

Answered Offline

There was not time during the webinar to answer the following questions live. Instead, the delivery team has followed up with the written responses below:

Q) Are you able to give sight of what the next ‘barriers’ might be?

A) Yes. Stakeholders have already helped identify a long list of barriers, and the Sector Implementation Committee will review and refine this list on an ongoing basis as the programme progresses.

We will publish the priority barriers selected for focused activity, alongside the relevant opportunities to get involved (for example, end-to-end sprint activities and/or targeted calls to industry and partners).

We’ll share announcements via the Implementation Programme website and through Ofwat social media and newsletter updates. You can also submit barriers at any time via the **Barrier Identification Form** (or by contacting the delivery team).

Q) For the early adopter stream, is it still applicable for ideas that one water company has already adopted, and now wants to roll out to others? Therefore skipping the first few steps of the Early Adopter & Fast Follower process.

A) No – Fast Follower funding is only available where there is a Programme-funded Early Adopter implementation. In other words, unless a company is willing to act as the Early Adopter and submits a successful match-funding application to do so, other companies cannot use the Programme to “fast follow” a solution that has already been implemented elsewhere.

To meet the Early Adopter entry requirements, the applicant must demonstrate that the proposed work is a clearly defined next step beyond what has been done previously with that innovation (including any prior deployments in the sector), and that it still benefits from Programme support to de-risk delivery and generate transferable learning for Fast Followers and the wider sector.

Q) Are the water companies putting forward senior people for the implementation role? Are they separate to the innovation function – it’s a very different ask/skill

A) Each eligible water company must nominate a single Implementation Representative as their main point of contact for the Programme. Implementation Representatives receive information about approved Early Adopter proposals, coordinate internal discussions on whether to Fast Follow, and attend Implementation Review Forums where the pipeline and learning are discussed.

It’s for each company to decide who is best placed to take on this role (it may sit within innovation, operations, transformation, asset delivery, or another function). In practice, we recommend nominating someone with the credibility and capacity to coordinate

across teams, plus the delegated authority to represent the organisation and support timely decisions.

Q) What do you define as 'at scale'? - It can mean lots of different things to different people

A) The aim of the Programme is to “accelerate the speed and scale by which successful innovations are implemented by the water sector in England and Wales”. We acknowledge that “at scale” may look different between companies and innovations, and we have deliberately designed the Programme to accommodate different pathways to scale. We want water companies to be ambitious in their plans to use innovation and believe that providing match-funding will enable them in this pursuit.

As part of the application process, companies will be required to define the scale of their implementation and make a commitment to achieving this. They must also demonstrate how the proposed implementation goes beyond all previous work to date with that innovation, including any earlier trials or deployments in the water sector in England and Wales.

Crucially, as a minimum “at scale” should represent a step beyond a short-term pilot—demonstrating how the solution will be embedded into business-as-usual and deliver sustained value. We want to enable companies to be ambitious

Answered Live

The following questions were answered live during the webinar. If you'd like to hear the presenters' exact responses, you can [watch the recording here](#). For ease, we've also provided written responses below. These capture the key points and intent of what was shared on the day, but they are not a verbatim transcript.

Q) This innovation fund strand feels very tailored to widgets and gizmos, has any thought been given to how projects that look at processes and policy change might be eligible for this funding stream?

A) Yes. Both streams are intended to support implementation of innovations in the broadest sense—this includes technologies, but also process, practice and operating-model changes, where they meet the relevant entry requirements.

In particular, the Implementation Enablers stream is well suited to tackling systemic, cross-sector issues—such as common process, policy or capability barriers that make implementation difficult across England and Wales.

Equally, the Early Adopter & Fast Follower stream can support process/practice innovations, provided the proposal is focused on implementation (not further R&D), is sufficiently evidenced to show it works, and represents a clearly defined step beyond any previous trials or small-scale deployments.

Q) How will Early Adopter projects be visible to allow consideration by Fast Followers? / How will Ofwat publicise the projects chosen as Early Adopter projects?

A) Visibility and communication are a core part of how the Programme is designed to work. We will share information on Early Adopter proposals and the emerging pipeline through Implementation Review Forums (and the outputs and learning that come out of those forums). Once projects have successfully reached award then key information and updates will be published through the Programme Website and existing communication channels such as the Water Innovation Fund newsletter.

It's also important to note that not all information will be made public (for example, detailed business cases and commercially sensitive content). That level of detail will be shared via each company's appointed Implementation Representative, who acts as the single point of contact and receives the information needed to support internal consideration of whether to Fast Follow.

Q) For the Reg31 challenge - is there information on why the barrier currently exists - why did we lose the capability?

A) In short, Regulation 31 testing is highly specialist. It requires specific expertise, equipment, and quality systems, and can be resource-intensive to maintain. Over time,

some laboratories have chosen to move away from this area, which has contributed to reduced sector capacity.

At the same time, demand has increased—both from innovations needing testing to support adoption and from the need to maintain or renew certification for solutions already in the market. This combination has created a bottleneck and a growing backlog.

That's why we have established this Implementation Enablers challenge, working closely with partners including DWI, to help stimulate capacity and unblock what is widely seen as a critical constraint on innovation in the drinking water space.

Q) What is the reason for delaying release of funds to fast followers until the early adopter has implemented? Implementation barriers between companies could be wildly different / It seems that fast followers aren't fast at all if they have to wait for the early adopters to fully implement the innovation. Isn't there a better way for fast followers to implement sooner?

A) The intent is to balance pace with risk reduction. Implementing something “for the first time” can still carry delivery and performance risk, and one of the Programme's objectives is to reduce that risk for the wider sector by enabling an Early Adopter to go first, capture learning, and share what works (and what doesn't).

That said, the model is designed to be flexible. Fast Followers do not necessarily need to wait until the end of an Early Adopter project to begin. Early Adopters are expected to define milestones and evidence points that would give confidence for Fast Followers to start—so onward implementations can begin as soon as there is sufficient learning to do so responsibly.

We also recognise that implementation contexts differ across companies. A key purpose of the shared learning is to help Fast Followers understand what needs adapting to their setting, and what conditions are necessary for success.

Finally, it's worth noting that the Programme is not the only route to implementation. Where a solution is already clearly proven and low-risk for a company to adopt independently, water companies can of course choose to proceed outside the Programme.

Q) After an early adopter applies and is approved, what happens if no fast-followers come forward within the three month period?

A) Securing at least two Fast Followers within the required timeframe is a core part of the process. If an Early Adopter proposal does not secure the required Fast Followers, it would not be awarded funding under the Early Adopter & Fast Follower stream.

If that happens, the applicant is free to refine and resubmit—potentially adjusting the offer, the evidence base, the proposed support to Fast Followers, or the implementation

approach—based on the feedback and learning from engagement with Implementation Representatives and the Implementation Review Forum. In some cases, it may also indicate that there isn't sufficient sector appetite to prioritise that solution for this Programme at this time.

Q) For the enablers stream, I can't see the application form on the website?

A) The application process—including the format and the questions you need to respond to—is set out in the [Stage 1 Application Guidance](#), available in the Supporting Documents section of the Implementation Enablers webpage.

Q) Ofwat have put a lot of customer money towards innovations created in the Catalyst and Breakthrough funds. Will those projects be prioritised for Early Adoption over external innovation?

A) No—there is no preference or prioritisation built into the Programme based on where an innovation originated. It is for water companies to decide what they bring forward and support.

All applications must be underpinned by robust evidence and learning that gives water companies confidence the innovation is ready for implementation. Evidence may come from a range of sources (for example, prior trials, pilots, or operational deployments), but applications will be assessed against the published criteria and the strength of the implementation case—not on whether the innovation has previously received Ofwat Innovation Fund support.

Q) Picking up on the comments made about criticality of communication and collaboration to this fund's success - should/could Spring be a key delivery partner for this fund?

A) We engage with Spring regularly and recognise the important role it plays across the innovation landscape. We haven't formalised a specific delivery role for Spring within this Programme at this stage, but the Programme is designed to learn and adapt over time. Where there are clear opportunities for collaboration that strengthen delivery and increase impact for the sector, we will explore them.

Q) For the early adopter/fast follower fund - do the solutions need to be proven technology or can further technology trials be included as well?

A) The Early Adopter & Fast Follower stream is intended to fund implementation, not further technology development or trials. Applicants need to demonstrate that the innovation is sufficiently proven to justify implementation activity and that the work proposed is focused on embedding and scaling in operational contexts.

Where additional R&D, piloting, or technology validation is still required, other routes within the wider Ofwat Innovation Fund are typically better suited to support that earlier-stage activity.