

Applicant Information Pack – Digitising SME Trade Finance

Challenge Overview

Thank you for your interest in the second Innovation Challenge Call on the topic of Digitising SME Trade Finance, launched by the Digital Trust Centre of Excellence (CoE).

Applicants with promising proposals will be selected for the Shortlist and move into the Exploration Phase, taking part in workshops and sessions to further refine their solution and proposal. From this Shortlist, the winning team will progress into the Development Phase and access funding up to £50,000 from the Digital Trust Centre of Excellence, delivered by Edinburgh Napier University.

PLEASE ENSURE YOU COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING STEPS FOR A COMPLETE APPLICATION.

The deadline for applications is 15 March 2026, 11:59pm (BST).

- Read this document and the Challenge Statement (available [here](#))
- Complete the online application form with written responses
- Upload your pitch deck and video link via the application form (more details below)

Timelines and Expectations

Application Window	February – March 2026
The application window will be open from 17 February to 15 March 2026, inclusive.	
Exploration Phase (Shortlisted Teams)	April – May 2026
Shortlisted teams will join an intensive Exploration Phase with technical and market workshops, as well as tailored support and mentorship. The teams will benefit from expert insights and feedback from the CoE’s networks of industry leading partners .	
Please note the mandatory in-person sessions:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person intensive workshop (Edinburgh, late April – May, dates TBC). Teams must commit to attend the 2-3 day workshop as this forms a core part of the programme. • The Exploration Phase culminates in a Pitch Event (Edinburgh, dates TBC). The winning solution will progress to the funded Development Phase. 	
Funded Development Phase (Final Winner)	June – September 2026
One standout solution will be awarded up to £50,000 in staged funding to support testing, development, and refinement. Funding will be released in phases, aligned with predefined milestones to assess progress and deliverables.	

The Application Process

The CoE is looking for Digital Trust innovations that can go all the way to real-world adoption. We want innovations that address genuine market needs and have clear customer value. Please demonstrate you have an existing solution at TRL 3-4, with a robust plan to achieving TRL 5 through a 3-month funded Development Phase. Most importantly, convince us you have the passion and determination to scale this beyond the programme and into the hands of users who need it.

To ensure we can evaluate your application, you must submit THREE components:

1. Written Application Form

Complete the online application available on our [website](#) with concise, fixed-length text responses covering details of your company or team, solution details, eligibility.

Please note - The form must be completed in one go, progress cannot be saved – please check you have all relevant input (including pitch deck and video) before starting.

2. Pitch Deck (PDF, max. 5 slides)

Upload a pitch deck of your solution (maximum 5 slides). Your deck should act as a stand-alone solution overview for the evaluation panel that conveys your solution, its potential, and your team's ability to deliver it. It may include:

- Problem statement and market opportunity
- Solution overview and key features
- Technology approach, current development stage (TRL), and progression plan to TRL 5
- Business model, traction, and go-to-market strategy
- Team credentials and relevant experience
- Future development roadmap

3. Video Demo or Video Team Intro (max. 2 minutes)

Record a short video (90 seconds ideal – 2 minutes maximum) demonstrating your solution. If a demo isn't possible, use the time to introduce your team and make the case for why you're the right people to solve this problem.

Video submissions must be uploaded to YouTube. Follow these steps:

- Sign in to your YouTube account (or create a free account at youtube.com).
- Click the Create (+) button in the top-right corner and select upload video.
- Select the correct privacy settings: When prompted to choose visibility select Unlisted (recommended). This means only people with the link can view your video. It will not appear in search results or on your public channel.
- NB: Do NOT select “Private,” as we will not be able to view the video.
- Click Next through the remaining steps and hit Save.
- Once published, click Copy link and paste the full YouTube URL into the application form.

Screening and Evaluation

Each application will be reviewed to ensure compliance with eligibility criteria and fit to the Challenge Statement. Applications will then be evaluated by an expert panel against the criteria outlined below. Shortlisted teams will be announced in April.

Evaluation Panel

The expert evaluation panel is composed to reflect a broad range of domain expertise and includes representatives from: the Digital Trust Centre of Excellence (Edinburgh Napier University); The University of Edinburgh; The University of Glasgow; Scottish Enterprise; Challenge Sponsor(s).

All panel members will be required to declare any conflicts of interest and will be excluded from the evaluation process where such conflicts exist.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. Relevance & Impact

- How well does the solution address the challenge? How clearly does the proposal demonstrate insight into the opportunity space? What is the potential impact on the problem space?
- Scalability and adoption – who is the solution for, and how might it grow or be adopted over time?

2. Innovation & Technical Merit

- Originality of the idea and uniqueness of the proposed approach.
- How innovatively does the solution leverage technology?
- Does the solution effectively build digital trust?

3. Feasibility & Readiness

- Is the solution at TRL 3-4? Is there a credible pathway to TRL 5 through the programme?
- Technical viability and feasibility – clarity of the delivery plan, how the team intends to test and learn.
- Can the team deliver during the programme timeline?

4. Team Capability

- Does the team have the right expertise, experience, and technical capability to deliver or explore this solution?
- Team culture, ethos, and demonstrated passion for solving the problem.

5. Economic Benefit to Scotland

- What is the potential benefit to the Scottish economy?
- How does the proposal demonstrate connection to economic growth in Scotland?

Eligibility Criteria

<p>Applicant type</p>	<p>This Call is open to individuals, teams, startups, and SMEs that are in the early stages of solution development. We are excited to support respondents in validating disruptive, cutting-edge solutions with a clear vision for their potential impact and a pathway to execution.</p> <p>If you do not have a registered business, you're welcome to apply, but please note that a registered UK business entity must be in place before the Final Pitch Event (May 2026) to remain eligible for funding.</p>
<p>Technology Readiness Level</p>	<p>Your solution must be at TRL 3-4, with a credible pathway to achieving TRL 5 through the funded programme.</p>
<p>Availability</p>	<p>The individual, team, startup, must be available to work on their proposed solution throughout the Challenge timeframes.</p>
<p>In Person Commitments</p>	<p>Shortlisted teams must commit to attend a 2-3 day in-person workshop as well as a Pitch Event in Edinburgh during the Exploration Phase. Travel costs for these sessions will not be reimbursed. Further details in the Timelines section.</p>
<p>Location Criteria</p>	<p>Participants will need to have a workspace available, whether that's a physical office space or the option of working from home. However, the Digital Trust CoE will host physical meetings, workshops etc. at Edinburgh Napier University campus locations, or at partner locations where relevant.</p> <p>As the innovation funding is targeted at economic growth in Scotland, some link to this benefit in Scotland should be demonstrated, but individuals and companies from anywhere will be considered. The intent of this criteria is to demonstrate that the Scottish ecosystem is a great place for innovative people and businesses from anywhere to establish, build and grow.</p> <p>Examples of economic benefit in this context include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A business or individuals based in Scotland or registered, trading or have a strategic presence in Scotland • A proposition that conducts development of a concept in Scotland • A proposition which has direct impact in Scotland • A commitment to establish a business entity in the UK with some business operations in Scotland

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is there a registration fee or any cost associated with participating?

No, there are no registration fees and no direct costs to participate in the application, Exploration Phase, or Development Phase. However, travel to Edinburgh will be required for in-person events during the Exploration Phase (2-3 day workshop & Pitch Event), and travel costs will not be reimbursed.

Q: What is a Technology Readiness Level (TRL)?

[TRL](#) is a method for estimating the maturity of technologies:

- TRL 3: Experimental proof of concept
- TRL 4: Technology validated in lab
- TRL 5: Technology validated in relevant environment

Q: Can I apply if I'm based outside Scotland?

Yes! While the funding is targeted at economic growth in Scotland, we welcome applications from individuals and companies anywhere, provided you can demonstrate some link to Scottish economic benefit (see Location Criteria section for examples).

Q: How many teams will be selected for the Exploration Phase?

We will select approximately 3-5 teams for the Exploration Phase. Only one team will be selected as the winner to receive funding for the Development Phase.

Q: What happens if I'm not selected for the shortlist?

All applicants will be notified of the outcome by email. We encourage you to stay connected with the Digital Trust CoE for future opportunities, and may offer tailored follow-up.

Q: What support will we receive during the Exploration Phase?

Shortlisted teams will receive expert advice and feedback from the Digital Trust CoE, as well as our network of partners and industry connections. You'll participate in intensive workshops and receive feedback on your solution. This phase is designed to significantly strengthen your solution, and connect you where relevant.

Q: How is the £50,000 funding structured?

Funding for the winning team is released in stages, aligned with predefined milestones. A detailed delivery plan with check-gates will be agreed between the Digital Trust CoE and the winning team at the start of the Development Phase.

Q: Do I need to have a registered company to apply?

No, we welcome applications from individuals, teams, startups, and SMEs. However, company registration will be required before the Final Pitch Event (May 2026) – if selected as the winner for

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the funded Development Phase, you will need to have appropriate legal structures to receive funding.

Q: Who owns the intellectual property (IP) developed during the programme?

You retain ownership of your IP. The Digital Trust CoE does not claim ownership of solutions developed through the programme.

Contact Information

For questions about the application process, eligibility, or the Challenge, please contact:

Email: Digital.Trust@napier.ac.uk

Website: <https://coetrust.com>

Newsletter: [Sign up](#)

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We look forward to receiving your application and supporting Scotland's next generation of digital trust innovators.