

ESA BIC UK Frequently Asked Questions

Below you will find questions and answers relating to the ESA BIC UK Open Call. If you cannot find the answer to your question, please contact ESA BIC Team by emailing enquiries@esa-bic.org.uk.

What kind of space connection is needed to be eligible for the ESA BIC UK?

Having a relevant space technology relationship or heritage is one of the most important aspects you will need in order to join the ESA BIC. The connection may comprise any of the following:

- the downstream application of space technologies in non-space fields (satellite navigation, satellite communication or earth observation)
- NewSpace/upstream development (commercial hardware development for space)
- technology transfer between the space and non-space sectors (in either direction, either ideas for spin-off from space to a non-space sector, or ideas for spin-in from a non-space sector into space)
- licensing a patent from the ESA patent portfolio.

Where can I find space technology for use?

You may wish to review existing IP for exploitation via the ESA website http://www.esa.int/OurActivities/Technology/IPfor_commercialisation where you can find examples of ESA-developed space technology. For more information regarding patents and development licences please contact Aude de Clercq by emailing Aude.de.Clercq@esa.int or calling +31 71 565 8662.

May the incentive money (£51,723.60) from ESA BIC UK be used to pay for staff wages, personal and/or travel expenses?

The incentive money can only be used to cover the following items:

- Research and development (R&D)
- IP protection
- Third-party consultancy (to a defined limit)
- Market research (with a limit of £5,000.00 throughout the whole programme)

- Salaries (see next question for details)
- Events and travel: There is a combined limit of £2,155.00 for events and travel. This includes tickets for event spaces or task-related, and travel to and from those events. Reimbursements for subsistence expenses during travel are not allowed.

May the incentive money (£51,723.60) from ESA BIC UK be used to pay for staff wages?

Yes, the incentive money can be utilized to pay salaries under the following conditions:

- All costs should be included in the expenditure plan provided in the incubation proposal and agreed upon with the ESA BIC.
- Up to half of the incentive amount can be claimed for entrepreneur salaries and/or for expenses incurred outside the UK. However, under no circumstances can incubatees claim more than half of the incentive amount in total for entrepreneur salaries.
- If the expenditure limit for these categories is reached, permission must be sought from ESA (via the ESA BIC UK) before incurring additional non-UK expenses.

Additionally, before each Review Meeting, the incubatee must submit a timesheet for the employee whose salary will be covered by the incentive payment. The document should include the employee's name, task number, hourly rate, hours worked, and total cost. It must be signed by a company Director, sent on company-headed paper, explain how deliverables will be met according to the Incubation Proposal, and include the Incubation Contract Number (e.g., EB2425-01).

May the incentive money (£51,723.60) from ESA BIC UK be used to pay for paying rent for office space?

Yes, however, the rental payment plan must be included in the expenditure plan outlined in your incubation proposal and approved by the ESA BIC before any rental payments can be made. Please be aware that a limit may be imposed if excessive amount of money is allocated to administrative expenses instead of R&D, which is the primary focus of this programme.

What business support is available from the ESA BIC UK?

In Harwell the ESA BIC UK contracts with a third-party supplier, Ashby House, to provide a programme based around 1:1 support which is tailored to the needs of each incubatee company and includes elements of:

- Commercial Business Plan Development
- Finance Skills
- Intellectual Property
- Legal Advice
- Marketing
- Presentation Skills
- Research and Development
- Sales Training

Workshops on specific topics are organised according to demand. Twice each year a two-day investor readiness programme is held, with the specific aim of making your business investor-ready.

Similar programmes are available at the other ESA BIC UK locations at Daresbury Laboratory; the Higgs Innovation Centre, Edinburgh; and Space Park Leicester.

What technical support is available from the ESA BIC UK?

A key part of the ESA BIC UK package of support is the commitment to provide technical support through the expertise and facilities of the Science & Technology Facilities Council (STFC), the University of Leicester, and relevant partners where appropriate.

The package includes:

- Up to 40 hours' access to world-class science facilities, technical expertise, and business enablement skills
- Up to 40 hours per year of access to workshops, laboratory space and equipment.

Details for STFC locations are contained in the “Incubatee Technical Support & Equipment List” document which is available from the ESA BIC UK Operations Manager. The document describes technical consultancy opportunities from STFC experts and provides information about laboratory space and equipment. On a case-by-case basis it may also be possible to source support from the Satellite Applications Catapult, and from ESA.

Is it mandatory for personnel to be permanently located at ESA BIC UK during the project, or is it enough to travel to and from as needed (for meetings, technical support, etc.)?

In our experience an incubation centre is more than just a place to work. Being located in the ESA BIC will give you visibility to potential customers, suppliers and potentially interested parties at your chosen campus. It will give you advance notification of events which could be of benefit to your personal and business development. Having a base located within the Harwell Space Cluster, Daresbury, Edinburgh, or Leicester also offers you the unique opportunity to collaborate for success with other local entrepreneurs, gain insight into emerging technologies and learn through sharing knowledge and experience.

How long does the incubation last? How long does it take to become an incubatee at ESA BIC?

The incubation typically lasts 18 months but can be up to 24 months. As a rule of thumb, there are about six weeks between the application deadline and the signing of the contract.

What does “support entities” mean?

Support entities are companies, government or research institutes which are supporting you, with knowledge and/or money.

What happens after I apply to the ESA BIC UK?

After you have applied, your application will be assessed by a Tender Opening Board (TOB), typically within one week of the deadline for submissions. The TOB will review your proposal to assess whether it has met the necessary application criteria.

If the necessary requirements have been met, you will then be invited by the TOB to give a presentation to the Tender Evaluation Board (TEB), which will meet around three weeks after the submission deadline. The outcome of the TEB will be provided to you shortly after the meeting.

If you are selected, you will receive an invitation to attend a negotiation meeting for the ESA BIC UK programme.

Who is on the Tender Evaluation Board (TEB)?

The TEB consists of representatives from ESA, the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC), the Satellite Applications Catapult, the UK Space Agency and the University of Leicester.

What are the criteria that the Tender Evaluation Board (TEB) is looking for?

The evaluation criteria are listed in Section II of the Open Call document.

Do I have to have already founded a company to apply?

No. The founding of a company and Companies House registration is not necessary for the application and acceptance into the incubation programme. If there is no entry at Companies House before the incubation begins, the company must be formed by the midterm review.

Does the incentive money (£51,723.60) from ESA BIC constitute Minimal Financial Assistance?

The ESA BIC incentive funding is provided 50% (£25,861.80) by ESA and 50% (£25,861.80) locally by STFC or the University of Leicester. The ESA funding does not constitute Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA), but the local funding does.

Companies may not receive MFA in excess of £315,000 over a period consisting of (i) the elapsed part of the current financial year and (ii) the 2 financial years immediately preceding the current financial year. For this reason, when you apply to the ESA BIC you are required to provide details of any MFA received in the previous three years, and to undertake that you will inform ESA of any financial support received during the execution of the incubation contract.

Please note that the ESA BIC UK cannot provide formal advice on MFA. It is the responsibility of companies to take their own advice and ensure compliance.

Can I attend another start-up support programme (such as pre-incubator, incubator, or accelerator) at the same time as the ESA BIC UK?

Possibly. While we typically require that companies are not hosted in another business incubator, or entity or organisation providing similar support for the duration of the incubation contract, participation in some complementary programmes may be agreed upon on a case-by-case basis.

I've already received public funding for my business idea, can I still apply to the ESA BIC UK?

If you have previously received public funding for this idea – and in particular funding from the European Space Agency, Innovate UK, the UK Space Agency (e.g. Leo Programme) – you must inform the ESA BIC UK about this in advance of your application.

Does ESA take any equity in my company?

No.

When do we receive the incentive money (£51,723.60) from the ESA BIC UK?

The incentive money is distributed in three stages. You receive an initial payment of £17,241.20 after attending the Month One Progress Check-In. At the mid-term review you will need to provide evidence that you have spent this initial money on eligible items, as well as additional spend of a maximum of £17,241.20 which will then be reimbursed. Finally, the remaining £17,241.20 is given at the end of the incubation period, again requiring evidence of eligible spending. In summary, the first payment is provided in advance, while the second and third payments are given as reimbursements.

When I claim the expenses do I include the VAT?

If you are VAT registered, then you should submit your expenditure at the mid-term and final review meetings NET of VAT as you can claim VAT back from HMRC.

Companies which are not registered for VAT may submit gross amounts if they choose, but should note the total claimed will still be capped at £51,723.60.