



**INNOVATION VOUCHERS
FREQUENTLY ASKED
QUESTIONS**

Frequently Asked Questions

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Q1 How does an Innovation Voucher work?

An Innovation Voucher is worth up to £5,000 (or the equivalent euro amount if used in the Republic of Ireland) and allows small and medium sized enterprises (SME's) to access academic skills and expertise from one of the registered Knowledge Providers throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The aim is to improve the innovation capability of your business and to build links between public sector Knowledge Providers and the business community. If you would like help with an innovation project, such as developing innovative products processes or services, you may apply for an Innovation Voucher to access external expertise.

You can use an Innovation Voucher to get help in areas you do not have the expertise, technology or facilities needed to progress a project or solve a business issue. They are designed to encourage new, partnerships between businesses and a public sector Knowledge Provider, such as a university, college, technology institution or research organisation, and can help you avail of their specialist knowledge.

Medium sized businesses (with more than 50 employees) are not eligible for an Innovation Voucher if they have received assistance from Invest NI's Grant for R&D programme in the last five years.

If you are awarded a Voucher, you have nine months to complete your project with the Knowledge Provider from the date of issue. On completion of your project, you will receive a final report from the Knowledge Provider and will pay VAT of 20% direct to the Knowledge Provider. Invest NI will pay the Knowledge Provider directly up to a maximum of £5,000 (or EURO equivalent).

Innovation Vouchers are not transferrable and must be used for the project detailed in the approved application form.

Q2 Who are the Knowledge Providers?

There are 39 Knowledge Providers throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. [Browse the list of approved Knowledge Providers on investni.com](http://investni.com).

Knowledge Providers are publicly funded universities, colleges, technology institutions and research organisations in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. You can only access an Innovation Voucher by working with an approved Knowledge Provider.

Q3 Why were Innovation Vouchers developed?

Whilst innovation is widely recognised as an essential condition for business growth, sustainability and competitiveness, Northern Ireland has historically lagged behind other leading European countries and UK regions in terms of its levels of innovation activity.

The latest UK Innovation Survey for 2015 (based on data from 2012-14) shows Northern Ireland as 11 out of the 12 regions in the UK in terms of the rate of innovation activity, despite the percentage of Northern Ireland firms innovating rising from 40% to 45%.

The main objective of an Innovation Voucher is to increase the level of innovation in Northern Ireland's small and medium sized businesses as a result of a partnership between publicly funded universities, colleges, technology institutions and research organisations. .

They are also designed to increase the transfer of knowledge between academia and business, resulting in an increase to the level of innovation activity in Northern Ireland.

Q4 What can I use an Innovation Voucher for?

Innovation is about doing things differently or doing different things to make your business better. An Innovation Voucher can help you take a creative approach to tackling specific business issues.

Typical projects are:

- Ideas for new or improved products, processes and services.
- Validation trialling of new or enhanced products and/or services.
- Access to specialist information and expertise on new materials.
- Tapping into research and scientific expertise.

Q5 What can't I use an Innovation Voucher for?

Where an existing solution is readily available from the private sector, it is unlikely that an Innovation Voucher will be awarded.

Whilst we support a broad range of projects, there are some activities Invest NI will not support through an Innovation Voucher. These are:

- Standard mobile apps.
- General sales activities.
- Standard business advice.
- General marketing activities.
- Buying training for your business.
- Buying equipment for your business.
- Business plans and economic appraisals.
- Website development and online optimisation.
- Internships for students from knowledge institutions.
- Software purchases and basic software development.
- Aid that would promote or subsidise the cost of exports.
- Achieving compliance with statutory regulations or legislation.
- Testing products that are not within the ownership of your business.
- Project costs incurred prior to the issue date of the Innovation Voucher.

If support for your project is available under another Invest NI programme, an Innovation Voucher will not be awarded. Invest NI will refer you to the appropriate programme team.

Please note: The VAT charged on agreed Innovation Voucher project activities must be paid for separately by your business. See Q17 for more information.

Q6 Who is eligible to apply?

Innovation Vouchers are open to Northern Ireland based SMEs, social enterprises and third sector organisations, providing they partner with an approved Knowledge Provider. This includes sole traders, partnerships, limited companies, new start-ups and those businesses at pre-trading stage.

You can apply for an Innovation Voucher if:

- You are a small enterprise, social enterprise or third sector organisation with less than 50 employees and either an annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet not exceeding €10 million.
- You are a medium enterprise, social enterprise or third sector organisation with more than 50 employees but less than 250 employees, and either an annual turnover not exceeding €50 million or an annual balance sheet not exceeding €43 million. You must not have received assistance through Invest NI's Grant for R&D programme in the past five years.

View the EU definition of a SME: https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition_en

Exemptions

Companies in the transport or agricultural sectors cannot apply for an Innovation Voucher in line with State Aid Guidelines.

Q7 Can a group of businesses apply together?

Up to five businesses can apply together and pool their Innovation Vouchers to solve a common issue. This is referred to as a Pooled Project.

The lead business submitting an Innovation Voucher pooled application:

- Is responsible for managing the process for the pooled Innovation Voucher application process on behalf of all applying businesses, covering all paperwork and reporting requirements.
- Must complete the contact details and appropriate declarations on behalf of each pooled applicant.

If you have any further questions about the pooled application process, please do not hesitate to contact our Business Support Team on 0800 181 4422 between 8.30am and 5pm Monday to Friday or send us an email at the following web page:
<http://www.investni.com/contact-us.html>

Q8 How can I apply for an Innovation Voucher?

You can apply for an Innovation Voucher during one of our open calls using the online application form available at: www.investni.com/innovationvouchers

MYINI Registration

Before you can access the Innovation Voucher application form, you will need to answer a few preliminary questions to check that you are eligible to apply.

If you meet the criteria, you will need to register on Invest NI's MYINI portal. The registration process will ask you to provide your contact details and your unique username and password.

Please make a note of your username and password and keep them safe as you will need them each time you sign into MYINI to access, update or submit your application form.

You should always keep your username and password safe as this will allow you to sign into MYINI and access, update or submit your application form.

Call for Applications

Invest NI generally runs four calls for applications for Innovation Vouchers every year. The closing dates for each call for applications will be detailed on the online application form and the Innovation Vouchers web page at: www.investni.com/innovationvouchers

It is your responsibility to ensure you submit your online application before the closing date and time of each call. Printed copies of the online application will not be accepted.

Online applications cannot be submitted after the closing date and time of each call.

Please familiarise yourself with the [Innovation Voucher Guidance Notes \(PDF\)](#) before completing and submitting your application.

Accessibility

If you have a disability which affects your ability to access the online application process, please contact us so we can discuss your particular needs and ensure that you are able to complete the information required to submit an application.

Please do not hesitate to contact our Business Support Team on 0800 181 4422 between 8.30am and 5pm Monday to Friday or send us an email at the following web page: <http://www.investni.com/contact-us.html>

Q9 What happens after I submit my application?

The submission deadline for Innovation Voucher applications is always 3pm on the final day of the call. We recommend you submit your application well before the closing deadline as late forms will not be accepted.

Following the submission deadline, your application will be assessed by the Assessment Panel. We aim to notify you of the Panel's decision within four weeks of the closing date of the call. Our decision will also be available on your MYINI account.

If you are successful, you will receive your Innovation Voucher in the post.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified of the decision by e-mail and will have the opportunity to seek feedback about their application from the Innovation Voucher team. If appropriate, unsuccessful applicants may wish to submit a revised application in a subsequent call.

Q10 Can I apply again if I am unsuccessful the first time?

Yes. If you have been unsuccessful you can contact the Innovation Voucher Team to request specific feedback on your unsuccessful application. Please take this feedback into account before re-submitting the application.

Q11 What happens once I am awarded an Innovation Voucher?

You can exchange your Innovation Voucher for advice and expertise provided by a Knowledge Provider to address the issue outlined in your approved Innovation Voucher application form.

[Browse the list of approved Knowledge Providers on investni.com.](#)

You should share your application form with the Knowledge Provider. This should form the basis of your discussions when you agree the programme of work required to address your business issue.

As Knowledge Providers are publicly funded research organisations, they will offer their services from within their existing resources.

Q12 How do I start working with a Knowledge Provider?

The first step is to contact the Knowledge Provider you would like to work with from the [list of approved Knowledge Providers on investni.com](#).

This will help you to identify if they have the required knowledge and expertise to solve your business issue. The Innovation Voucher Team can also help you identify an appropriate Knowledge Provider.

You do not need to select a Knowledge Provider in advance of submitting your application, but you can indicate on your application if you have already done so.

Q13 What should be agreed before my project commences?

You should agree a Terms of Reference (ToR) with the Knowledge Provider for your project. This should broadly reflect the project as outlined in your approved application form.

Once you have agreed your ToR with the Knowledge Provider, the Knowledge Provider will forward a Letter of Notification to Invest NI for approval, covering the scope, timeframe, deliverables and costs of the project.

Once Invest NI reviews the ToR and approves the Letter of Notification, they will issue a purchase order to the Knowledge Provider. Work on your project can then commence.

Q14 Can I use my Innovation Voucher with a private sector company or research provider?

No, your Innovation Voucher cannot be used, either directly or indirectly, to fund services provided to your business by a private sector company or research provider.

In certain instances, in agreement with the Knowledge Provider and Invest NI, up to 20% of your Innovation Voucher may be sub-contracted to an external party outside of the pool of approved providers if the necessary skills and expertise is not available from the Knowledge Provider.

In such instances, the Knowledge Provider will manage the agreement with the sub-contractor and ensure that Invest NI is made aware prior to work commencing.

Q15 Should I expect a commercial product as an output of the Innovation Voucher project?

No, you should not expect a finished, commercial product as an output of your project. Your Innovation Voucher covers up to £5,000 of work by the Knowledge Provider. Examples of the type of project outputs you can expect include:

- reports;
- technical design drawings;
- technical specifications;
- technology roadmaps;
- rough product or process prototypes; or
- results of specific analysis.

You will need to agree project outputs and key deliverables at the outset with the Knowledge Provider and ensure this is clearly detailed in the ToR and Letter of Notification.

Q16 How are the full costs of the projects addressed?

The value of the Innovation Voucher is up to £5,000 which is used to offset the final costs of the project activity as agreed between your business and the Knowledge Provider in the Letter of Notification.

In the event that the final costs are greater than £5,000, you will be expected to pay the balance. We therefore recommend that you discuss and agree this with the Knowledge Provider before any work starts.

Please note: In awarding the Innovation Voucher, Invest NI is not commenting on the full cost, scope or deliverables of the project. You should be aware that the full cost of your project may be considerably greater than £5,000 and this must be considered carefully when discussing the project with the Knowledge Provider.

Please refer to Q21 for information relating to 2nd and 3rd vouchers.

Q17 Are Innovation Vouchers subject to VAT?

Innovation Vouchers are issued exclusive of VAT.

Innovation Vouchers are subject to VAT and the value of the voucher cannot be used to cover the VAT.

You will be responsible for the payment of VAT irrespective of whether or not your business is registered for VAT. If you are a VAT registered business, you might have the option of reclaiming through normal VAT procedures. More information on VAT can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/vat-returns/overview>.

VAT is liable on the project cost of £5,000 (or the total project cost if higher than £5,000). Therefore, you will be required to pay £1,000 VAT on a project worth £5,000.

On completion of the Innovation Voucher project, the Knowledge Provider will invoice you directly for the VAT payment.

A subsequent application for another Innovation Voucher will not be considered if the VAT has not been paid on a previous Innovation Voucher.

Q18 How do I pay for the service(s) provided by the Knowledge Provider?

When the programme of work has been completed as per the Letter of Notification, the Knowledge Provider will invoice Invest NI for reimbursement of up to the £5,000 as covered by the Innovation Voucher.

As stated in Q16, in the event that the final costs are greater than the Innovation Voucher amount, this will have been discussed and agreed between your business and the Knowledge Provider and clearly detailed in the Letter of Notification.

Your business will be responsible for payment of any additional amounts over and above the £5,000 voucher, as well as the VAT associated with the entire project.

Please refer to Q21 for information relating to 2nd and 3rd vouchers.

Q19 What information will you hold about my business?

Any personal data you provide to Invest NI will be handled in line with the Data Protection Act 1998.

- We will store this information securely and retain it only as long as is necessary under public sector requirements.
- We will share your personal data with knowledge providers for the specific purposes of this programme.
- We may also share your personal data with our sponsor department, the Department for the Economy, for governance purposes and also with other public bodies, such as local Councils, for economic development purposes.

As the Innovation Voucher is sourced from public funds Invest NI will, in the interest of openness and transparency, proactively publish limited information on the scheme including:

- Name of applicants.
- Application title.
- Amount of assistance.

Invest NI will not publish any other personal or commercial information you provide as part of this application process.

Q20 Can I apply for more than one Innovation Voucher?

Yes, a company or an individual may make use of a maximum of three Innovation Vouchers for different projects but can only have one 'active' voucher at any point in time.

Your business will not be eligible for further Innovation Vouchers until your account with the Knowledge Provider is settled in full, including the payment of VAT.

Q21 What are the funding levels for Innovation Vouchers?

1st Innovation Voucher £5,000

Your business will pay for the VAT associated with the project and any project costs over and above the voucher value. First vouchers are designed to encourage businesses which have not teamed up before with a Knowledge Provider. Invest NI's aim is to nurture this type of collaboration, so we may give priority to businesses that are new to working on a formal basis with a specific department within academic and research institutions.

2nd Innovation Voucher £5,000

The second voucher is worth 80% up to a maximum of £5,000 of the total cost. Your business must pay the remaining 20% of the cost, as well as any other project costs if the total exceeds £6,250 and all of the VAT associated with the project.

3rd Innovation Voucher £5,000

The third voucher is worth 70% up to a maximum of £5,000 of the total cost. Your business must pay the remaining 30% of the cost, as well as any other project costs if the total exceeds £7,143 and all of the VAT associated with the project.

Examples

Based on a £5,000 project

Voucher	Project Cost	Voucher Value	Client Contribution	VAT (20% of project cost)	Total Cost to Client
1st	£5,000	100% up to £5,000	£0	£1,000	£1,000
2nd	£5,000	80% up to £4,000	£1,000	£1,000	£2,000
3rd	£5,000	70% up to £3,500	£1,500	£1,000	£2,500

Based on the client wishing to use the full £5,000 value of a second or third voucher

Voucher	Project Cost	Voucher Value	Client Contribution	VAT (20% of project cost)	Total Cost to Client
2nd	£6,250	80% up to £5,000	20% = £1,250	£1,250	£2,500
3rd	£7,143	70% up to £5,000	30% = £2,142	£1,428	£3,570

VAT registered businesses may be able to reclaim the VAT through normal VAT procedures. More information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/vat-returns/overview>.

Q22 What can a Knowledge Provider claim as eligible costs on Innovation Voucher projects?

All researchers employed by a Knowledge Provider may receive payment for the work undertaken in an Innovation Voucher project, provided such payments are within the terms and conditions of the individual's contract with the Knowledge Provider.

Salary costs for work undertaken by students recruited by the Knowledge Providers on short term contracts for the purposes of the Innovation Voucher project are also permitted.

Small items of equipment and materials may be purchased as required, providing these are agreed in advance between your business and the Knowledge Provider. However, this does not include the purchase of equipment and materials that the Knowledge Provider would normally be expected to have available onsite.

Small amounts of travel (such as mileage) may also be allowed, providing this is agreed in advance between your business and the Knowledge Provider

Invest NI normally expect at least 70% of the claimed costs of any Innovation Voucher project to go towards paying for the skills and expertise of the Knowledge Provider.

Q23 How long is an Innovation Voucher valid for?

An Innovation Voucher is valid for nine months from the date of issue. Each Innovation Voucher issued includes a voucher number and expiry date.

Your business will have nine months to complete your project with the Knowledge Provider from the date of issue.

Q24 What happens if the expiry date is approaching and project work has not been completed?

Please contact the Innovation Voucher team at Invest NI as early as possible in such a circumstance.

Q25 Will my business own any Foreground IP generated during the Innovation Voucher project?

Foreground IP is the intellectual property that is conceived, created, or developed by the Knowledge Provider on your behalf during the course of the Innovation Voucher project.

Any foreground IP developed as a result of the Innovation Voucher project will belong to or be assigned to your business, unless you and the Knowledge Provider have agreed otherwise.