxes are fully recoverable, such as VAT, costs should be shown net of the recoverable amount. Taxes that are not recoverable should be included, for example, customs duties payable on goods imported into the UK.

Dissemination

One of the key drivers of the Ofwat Innovation Fund is not just funding innovation, but disseminating knowledge. This includes knowledge about what has worked, but also what has not. The Fund is not only keen to hear what happened **but why**, and expects projects we fund to share these learnings in a **timely manner**, and regularly throughout the project. This is an important pathway to enabling innovations to be developed further and eventually implemented; but also to ensure that even where an innovation has been proven unsuccessful, benefits are still realised.

Entries that provided strong answers in the Breakthrough 5 competition for **knowledge dissemination** demonstrated a comprehensive, thoughtful approach. They provided concrete details on how they would share intellectual property (IP), such as by granting royalty-free licenses to partners or making certain elements of their work **open source**. These entries also showcased a clear, proactive strategy for **stakeholder engagement**, involving a wide range of partners from water companies to regulators and academics from the project's inception. They outlined a clear roadmap of **specific communication channels** to be used, including workshops, webinars, industry journals, and dedicated project websites, often with a robust budget allocated for these activities. The most successful entries prioritised making project results and data "widely available" through transparent and well-defined methods.

Senior sponsorship of the entry and innovation

In 3.1.1 (Catalyst and Transform Stage 2) we ask about the senior sponsors and leaders involved from the lead water company and partner organisations and their engagement and investment in the entry.

Entries that provided strong answers in Breakthrough 5 for this question included named senior sponsors, with **relevant experience**, from a **broad range of partners**. The involvement of these senior sponsors was outlined, with strong evidence of their **level of commitment**, clear responsibilities and detail of their **sustained involvement** in the project. Strong entries recognised potential challenges like personnel changes and mitigated these, ensuring continuity in leadership and participation.

Partnerships and collaboration

We particularly encourage entries that involve partnerships and collaboration between water companies, including Small water and sewerage undertakers and infrastructure providers (i.e. Tideway), as well as with organisations in the water sector supply chain and beyond.

- **If you are a water company, including Small water and sewerage undertakers and infrastructure providers (i.e. Tideway):** you are strongly encouraged to explore opportunities for new partnerships and consortia, including by signalling opportunities for partnerships on your website and social media channels. You can

partner with any organisation you wish, domestic or international, including other water companies, supply chain partners, new start-ups, SMEs, academia, local authorities, water companies outside of England and Wales, and water supply and/or sewerage retailers. Please note that it is your responsibility to carry out any checks and due diligence on partners.

- **If you are not a water company:** Breakthrough 6 is an opportunity to reach out to one or more water companies to explore the possibility of working together. If you are new to the water sector, you may wish to contact [Spring, the water sector's centre of excellence for innovation](#). In particular, we recommend you read [the water sector's innovation strategy](#) before contacting water companies to understand their innovation priorities.

Collaboration agreement template

Where relevant, entries that are successful will need to develop agreements with partners (commonly referred to as 'collaboration agreements'). The Fund does not require the use of any particular template for collaboration agreements. However, should you wish to refer to an example, you can consider the one available via [the website](#). It is suggested that the collaboration agreement is shared between partners even before it is known if the project has been successful. This will aid the development of collaboration agreements in advance of the project start (which is strongly recommended) to avoid delays if the entry is successful.

Note: The example collaboration agreement linked above is a cross-water company effort between the legal and innovation teams of water companies including Anglian Water, Thames Water, United Utilities, Severn Trent, Affinity Water, Welsh Water, Northumbrian Water and Southern Water. This agreement is flexible and therefore it is a basis for early discussion between water companies and other project partners. It may be adapted over time. The Ofwat Innovation Fund and any of the above organisations cannot provide any legal support or advice, nor be legally liable, in the event of any issues relating to a project's collaboration agreement.

Entering the Catalyst stream

This section will outline everything you need to enter into the Catalyst stream of Breakthrough 6, including:

- The entry process
- Reasonable adjustments and accommodations
- Entry questions, assessment criteria, weighting, and guidance:
 - Eligibility criteria
 - Unassessed questions
 - Assessed questions.

For a timeline of the Catalyst stream, please refer to the [Timeline & key dates](#) section above.

The entry process

Winning entries will be selected following the assessment process outlined below. We have worked to ensure the entry process is as efficient and practical as possible, allowing for easy access for all water companies, particularly smaller ones.

Information you provide in your entry may be shared with our partners (including the judges and any due diligence providers) to administer Breakthrough 6. For more information on how we use your data, please see the [privacy policy](#) and the [terms and conditions](#).

The steps of the entry process, detailed below, are:

- A. Entry period
- B. Eligibility screen
- C. Assessment
- D. Judging, including live Q&A
- E. Ofwat Decision
- F. Award
- G. Feedback

A. Entry period

The Catalyst stream opens for entries on **8 September 2025** at 12 noon (BST) and closes on **6 January 2026** at 12 noon (GMT).

Changes to the entry form

Based on feedback from the previous round, we have updated the entry form to improve entrant experience and improve the gathering of information about entries to aid assessors and judges in their decision making. The main changes to the entry form are detailed below.

Terminology change: In order to align with Ofwat's terminology, going forward entries will need to demonstrate how they benefit 'customers, communities and the environment' (a change from 'customers, society and the environment')

Updates to entry questions and criteria

Entry form guidance has been updated and the flow of the questions has been strengthened based on feedback from previous rounds, to enable smoother completion of the form.

Unassessed Questions

Further guidance has been included on responsibilities of the main contact to ensure that the right person is chosen for this role.

Columns have been added to the partner contacts template to gather information on whether partners count as a Small and Medium Sized Enterprise, and whether they are a UK

Incorporated Entity. Guidance has been added to the entry form to support this. This data is for reporting use only and has no bearing on the assessment of the entry.

Assessed Questions

You can now upload pitch decks separately from the main submission, and the guidance on providing visuals has been made clearer.

Assessed Criteria

Criterion 1: A new question 1.2.2 has been added about the intended outputs of the entry (see definitions below). The strategic themes have been removed, and the associated criterion has been eliminated. Due to these changes, the word count for this criterion has increased by 50 words.

Criterion 2: A new sub-criterion (2.2) now focuses on how the lead entrant and their partners plan to develop and implement the innovation, separate from its wider adoption in the water sector. Because of this and some other minor changes to questions, the word count for this criterion has increased by 600 words.

Criterion 3: The guidance for 3.1 has been updated to clarify what is being assessed, with additional guidance about this included in this handbook under the section [Senior sponsorship of the entry and innovation](#). A question around plans for dissemination has been moved from 3.2 into 2.3. A word count has now been added to question 3.5.1. As a result of these changes and some other minor changes to questions in this criterion, the word counts have increased slightly by 100 words.

Criteria Weighting

Although the above changes have not resulted in a change to the weighting across the main criteria 1, 2 and 3. there are changes to the weighting of some of the sub-criteria. Please review the criteria weighting carefully when completing your entry.

Inputs, Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts

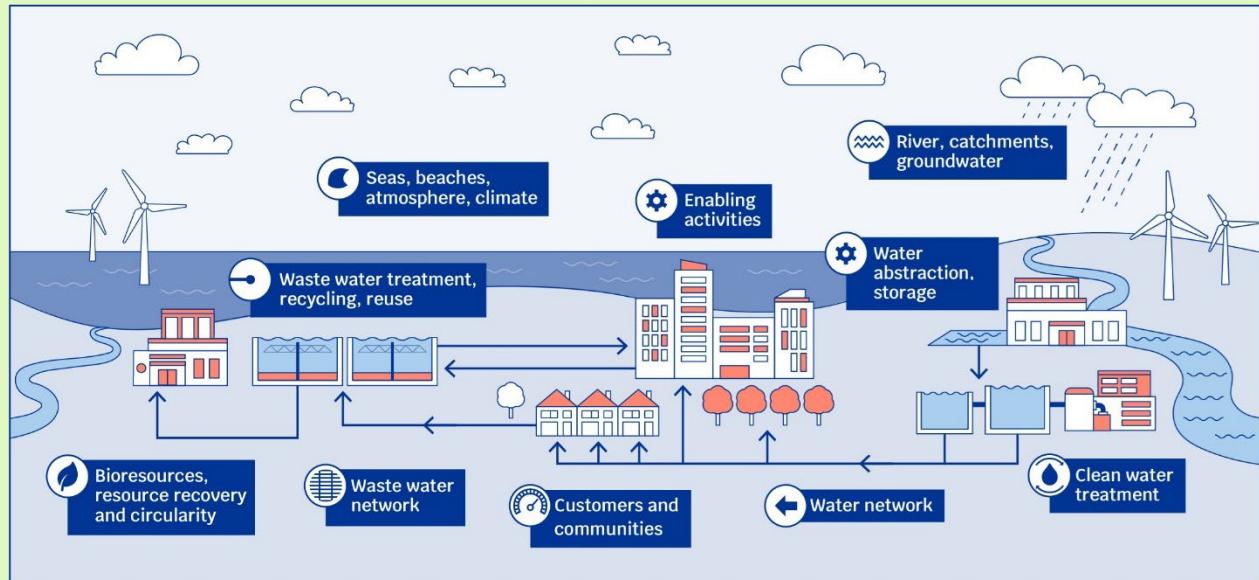
This round, the entry form makes more mention of these, and their definitions are as follows:

- **Inputs** The resources required to achieve the project objectives (this includes programme, expenditure and costs, risks, including any approvals and consents required, and project partners).
- **Outputs** The direct result of the activity, e.g. technological progress, or increased knowledge (this includes lessons learnt and any changes in approach)
- **Outcomes** The changes or benefits that result, generally to the direct beneficiaries of the project e.g. benefits to the environment resulting from the innovation (these are different for each project and will be based on the SMART outcomes included in the original entry)
- **Impact** The final, wider changes that result from the programme (these are different for each project and will be based on the impacts included in the original entry)

This is to bring the terminology more in that with that used in the monitoring of successful entries.

Water cycle tags

Water Cycle Tags refer to specific parts of the water cycle. These have been updated in this round and you can see more information about them in this diagram:



We set out the questions that should be answered, along with guidance on completing the entry process in [Entry questions, assessment criteria, weighting, and guidance](#) below.

All entries must be submitted by **6 January 2026 at 12 noon (GMT)** using the Catalyst online entry form available [via the website](#). Any entry partner can submit this form, but it must include the details of the lead entrant. The lead entrant will be asked to verify the entry is theirs and confirm they have accepted the terms and conditions during the eligibility screen.

The entry form is available as a Word document (Entry drafting form) along with the entry template (budget) as an Excel document via [the website](#) to help you develop and collaborate on your answers before completing the online form.

If entrants wish to work on more than one draft on the online entry platform during the entry period, please contact waterinnovation@challengeworks.org for assistance.

Before submitting your entry, please ensure that:

- You and your partners have read and understood the Challenge [terms and conditions](#) and [privacy policy](#), including the [Ofwat privacy policy](#).
- You have followed good procurement principles, performed your due diligence on your partners and accepted any risk and liability from going ahead with them.
- You and your entry partners have set out in your entry how a 10% minimum financial contribution will be provided for (at least 10% of total entry financial costs will be funded from sources other than the Fund).

Pitch recordings

All entrants to the Catalyst stream are required to book a slot to record a 3-minute pitch video. The purpose of the pitch recording is to provide a video explainer to help assessors and judges quickly understand your entry.

Pitches should outline:

- The problem the entry aims to address and what benefits it will have for customers, communities and/or the environment if successful (around 25% of the pitch)
- What about the entry is innovative (around 25% of the pitch)
- What entrants intend to do within their entry, focusing on activities that will be undertaken (around 50% of the pitch)

B. Eligibility screen

Entrants must meet the eligibility criteria set out in the [Entry requirements](#) section.

When entries close, an eligibility screen will be conducted to ensure entries meet all the eligibility criteria.

C. Assessment

All eligible entries will be assessed by assessors against each of the following three assessment criteria categories:

1. Positive impact for water customers, communities, and the environment.
2. Innovation enablers and innovative solutions.
3. Capacity, capability, and commitment to deliver.

Assessors will be matched to entries relevant to their area of expertise.

Scoring will be between 1 and 5 (5 being the highest). These scores are then weighted. The assessed entry questions, assessment criteria and weighting are set out in the [Entry questions, assessment criteria, weighting, and guidance](#) section below.

A moderation meeting will be held to discuss and recommend shortlisted entries to put forward to judges. This moderation meeting will ensure that all assessors' opinions have been captured and that a consistent view on the merits of each entry is provided.

Whilst scoring will form part of this process, in making its decision on whether to put forward an entry to judges, Ofwat will also consider the opinions of the assessors and will seek to ensure a diverse portfolio of entries in terms of entry themes, types, entrants and geographic location.

Please note that **the booking window is from 17 November to 18 December 2025. Slots are available from 18 November to 18 December 2025.** Please [book a slot via Calendly](#).

To promote equity, diversity and inclusion and reduce any potential bias in the entry process, we will continue to exclude speaker videos in pitch recordings for Breakthrough 6. Entrants are asked to present slides or other visuals whilst talking.

Drinking Water Inspectorate involvement

Entries that align with the Water Cycle tags Water abstraction & storage, Clean water treatment, or Water network (as selected by entrants in the entry form) may be referred to the Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) for additional review. Entries that do not select these categories but still relate to drinking water may be flagged by assessors for DWI review. DWI's views may in turn be provided to judges and Ofwat to aid their decision-making. All funding decisions will be made in accordance with the published assessment criteria.

Water Cycle Tags refer to specific parts of the water cycle. These have been updated in this round and you can see more information about them in [this diagram](#).

Environment Agency involvement

Environment Agency involvement

Building on the work we have done with the DWI in Breakthrough 5, entries in Breakthrough 6 may be passed to the Environment Agency for review. This is to allow the Fund to make informed funding decisions and to ensure policy coherence. The Environment Agency's views may in turn be provided to judges and Ofwat to aid their decision-making. All funding decisions will be made in accordance with the published assessment criteria.

D. Judging

An independent panel of judges will review the shortlisted entries put forward through the assessment. The judging panel will review the entries individually, scoring the entries using the same criteria as the assessors. The judging panel will then convene to discuss entries and recommend to Ofwat which entries they agree best meet the assessment criteria and offer a diverse portfolio for funding.

Breakthrough 6 will continue to offer the opportunity of a **live Q&A session** for the entrants to respond to judges' questions as part of the entry process. Please note entrants will not be requested to pitch to the judges. Questions will not be provided to entry teams in advance to enable a more dynamic conversation.

Judges will ask questions relating to shortlisted entries during the judging days **between 9 am and 5.30 pm (GMT) on 24, 25 or 26 March 2026**. Q&A slots will be allocated to shortlisted entries no later than 11 March 2026, but where possible, we will endeavour to provide as much notice as possible.

If teams are not able to attend the live Q&A, they should notify the delivery partners at waterinnovation@challengeworks.org as soon as possible, for a chance to answer the judges' questions in writing. No other opportunities for questions and answers will be provided, with the exception of clarifying conflicting entry answers.

Contacting Judges

Please note that entrants should not get in touch with Judges directly, as this may be seen as attempting to undermine the competitive process.

E. Ofwat Decision

Ofwat will make the final decision on which entries should receive funding. In making its decision, Ofwat will consider the views of assessors and judges on which entries best meet the assessment criteria and offer a diverse portfolio for funding.

Ofwat intends to publish this decision and its reasons for awarding funding. Ofwat will take account of entrants' preferences regarding the confidentiality of their entries.

F. Award

Entries should expect to be notified if they have been awarded funding by late April 2026.

Winner's Agreement

When notified, successful entries will receive a copy of their draft winner's agreement. This winner's agreement will be based on the standard template available via [the website](#). Please note that this template is only provided for information purposes and may be subject to changes. Winning teams must sign these agreements no later than **5 pm (GMT) on 15 May 2026** to be paid by late June 2026.

A **winners' onboarding event will be held online on 9 June 2026, 1-3 pm (GMT)**.

Further information and a joining link will be shared with winning entries in the weeks ahead of the event.

G. Feedback

After winners have been announced, feedback will be provided to the main contacts and lead entrants who did not win funding, outlining why their entry was unsuccessful.

Feedback will be provided on each entry, in line with the assessment criteria and, where relevant, provide guidance on areas of improvement. The feedback will not include scores provided by the assessors and the judging panel. As mentioned above, scoring forms only a part of the overall assessment process.

Feedback will not be provided to winning entries.

Entry questions, assessment criteria, weighting, and guidance

There are three types of entry questions in the entry form:

- **Eligibility criteria** – These are questions that will be used to determine eligibility.
- **Unassessed questions** – These questions will be used to manage your entry, support portfolio decision-making, enable monitoring and evaluation of the Challenge and create publications and announcement materials if your entry is successful.

Unassessed questions are visible to assessors and judges, but they are not subject to scoring.

- **Assessed questions**

- **General information** – This section provides general information about the entry. Assessors and judges will review the answers to these questions but not score them against the assessment criteria.
- **Assessment criteria questions** – This section provides detailed information about the entry against the assessment criteria. Assessors and judges will assess answers to this section against the assessment criteria.

As part of criterion 3, you will be asked to complete the Entry template [LINK](#) and this will form a significant and important part of your entry. You are advised to read the guidance in each Tab of the spreadsheet, and to refer to the Checks tab (which does some basic checks and offers you a manual checklist for the Funding questions in section C of the Entry form). Tab C – Budget Detail is designed to help assessors and judges to understand and assess the entry. You are advised to provide clarifying information in the description column, especially where there are large sums attributed to budget items. You can then provide further information in questions 3.4.3 of the Entry form.

Eligibility criteria

Question	Question Guidance
Is the lead entrant an appointed 'Water Company' (a water and/or sewerage undertaker or infrastructure provider (i.e. Tideway) in England or Wales?	Yes/No
Are all entry partners abiding to the terms and conditions of Breakthrough 6?	Yes/No
Do the entry partners commit to making a minimum 10% contribution towards the total cost of the entry if it is awarded funding?	Yes/No
Is the amount of funding requested between £150,000 and £2,000,000? If you wish to bid for more than £2,000,000, please enter the Transform stream .	Yes/No

Unassessed questions

Unassessed questions are visible to assessors and judges, but they are not subject to scoring. As a reminder, all answers to the questions in this form are visible to assessors and judges, except the information provided in section A – Main Contact Details.

The following unassessed questions are included in the entry form to manage your entry.

Question Category	#	Question		Question Guidance	Word Count
A	Main Contact Details	i	Name of main contact	You must designate one person as the main contact. This person will be the primary point of contact with the Water Breakthrough Challenge team. This is the person who we will contact for all matters relating to your entry, including eligibility and IPR queries, arranging Q&A slots, informing of outcomes and arranging the signing of any agreements. This person is responsible for notifying us of a secondary contact should they be on leave or otherwise unavailable during any of the above steps. Please ensure that the information provided below relates to the same person.	Yes
		ii	Main contact job title		Yes
		iii	Main contact organisation		Yes
		iv	Main contact's work email address(es)		Yes
		v	Main contact's work telephone number		Yes
		vi	Details of communications lead	Please provide the name, email address and telephone number of the person who will be responsible for coordinating any external communications activities should this entry be successful.	Yes
B	Entrant Details	i	List of Partner Organisation(s)	Please list the legal name(s) of organisations involved in this entry, excluding the lead entrant. The list should only include organisations formally committed to and involved in delivering the entry, as outlined in responses to assessment criteria 3. Organisations providing informal endorsements should not be considered partners and therefore should not be included in this list. Using the appropriate columns, please confirm whether each organisation is: an SME as per this definition: Fewer than 250 staff and less than £44m in annual turnover, or a balance sheet total of less than or equal to £38m	Yes

				A UK Incorporated Entity: Which includes any private limited company, limited liability partnership, incorporated charity and Community Interest Company which is incorporated in part of the United Kingdom This data is for reporting use only and has no bearing on the assessment of the entry. Please also provide the name and email address of the lead contact at each partner organisation.	
		ii	Winner's Agreement	Please confirm you have reviewed the template Winner's Agreement and that the lead organisation will sign this if your entry is successful in receiving funding.	Yes
		iii	Which water company is leading this entry?	Please select the name of the lead entrant water company. This must be an appointed 'Water Company' (a water and/or sewerage undertaker or infrastructure provider) (i.e. Tideway) in England and Wales.	Yes
		iv	Please provide the email address for the main contact for the lead water company.		Yes
C	Funding	i	How much funding are you requesting from the Fund?	Please provide the amount of funds requested from the Water Breakthrough Challenge in £ GBP in nominal (today's) prices, excluding any financial contributions. Please use the calculator above to ensure the amount of funding you are requesting is a maximum of 90% of the total cost of the entry.	Yes
		ii	What is the amount of financial contributions entry partners are committing from sources other than charges to water company customers?	Please provide the amount of the mandatory financial contribution entry partners have committed to contribute to the entry in £ GBP in nominal (today's) prices. The contribution must amount to a minimum of 10% of the total financial cost of the entry and cannot be funded by charges to water customers in England and Wales. We welcome additional contributions beyond this minimum 10%. Please exclude any in-kind contributions (these should be covered in C vi (not needed until Stage 2 for Transform)). Please use the calculator above to ensure you are providing the 10% minimum contribution. If you have any questions about the mandatory financial contribution, please book a surgery session with the Breakthrough delivery team.	Yes

		iii	What is the amount of financial contributions entry partners are committing from charges to water customers, if any?	There is no requirement for entries to include additional financial contributions from charges to water customers. However, if any such contributions are included, please provide the amount here.	Yes
		iv	What is the total cost of your entry?	Please provide the total cost of the entry in £ GBP in nominal (today's) prices, including workstreams and funds not covered by the Water Breakthrough Challenge and any financial contributions from entry partners. These figures should be inclusive of inflation allowances and applicable taxes which are not recoverable, reflecting the actual costs of the entry. Where taxes are fully recoverable, such as VAT, costs should be shown net of the recoverable amount. Taxes that are not recoverable should be included, for example, customs duties payable on goods imported into the UK. Please use the calculator above to ensure $Civ = Ci + Cii (+Ciii)$.	Yes
		v	What is the source of the minimum 10% financial contribution?	Please provide an overview of each partner's contributions to the mandatory minimum 10% financial contribution towards the total cost of the project. As a reminder, this cannot be funded from charges to water customers in England and Wales.	Yes (100)
		vi	What is the value of any in-kind contributions?	Please provide the value of any in-kind contributions (if quantifiable) from any source in £ GBP in nominal (today's) prices.	Yes
D	Intellectual Property Rights	i	Does your entry align with the default position on intellectual property rights (IPR) as set out at section 4 of the terms and conditions?	<i>Single Option: Default IPR/Alternative IPR</i>	Yes
		ii	Default IPR	<i>[Appears only if answer to Di is Default IPR]</i> Please explain how you will comply with the default position set out in section 4 of the terms and conditions, including detail of: - Whether the funded entry (i.e., that part funded by the Fund) is part of a wider project; - Foreground IPR to be generated by the funded entry; - Background IPR that is necessary to use the Foreground IPR for the funded entry, clearly distinguishing between General Background IPR and Specific Background IPR (see definitions below*); - Any other Background IPR relating to the delivery of the project, as a whole (i.e., not the funded entry);	Yes

			- What Background IPR and what Foreground IPR will be available. In answering this part, please include details of Foreground IPR, Background IPR that is necessary to use the Foreground IPR and (if appropriate) any wider background IPR that is related to the delivery of the project, as a whole (i.e., not just the funded entry). Please set out how your proposals will not result in restricted benefits to customers of water companies, and ultimately there will not be additional costs to customers. *For the purpose of Default IPR option, the terms and conditions differentiate between 'General Background IPR' and 'Specific Background IPR'. General Background IPR is any and all Background IPR that is not Specific Background IPR. Specific Background IPR is Background IPR which has been specifically identified in the entry and is such Background IPR that may be licenced on terms including a royalty and/or other appropriate forms of remuneration. However, we recognise that Specific Background IPR may require adjustment during the project and therefore the terms and conditions allow for the possibility of later designation, at Ofwat's discretion. Where you are seeking to designate Background IPR as Specific Background IPR, we expect you to include as much detail as possible in your application relating to potential levels of royalties and/or other appropriate forms of remuneration that you or your partners intend to impose on the Water Companies (where these are known or can be proposed at this stage of the project), or the principles and, where possible, the mechanisms you, or your partners, may use to calculate these in future. In all instances, you must set out how and why you consider that the proposals or the approaches outlined are fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory. We recognise that it may be more difficult to provide this information for projects that are at an early stage of development. Where this is the case, you should clearly state what information you can and cannot provide at the point of submitting your entry and why. In order to assess whether the proposed terms are fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory we expect you to provide information in your entry that demonstrates how the proposed royalties, remuneration and/or principles are: - Reasonable in light of market-standard royalties or other remuneration; - No less favourable than the terms that you may offer to third parties;	
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				• In all cases, proportional to the funding contributed by Ofwat to the development of the relevant Foreground IPR; and • Generally, in line with the principle that the Foreground IPR (and therefore the Background IPR required to use the Foreground IPR) must be used for the benefit of the customers of all water companies and present value for money for those customers.	
		iii.	Alternative IPR	<i>[Appears only if answer to Di is Alternative IPR]</i> Please set out your alternative IPR proposals and how they meet the following conditions: • The entry will not result in restricted benefits to customers of water companies in England and Wales; • The alternative arrangements will not result in additional costs to customers. In setting out how your proposals meet the criteria, answers must include the following: • Whether the funded entry (i.e., that part funded by the Fund) is part of a wider project; • Details of Foreground IPR to be generated by the funded entry, details of Background IPR that is necessary to use the Foreground IPR for the funded entry and details of wider background IPR relating to the delivery of the project as a whole (i.e., not just the funded entry); • What IPR will be available for the funded entry under the proposed alternative IPR provisions, and the customer benefits of that availability alone. • If the wider project Background IPR will be available, what would the terms be? Please include an assessment, including where appropriate a cost benefit analysis, as to how these terms are proportionate given the wider benefits to customers. Where your proposal does not align with the default position on IPR, Ofwat has the discretion to consider alternative IPR arrangements.	Yes
E		i	Anticipated start date	Please state the date you anticipate your project will start. We expect entries awarded funding in Breakthrough 6 to start within 6 months of	Yes

	Monitoring & Evaluation			being notified of the award. However, we recognise that some entries may require a longer mobilisation period.	
		ii	Anticipated end date	Assuming the project starts on your anticipated start date, please state the date you anticipate project delivery being complete. Please note this should include any dissemination activities as set out in your project plan.	Yes
		iii	Project stage at start of delivery	<i>[Dropdown project stages as set out in Appendix 1 Project Stages in the Entrant Handbook.]</i> Please select the most relevant project stage that your entry will be at when it starts using Breakthrough 6 funding.	Yes
		iv	Project stage at end of delivery	<i>[Dropdown project stages as set out in Appendix 1 Project Stages in the Entrant Handbook.]</i> Please select the most relevant project stage that your entry will be at when it is complete.	Yes
		v	Which water cycle tag is the most appropriate for your project?	<i>[Dropdown water cycle tags]</i> Please select the most relevant water cycle tag for your entry from the water cycle diagram .	Yes
		vi	Which water cycle tag is the second most appropriate for your project?	<i>[Optional dropdown water cycle tags, including an N/A option]</i> Please select the second most relevant water cycle tag for your entry from the water cycle diagram .	Yes
		vii	Has this entry been submitted into a previous round of the Water Breakthrough Challenge?	Yes/No	Yes
		viii	Please briefly explain how the entry has changed from the previous round(s).	<i>[Only appears if answer to the previous question is Yes]</i>	Yes

Assessed Questions

General Information

Assessors and judges will review the answers to these questions but not score them against the assessment criteria. As a reminder, all answers to the questions in this form are visible to assessors and judges, except the information provided in section A – Main Contact Details. Please note: **Answers to 0.1 (Entry title) and 0.2 Entry Description may be used for public-facing communication purposes.**

These questions do not relate to specific assessment criteria but will aid the understanding of our judges and assessors when assessing your entry.

Assessment Criteria	#	Question	Question Guidance	Word count
All	0.1	Entry title	Please include a short, unique and descriptive name to reference your entry. This may be used in public-facing communications if the entry is successful.	Yes
	0.2	Entry description	Please provide a concise summary of your entry in jargon-free, plain English. This may be used in public-facing communications if the entry is successful , and should help a customer-facing audience understand what you propose to do and the benefits you hope to deliver.	Yes (80)
	0.3	Entry references	<i>[Optional]</i> Please feel free to include a reference list of any sources of information you have used to support your entry.	Yes
	0.4	Entry visual and diagrams	<i>[Optional]</i> You can attach up to three images and/or diagrams relevant to your entry. Assessors and judges will not be able to review any narrative text within these visuals. Please clearly reference any visuals in your answers below. These must be presented as a PDFs (A4 size), with one visual/diagram per PDF.	Yes
	0.5	Mainstreaming Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in	Please outline how Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) will be incorporated in the design and delivery of your entry. This could be shown through the make-up of the delivery team and the adjustments you will make to your project delivery. For example:	Yes (500)

		your entry to benefit customers	• How will you ensure the representation of diverse voices and needs in the design of your entry? • How will you tackle accessibility challenges in the development of the entry's outputs, e.g. software, build infrastructure, toolkits, etc.? • How will you integrate any wider EDI company policy in the entry's delivery processes and ways of working? Please do not provide any personal or confidential data in your response to this question, but we would welcome anonymous, aggregated data.	
	0.6	I have completed the pitch recording for this entry	Please sign up to record a 3-minute pitch video. The purpose of the pitch recording is to provide a video explainer to help assessors and judges quickly understand your entry. Within this pitch, you should outline: • The problem the entry aims to address and what benefits it will have for customers, communities and/or the environment if successful. As a guide, we suggest this should be around a quarter of your pitch. • What is innovative about your entry. As a guide, we suggest this should be around a quarter of your pitch. • What you intend to do within your entry, focusing on the activities you will undertake. As a guide, we suggest this should be around half of your pitch. You are welcome to use slides or other visual aids within your recording. You may upload these here.	Yes

Assessment Criteria Questions

Assessors and judges review and score the answers to these questions. As a reminder, all answers to the questions in this form are visible to assessors and judges, except the information provided in section A – Main Contact Details.

The following questions are included in the entry form, relating to the assessment criteria below.

1. Positive impact for water customers communities, and/or the environment

Under this assessment category, we are looking to understand the benefits entries seek to deliver for customers, communities, and the environment. Strong entries will address a well-evidenced, important need or opportunity in the water sector in England and Wales for water customers, communities and/or the environment.

#	Assessment Criteria	Assessment Guidance	#	Question	Question Guidance	Catalyst
1.1	Address a significant need or opportunity for customers, communities and/or the environment	Strong entries will be able to articulate which significant need or opportunities the entry aims to address. Entrants should demonstrate a deep understanding of this need or opportunity. They should also showcase an understanding of the wider sector and demonstrate that their initiative addresses an unmet need.	1.1.1	What is the need or opportunity your entry aims to address?	Please summarise the customer, communities and/or environmental need this entry aims to address and why it is significant to the water sector in England and Wales.	Yes (250)
			1.1.2	What, if anything, has already been done to understand and address this need, either by the entry partners or others?	Please provide a summary of any work to date undertaken to address this need by you or others, detailing the key aspects of the problem that have not yet been addressed.	Yes (250)
1.2	Will, or could, be effective in addressing these problems or opportunities	Strong entries will be able to articulate a clear vision for their innovation, and how it will bring about the change required to address the opportunities identified in 1.1. Entrants should clearly describe the outputs they expect to generate, the outcomes they hope to achieve, and the potential longer-term impacts for customers, communities and/or the environment.	1.2.1	What is your proposed innovation, and how does it address the need or opportunity identified?	Please summarise your vision for this entry - what type of project or innovation are you proposing (e.g. a desk-based study, laboratory testing, a prototype, a system, a process, a design, a product, etc.), what changes will come about as a result of this innovation, and how will these changes address the need identified in response to criteria 1.1.	Yes (300)
			1.2.2	What are the entry's intended outputs, including any knowledge or intellectual property you intend to generate?	Please provide a bullet point list of intended outputs. Outputs are the direct results of the activities you deliver through your project e.g. in the form of technological progress, increased knowledge, and new intellectual property.	Yes (300)
			1.2.3	What are the entry's intended outcomes, and how will they benefit the wider sector?	Please provide a bullet point list of the intended outcomes (what the entry hopes to achieve/accomplish at project completion) in the long and short term of the entry, with particular reference to positive outcomes for water and wastewater customers, communities and the environment in England and Wales.	Yes (300)

					Outcomes are the changes or benefits that result from the outputs identified above, and will generally pertain to the direct beneficiaries of the project. For example, an outcome may be that, by entry completion, a new approach will be developed and implemented by entry partner organisations which delivers environmental benefits; or the sector may better understand where or how an innovative approach could be applied.	
			1.2.4	How will this project achieve the intended outcomes?	Please explain how the project will achieve the outcomes set out in the previous answer by providing SMART objectives (ideally in bullet point format). These objectives must be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. They should set out what the project aims to achieve/accomplish within its delivery period.	Yes (250)
			1.2.5	What longer-term impacts will the entry provide for the wider water sector once the project has been completed?	Please provide a narrative detailing the entry's intended impacts, including any eventual direct and indirect benefits resulting from your project. This should include how it advances innovation in the water sector in England and Wales. Where possible, please quantify expected benefits and describe the approach you have used to do so. Set out any potential cost efficiencies that you expect this project to achieve that would benefit water customers, and when you anticipate these to materialise.	Yes (200)
			1.3.1	What benefits could the project generate even if it does not fully achieve its intended outcomes?	Please set out a plan for benefit delivery/realisation in the event that the project cannot meet its intended outcomes. The plan should work towards achieving these outcomes and should include information sharing on the barriers to delivery. This should focus on identifying what benefits can still be realised if the primary outcomes are not achieved, and clearly explain how those benefits will be delivered (for	Yes (300)
1.3	Set out the potential benefits to customers, communities and the environment even if the project isn't successful in achieving its intended outcomes	To be truly innovative, we recognise that projects may not be successful in achieving their intended outcomes. We are open to entries that recognise this risk, provided that they carry the potential for significant benefits to customers, communities and the environment.				

		A strong entry will articulate how much is understood about the project's feasibility and related uncertainties, the range of possible scenarios that may occur, and how benefits, such as knowledge sharing, could still be realised in the event the project should fail to meet its intended outcomes.			example, by sharing lessons learned about your proposed innovation). NOTE: This question is intended for you to demonstrate how your project will still provide benefits for the sector if the project does not deliver its expected outcomes. Risk mitigation and delivery assurance are covered in criteria 3.	
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2. Innovation enablers and innovative solutions

Under this assessment category, we want to understand what is novel about the proposed approach and solution and how it could deliver a positive sector-wide innovation legacy.

Strong entries will demonstrate how the proposed entry goes beyond the entrant's business-as-usual approach to innovation and how it may draw inspiration and/or talent from other sectors. This is both in terms of what the entrant proposes to deliver (innovative solutions) and how they propose to deliver it (innovation enablers). Innovation enablers are the innovative approaches the entry is proposing, which may include how entrants are working internally and externally with collaborators within and outside of the water sector for the benefit of water customers in England and Wales. Entries could include testing new ideas, adapting ideas or practices that have established themselves in other sectors, or adopting proven approaches that haven't been tried at scale.

#	Assessment Criteria	Assessment Guidance	#	Question	Question Guidance	Catalyst
2.1	Use innovative approaches and/or solutions which would not reasonably be expected to be	Strong entries will clearly set out how the approach or solution is innovative and why it could not be funded as part of business as usual. This can include experimenting with	2.1.1	What is innovative about your entry?	Please set out the innovative elements of the entry, e.g. solutions, technologies, practices, insights, approaches and ways of working. This should include how much research, trialling or similar has been undertaken on it so far; and how this approach is an improvement on what has been	Yes (700)

	funded as part of business-as-usual and/or develops innovative enablers which accelerate practice beyond business-as-usual	new ideas, adapting ideas and practices from other sectors or testing new approaches to enable their future implementation at scale. Solutions may include better management of people and resources, systems, processes or technologies. Strong entries will also articulate how the initiative will enable innovation through its delivery. This may include how entrants are working and sharing ideas with collaborators within and outside the water sector, dissemination and use of the knowledge gained across the sector, partnerships, effective joint working and how entrants intend to embed innovation capabilities and skills developed through this initiative into entrants' business-as-usual.			developed and/or deployed previously in the water sector in England and Wales.	
			2.1.2	Why could this entry not reasonably be expected to be funded through other means?	Please explain why the approach requires the support of the Water Breakthrough Challenge. Projects within the Water Breakthrough Challenge should not be 'sure bets'. Why could your entry not be developed without the support of the Water Breakthrough Challenge (for example as part of a water company's business-as-usual activities and normal ongoing improvement measures)?	Yes (300)
			2.1.3	How does this entry enable further innovation, including by building innovation capability and/or capacity for the water sector?	Please provide detail on how this entry can enable further innovation – for example by building the water sector's capability or capacity to innovate, or by enabling future collaboration. For more detail on innovation enablers, please refer to the 'What we are looking for – Areas for innovation' section in the Entrant Handbook). This should include a clear plan, including SMART objectives (i.e. be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). This could include how your project will enable collaboration across the sector; how it will share data, insights and ideas; or otherwise embed innovation capabilities and skills developed through this initiative within entrant organisations.	Yes (250)
2.2	Set out plans for further development and implementation by the lead and partner water companies following the completion of this entry.	Strong entries will describe clear plans (and demonstrate commitment from entry partners) to adopt or implement the solution, should it be proven successful. Entries involving early-stage innovations that are likely to require further development should be able to outline a pathway towards implementation highlighting how far the entry will progress the solution and considering	2.2.1	If the innovation is successful, what are the next steps for entry partners to further develop and eventually implement this solution?	Please outline plans for the entry partner organisations to take this solution forward, should it be proven successful and achieve its intended outcomes (as described in 1.2). How will it be adopted/implemented, or if required, developed further? Projects should be designed with a pathway towards implementation, including how they will develop and demonstrate the value proposition of the innovation to relevant stakeholders in order to enable future adoption.	Yes (700)

		what outstanding gaps may need to be validated following the project to enable future adoption.				
2.3	Set out the potential for implementation at scale across the wider water sector	Strong entries will either demonstrate how their solutions and/or approaches can be applied at scale or have the potential to be applied at scale in the future to provide benefits across the water sector in England and Wales. Entrants with clear plans and pathways will detail how they have considered opportunities and challenges for wider implementation across the sector and/or how they are addressing barriers to future implementation at an early design stage, and throughout their delivery.	2.3.1	What is the entry's potential for scaling up and/or wider implementation in the sector, what are your plans to realise this potential, and how will you monitor this through your delivery?	Please provide an overview of the potential opportunity for implementation of your solution at scale to bring benefits to the water sector across numerous geographies, businesses, and scenarios. Please consider implementation plans within the delivery phase. Describe how scaling your solution will bring benefits, address water sector-wide needs, and/or be used to improve operations across numerous geographies, businesses, and scenarios.	Yes (300)
			2.3.2	What challenges and/or barriers to further implementation have you identified?	Please include a summary of potential challenges or barriers to implementing your innovation at scale.	Yes (200)
			2.3.3	What is your plan for disseminating project outputs (for example the knowledge and foreground intellectual property you will generate in your project)?	Please set out how you intend to capture your project outputs as set out in 1.2.2 (e.g. knowledge and foreground intellectual property generated by your project) and share them with relevant audiences across the wider sector. You should demonstrate how this will be done in a timely manner and throughout the delivery of the project, in a way that enables the eventual implementation of this solution at scale, should it be proven successful.	Yes (175)

3. Capacity, capability, and commitment to deliver

Under this assessment category, we are looking for a clear narrative, demonstrating strong evidence that the proposed entry is feasible and that appropriate resources and governance will be in place for its delivery.

Download a copy of the editable Entry Template: [LINK](#).

#	Assessment Criteria	Assessment Guidance	#	Question	Question Guidance	Catalyst
3.1	Show commitment to	Strong entries will be able to provide evidence of commitment	3.1.1	Who are the senior sponsors and leaders involved from	Please provide details of the engagement and investment of suitably senior staff who will be able to	Yes (250)

	the entry and innovation	to the entry, and the implementation of the innovation should it be proven successful, especially at a senior level. This will include the extent to which partners have committed to supporting the entry (for example, by investing resources or funding).		the lead water company and partner organisations, how are they engaged and invested in the entry, and how does your solution align with their (and their organisation's) priorities?	support the delivery of this entry, and the eventual adoption of the solution should it be proven successful. In doing so, please reflect the executive commitment to continuing the entry if delivery personnel were to change, as well as how the intended outcomes described in 1.2 align with organisational ambitions and priorities.	
3.2	Set out a realistic and achievable programme	Strong entries will detail the timeline of activities the entry is proposing and demonstrate that the entry has a realistic and achievable delivery plan and programme, with appropriately timed milestones and a proportionate monitoring plan for entry progress, which includes a plan for monitoring the benefits set out within assessment category 1 'Positive impact for water customers, communities and the environment', and for capturing and disseminating knowledge and IP generated through the project.	3.2.1	What is the delivery programme?	Please complete the delivery programme and provide a Gantt chart in tab B of the entry template. Use the text box below to describe your entry's delivery phases, with details of the activities that will happen within each phase, including any dissemination activities as described in your answer to 2.3.3. Please set out a milestone for each delivery phase as a minimum, and how you will determine if the entry has successfully met these. Milestones should be proportional to the scale and risk of your entry.	Yes (300 + Tab B)
			3.2.2	What project controls will be implemented, and how will you monitor the delivery of your entry?	Please provide a narrative describing what project controls will be implemented and how, including how you will monitor the delivery of your entry and its intended outcomes. This may include, for example, stage gates, go/no go decision processes, reference to steering and technical groups.	Yes (175)
3.3	Will be delivered by a team with the relevant skills and experience	Strong entries will be able to describe the roles and responsibilities assigned to the entry participants. They will also be able to demonstrate that the team includes individuals with relevant skills/capabilities and experience to deliver the entry.	3.3.1	Please describe the entry delivery team. Include team structure, roles, responsibilities, skills and experience.	Please describe the key team members involved in the entry, including from partner organisations, as well as their relevant skills and experience. Please include a short description of the roles and responsibilities assigned to each of the entry partners and how this will support successful delivery. Please also indicate which partner organisation the team member belongs to. Where roles will be filled post-award, please describe the pre-requisite skills to fulfil the role and when the role is planned to be filled. Please upload an organogram detailing the structure of the entry delivery team (JPEG, PNG or PDF).	Yes (500 + Organogram)

3.4	Demonstrate a realistic and considered costing which provides efficient use of customer funds	Strong entries will be able to demonstrate an efficient and realistic cost estimate and breakdown, a profile of this spend across the entry's life cycle, and what resources will be required to maintain the actions after delivery close-out. Entrants may also identify if other sources of funding or in-kind contributions are required to support this entry, detailing how and when this will be secured, as well as how different sources of funding will link together.	3.4.1	What is the breakdown of the entry costs, including the assumptions made? Please attach the completed budget template for your entry.	Please complete the Budget Detail template, tab C of the entry template, giving consideration to the guidance provided within the entry template and in section 'Entry questions, assessment criteria, weighting, and guidance' of the entrant handbook.	Yes (Tab C)
			3.4.2	Other than what is provided by the entry partners, what other sources of funding or in-kind contributions will be needed to support this entry?	If applicable, please set out any additional financial or non-financial resources required to complete the entry (i.e., outside the 10% minimum contribution, the funding from the Ofwat Innovation Fund and additional contributions provided by the partners). Please also explain if the funding has been confirmed or when it would be confirmed.	Yes (300)
3.5	Demonstrate a clear and proportionate approach to addressing risk	Strong entries will be able to demonstrate how they identify, quantify and manage risks and opportunities. Entrants will set credible plans for appropriately managing or mitigating these. For example, entrants should demonstrate an understanding of the circumstances in which the project may need to adapt, pivot, or even stop if new evidence suggests alternative approaches might be more beneficial.	3.5.1	What risks and opportunities have been identified for the entry? How will they be managed or mitigated?	Please summarise the top three risks to the success of your entry, and your proposed approach to mitigate these risks. Please complete the 'Risk Register' template (Tab D in the entry template), with information on risks and opportunities identified, e.g.: - the solution is not taken up by the sector; - an aspect of the innovation is shown not to work; - any dependencies on partnership arrangements and procurement activities.	Yes (250 words + Tab D)

Assessment criteria weighting

Catalyst stream

1. Positive impact for water customers, communities, and the environment	Weighting
1.1 Address a significant need or opportunity for customers, communities and/or the environment	9%
1.2 Will, or could, be effective in addressing these problems or opportunities	15.33%
1.3 Set out the potential benefits to customers, communities and the environment even if the project isn't successful in achieving its intended outcomes	9%
Total	33.33%

2. Innovation enablers and innovative solutions	Weighting
2.1 Use innovative approaches and/or solutions which would not be funded as part of business-as-usual and/or develop innovation enablers which accelerate practice beyond business-as-usual	15.33%
2.2 Set out plans for further development and implementation by the lead and partner water companies following the completion of this entry	9%
2.3 Set out plans for implementation at scale across the water sector	9%
Total	33.33%

3. Capacity, capability, and commitment to deliver	Weighting
3.1 Show commitment to the entry	5%
3.2 Set out a realistic and achievable programme	8.32%
3.3 Will be delivered by a team with the relevant skills and experience	6.66%
3.4 Demonstrate a realistic and considered costing which makes effective use of customer funds	6.66%
3.5 Demonstrate a clear and proportionate approach to addressing risk	6.66%
Total	33.33%

Requirements for successful entries

All participants in the Catalyst stream of Breakthrough 6 will be required to adhere to the full [terms and conditions](#) of participation. Please ensure you and your partners read and understood these before submitting your entry.

If your entry is selected to win, you must sign a winner's agreement outlining arrangements for monitoring and reporting based on your specific winning entry.

In particular, the key requirements of winners will include:

- **Use of funding:** Any funds awarded through Breakthrough 6 must only be used to fund the initiative described in your entry, which must promote the objectives of Breakthrough 6 as set out within this handbook.
- **Open data by default:** Data, information and learning generated by the winning projects will be open by default (i.e., freely available for everyone to access, use and share). The exception to this would be sensitive data, which in this context would include personal data or data with security implications.
- **10% contribution:** All entries must include a minimum of 10% financial contribution to ensure customers do not bear all the risk of initiatives funded through Breakthrough 6 and to encourage good project management.
- **Monitoring and reporting:** We will need to monitor your progress - this may be through meetings, surveys, written reporting, or other reasonable requests for information. We will endeavour to keep this reporting proportionate to your entry's relative size and risk.
- **Regulatory reporting:** Water companies will need to report spending against funding allowed in Ofwat's [Regulatory Accounting Guidelines tables – Table 9A](#). For regulatory reporting purposes, companies will need to report costs in 2022-23 CPIH deflated prices.
- **Intellectual property rights (IPR):** You should retain all rights in and to your background IPR, including where a bid involves more than one participant. However, an appropriate form of licence should be granted to all participants in any entry, which is the subject of an entry, for the sole purpose of the entry to enable it to go ahead. Appropriate licences for background IPR and foreground IPR should be provided to all current and future water companies in England and Wales.
- **Publicity:** We may use the names of the organisations and summaries of their proposals in publicity materials for Breakthrough 6. We also ask that you acknowledge our support in any public statements about the entry.
- **Conflicts of interest:** You (and any partners you work with) must take reasonable steps to manage any conflicts of interest with Ofwat, Challenge Works, Nesta or any of our delivery partners and judges. You must immediately inform Nesta if you become aware of any potential or actual conflict of interest and provide Challenge Works (part of Nesta) and Ofwat with all information reasonably requested in respect of such conflict.
- **Settlement arrangement:** Payment of funds awarded through Breakthrough 6 will be settled through an agreed mechanism.

More information and support for your entry

Please review the [frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#) if you have any questions. If you still have questions after doing so, please email us at waterinnovation@challengeworks.org.

On **Tuesday 9 September 2025, at 11.30 am (BST)**, we will host a live online session for potential entrants and partners to clarify their understanding of Breakthrough 6. The session will cover the key information for prospective entrants:

- An overview of the Fund's aims and ambitions;
- The Breakthrough 6 entry process, including changes from previous rounds and support available to entrants;
- Eligibility, assessment and requirements for winning entries;
- Examples of good practice in knowledge sharing and dissemination of learning;
- Q&A with the audience.

You can register for the session via [this link](#). Once the live session has happened, a recording and transcript will be hosted on [our Events page](#).

If you require any clarification on the entry process or the terms and conditions, you can book a **15-minute surgery session**. The surgery sessions will be run by the Breakthrough 6 delivery partners. Entrants can book a slot on Calendly, please access the [Catalyst booking page](#) or the [Transform booking page](#) based on which stream you are entering. You will be asked a few questions during the booking process to better help us answer your queries.

Recordings of the entry writing workshops we ran in previous rounds are available to all entrants [on our website](#). These are intended to help you develop entry-writing skills, ensure your answers are clear, and answer the questions in line with the assessment guidance.

Default platform for online events, including surgery sessions, live Q&A and pitch recording

We currently use Zoom for all of these, although this is subject to change. Please ensure you have downloaded the desktop version of Zoom to enable full functionality. You can find advice on joining a test call [here](#).

Reasonable adjustments and accommodations

If there are any reasonable adjustments that would support you entering, catering for any additional needs you may have, please contact waterinnovation@challengeworks.org.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

We need to collect relevant data and evidence to monitor the impact of and promote equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). For the Water Breakthrough Challenge, this means that entrants are asked to:

- Answer question 0.5 in the entry form on how they will promote EDI within their teams and tackle accessibility challenges via the delivery of their project. This includes:
 - Describing how diverse representation will be incorporated into the design and delivery of their entry;
 - Outlining how accessibility challenges will be tackled in the development of any outputs of the entry;

- Demonstrating how wider company EDI policies will be integrated into the entry;
 - Where relevant, demonstrating how they plan to include EDI considerations relating to their customers.
- Participate in a post-entry survey.

EDI considerations are highly encouraged where appropriate in the proposal. Entries will continue to be assessed on their merit against the assessment criteria.

Feedback and Learning

If you have any feedback or concerns relating to Breakthrough 6, the Ofwat Innovation Fund or any of the winners of previous rounds, please feel free to contact us directly at waterinnovation@challengeworks.org or submit your feedback or concerns anonymously [here](#). We welcome and support feedback from entrants via email and via **entrant surveys** sent out after entering one of our competitions.

If you would prefer to contact Ofwat directly, you may do so by emailing innovation@ofwat.gov.uk. Ofwat also has a range of materials available relating to [whistleblowing](#) and [making a complaint](#).



**Water
Breakthrough
Challenge**

waterinnovation.challenges.org

Appendices

Appendix 1 Project stages

Level	Description	Typical activities to be supported in this phase of maturity	Approximate Technology Readiness Level equivalent
1 Initial research	Understanding the problem and exploring possible solutions	Initial industry & market research, Problem investigation and analysis, gathering stakeholder requirements to create the value proposition, Early optioneering of solutions, technology concept/application formulation, risk/opportunity analysis and research	TRL 1-2
2 Concept and feasibility	Developing or testing a concept, designing the solution, and testing the feasibility of solutions	Innovation concept selection and early design, Testing/proving a concept, developing the initial prototype, Defining the approach to enable further detailed testing, and assessing the fundamental feasibility of solution(s) within controlled environments.	TRL 2-4
3 Development and verification	Developing the preferred solution, verifying the design through prototype demonstration in a real-world (or near-real-world) environment	On or off-site trials of the solution in a near-real or real-world environment, Design risk analysis, including Failure Modes Effects Analysis (FMEA) for future operation, approach to departures (how can we deploy the solution), Testing against operational requirements	TRL 3-6
4 Validation and optimisation	Scaling up the solution for roll-out or commercialisation	Identifying practical routes to market, development of training or education requirements, Large scale or late-stage testing (pilots), Fine-tuning to proven operational concepts, Benefits evaluation, review for approval and deployment, standards, or specification development for the innovation.	TRL 6-8
5 Deployment and post-launch	Implementing or rolling out the solution and assessing its impact	Roll-out and implementation, Standard/specification finalisation and publication, User training or education, Benefits testing and evaluation, Continuous improvement & lessons learnt for future development.	TRL 8-9

Appendix 2 Entering the Catalyst stream if unsuccessful in Transform Stage 1

In exceptional circumstances*, some unsuccessful entrants to Stage 1 of the Transform stream might consider entering the Catalyst stream (which closes on 6 January 2026) with a revised entry. This appendix outlines the process for any entrants who may consider this option.

Please note this does not represent a recommendation from us to unsuccessful entrants in Stage 1 of the Transform stream to enter the Catalyst stream. Entering the Catalyst stream will not in any way guarantee that your entry will be successful in winning funding. All entries to the Catalyst stream are subject to the same entry process, terms and conditions, and assessment.

On 17 November 2025, all entrants will be notified via email of the Stage 1 assessment results for the Transform stream. Among other relevant information, all emails to unsuccessful entrants will include a mention of the remaining window for entering the Catalyst stream. Unsuccessful entrants to Stage 1 of the Transform stream will be required to confirm in writing if they plan to enter the Catalyst stream **by 12 pm (GMT) on Friday 21 November 2025**.

If the entrant confirms that they intend to enter the Catalyst stream, the Breakthrough 6 delivery partners will:

- Prioritise feedback to entrants intending to enter the Catalyst stream, providing this to them by **3 December 2025**. Note: the accelerated timeline will only be feasible for a reduced number of entries (as opposed to all unsuccessful entries to Stage 1 of the Transform stream).
- Re-share access to the entrant's Transform stream, Stage 1 entry on Submittable. This should enable entrants to paste answers for editing into the entry form for the Catalyst stream. However, we would expect that any entry to the Catalyst stream following this route would be substantially revised to reflect the funding brackets, aims of the Catalyst stream, and any feedback given.

Ofwat and its delivery partners cannot provide bespoke support or guidance to any entrants selecting this option. However, unsuccessful entrants to Stage 1 of the Transform stream will have access to the same entrant support available to all entrants to the Catalyst stream under the competitive nature of the Fund.

Similarly, entering the Catalyst stream after an unsuccessful outcome in Stage 1 of the Transform stream will not change how entries into Catalyst are assessed.

Information about the Transform stream can be found in the [Transform stream Entrant Handbook](#).

*E.g., where the initial stages of a project plan submitted as part of a Transform entry could form a viable smaller-scale project that could meet the aims of the Catalyst stream. Please refer to [Appendix 1](#) of this handbook for more information about project stages.

The differences between entry forms in the Catalyst stream and the Stage 1 Transform stream comprise:

Description of difference	Detail
Pitch recording duration	3 mins (Catalyst) versus 5 mins (Transform)
12 additional questions in the Catalyst stream entry form (asked at Stage 2 in the Transform stream), for a total of approx. 3,475 extra words.	1.1.2 1.2.3, 1.2.4, 1.2.5 1.3.1 2.1.3 2.2.1 2.3.2, 2.3.3 3.2.2 3.3.1 3.4.2
Increased word count for 4 questions in the Catalyst stream compared to Stage 1 of the Transform stream	1.2.2 (300 vs 250) 2.1.1 (700 vs 600) 3.2.1 (300 vs 250) 3.5.1 (250 vs 125)
No live Q&A with assessors in the Catalyst stream as in Stage 1 of the Transform stream	N/A

Appendix 3 Entrant handbook version control

When changes are made to this handbook for Water Breakthrough Challenge 6 Catalyst stream, they will be documented here.

Version	Changes
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