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Moderator questions in Bold, Respondents in Regular text.

KEY: Unable to decipher = (inaudible + timecode), **Phonetic spelling** (ph) + timecode), **Missed word** = (mw + timecode), **Talking over each other** = (talking over each other + timecode).

Moderator: Good morning. You're very welcome to today's webinar, Innovate UK Funding Masterclass. Today is the second in our Invest NI series of webinars on Innovate UK funding and support for Northern Ireland businesses. My name is Lisa Braniff. I am Invest NI's Innovation Funding Advisory Service Manager and joining me on the call today is Dr Stephen McComb, Knowledge Transfer Advisor in Innovate UK Business Connect, and Stephen will take us through the main presentation of our funding masterclass. And, following the presentations, our Q&A session will be hosted by Barbara Orr. Barbara is the Ecosystem Senior Innovation and Growth Specialist for Innovate UK business growth. So, as I said, today is the second in our series of webinars, so I'll start by just briefly recapping a few of the key messages from our first webinar, which was an introduction to the Innovate UK funding and supports. If you have missed that webinar, or if you want to revisit it, the full webinar is recorded and is available on Invest NI's website, and you can access it through the QR, QR code displayed on the screen. I'll also inform you about the Invest NI advisory supports that are available for businesses who want to apply to Innovate UK funding supports and then Stephen will talk you through the grant-writing masterclass, which applies for Innovate UK funding and is also applicable to other grant applications.

And finally we'll conclude today's webinar with a Q&A session. So, throughout the webinar, you have the option of writing your answers in the-, writing your questions in the Q&A function. We'll hope to answer of many of those as possible at the end, particularly those that will have wide applicability to all the attendees on the webinar. So, in our first webinar, Dr Vicky Kell, Invest NI's Director of Innovation, introduced the importance of innovation and Invest NI's innovation escalator. Innovation is critical to enhance productivity and to enable businesses to grow and succeed in export markets. We have a number of innovation supports in Invest NI and they range from supports for companies who are starting their innovation journey to those company-, all the way through to companies who have been innovators for a long time and have very sophisticated, sophisticated innovation and R&D functions within their businesses. For those companies starting out, for-, and innovating for the first time, there's innovation advice. We have small-scale innovation vouchers and we have support on the innovation process available through Innovate NI. For companies who have increased their capacity for innovation, there's technical development and supports and incentives in order to support your operational development. And for those companies who have progressed along their innovation journey and have started to undertake research and development for adoption of, of knowledge and for applying new knowledge in order to develop innovative products that are uniquely placed to succeed in the marketplace.

In addition to the wide range of supports that Invest NI has on offer, there is also funding and support from other opportunities and Invest NI works in closely in partnership with Innovate UK to ensure that there is visibility and access of the Innovate UK supports for all businesses that it's applicable to in Northern Ireland. So, we do this in a, a number of ways, through co-funding partnerships, such as with the Knowledge Transfer partnership, which is co-funded by Invest NI and Innovate UK. We also support awareness raising in webinars such as the one you're joining us on today and ensure that we are always signposting businesses to the support mechanism that best suits their business need for a given development at a point in time. In our first webinar, Paul Atkinson, the Regional Manager for Northern Ireland, introducing us to the funding and supports that are available through the Innovate UK system. In our webinar today, the focus will be on the application process for a grant application in order to secure funding. But the grant is just one component of the Innovate UK funding system and to get that overview of all the other elements that are available, I'd invite you to revisit the first webinar in our series. Before commencing application for grant funding, it's very important that you take the time to assess the eligibility and suitability of, of the competition for your business. So, each funding opportunity will set out specific criteria around company size, competition scope and particular funding rules and collaboration rules that may be required for that competition.

Many competitions will specify what is the stage of development of the R&D that can be supported. Some competitions will focus on R&D that is quite early stage and far from market. Other competitions and supports can offer support for those later-stage R&D projects which are moving forwards to commercialisation. Many of the offerings will require match funding from the business. This means, for example, the funding could be offered at a, a support rate of 50% or 70%. The business will have to show where the other funding will come for in order to deliver the project as a whole and to ensure that there's sufficient cash flow for the company throughout the project duration. As I say, many of the projects will require a partner in a collaborative approach and it's very important when meeting partners that the right partnership is brought together to deliver the best solution and to add value to the project as a whole. Grant, as I say, is one mechanism and it's the one we're focussing on this morning but there are other supports available through, through loan or equity and really it depends on what your business wants to do to understand which support would be the right approach for a given project or for a stage of development of the business. And always keeping in mind that any project that you're applying for really needs to align with where you want to go with your commercialisation strategy and that the time frames line up in terms of the application process, the assessment process and the delivery of the project. Many of the projects will, will have to demonstrate that the innovation and R&D being supported through the project will enhance current or new products in a way which is significantly advancing what is currently available in the market by you or any of your competitors.

And I would say for process, there's always-, important to consider what value-added there will be beyond the funding, whether it's truly the partnership that you can work with or, or allowing you

to gain that credibility for future investments. Always consider the grant application as part of your overall business strategy rather than a stand-alone project. In Invest NI, we can support you to navigate that funding system and assess those critical criteria for the calls. We do this through a number of avenues. Raising awareness of the opportunities is one element. I'd invite you to visit the business support finder in NI Business Info, which has information on innovation supports from funders within Northern Ireland and also UK national funders such as Innovate UK. Innovate UK also has a dedicated innovation funding service portal where you will see all the competitions that are upcoming from Innovate UK. Within Invest NI, our innovation funding advisory service can also help you to check if the project idea that you have is a good fit for a particular fund, whether that's for Invest NI funding or for other funders such as Innovate UK, or other agencies. We can give you advice on the application process and help you with partner searching if that's something that is needed for the competition and can add value to your business. When you hear from Stephen, he will highlight the value in having an independent set of eyes review your draft application.

That's something which we can support you with at Invest NI and we will also signpost you to other specialist advisors in Innovate UK Business Connect, Innovate UK Business Growth, or other agencies that we work within the ecosystem to ensure we're offering a connected support service for businesses. For those businesses who can meet the criteria to become an Invest NI customer, you may be able to also apply for our financial support for project defining and scoping through the project definition programme. So, I'd invite you, if you are interested in that support service, that you can contact Invest NI at innovateandfundingadvice@investni.com. So, I'm shortly going to hand over to Stephen McComb who will deliver the main presentation on grant funding. Before that, we'd like to get an idea of a little bit of the experience from the attendees on the webinar today. So, there's a poll that's appearing on your screen now and we would ask you to let us know in terms of applications to Innovate UK funding, have you had at least one successful application? Have you applied to Innovate UK but not yet been successful? Or are you considering making an application to Innovate UK for the first time? So, if you'd like to vote, respond to the poll, that will just give us an idea of the level of experience of the attendees on the call today, which will help in the delivery of the presentation.

So, the results of the poll are, are in and we have 35% of the audience have had at least one successful application, which is fantastic. Just 15% have applied but have not yet been successful and we can see that about half of the audience, 50%, are considering making an application. So, that's perfect because this webinar is really to target those companies who are considering an application for the first time or those who want to improve their success rate of their applications. So, I'm pleased to welcome now Stephen McComb, who will-, who will take you through the main funding masterclass, and I'll look forward to your questions at the end. So, I'll hand over to you, Stephen, thank you.

Stephen McComb: Okay, thanks, Lisa. Welcome, everybody, to the, the session. I'm very grateful there is

50% here considering it-, an application but haven't tried that yet so that's, that's fantastic for us to understand. And well done to those who have been successful so far already. You should perhaps be taking the session. And those who have not been successful just yet, hopefully, this will help you, kind of, push you to realign a little bit. As mentioned, my name's Steve McComb. I am a KTP advisor for Innovate UK Business Connect, is my main role, but I also interact with a number of other parts of, of the wider health ecosystem, technology ecosystem. Lots of different technologies, etc. So, hopefully, this presentation is, sort of, based on dealing with lots of companies who are probably in your position of trying to apply for something and trying to work through the, the various hoops and hurdles to make sure you put a, a compelling case forward.

This-, the actual presentation itself has really been defined over quite a number of years so it, it keeps sort of changing with the times and, sort of, what's been asked of yourself as an applicant. And, and you'll see, sort of, the language will change over the years, the focus will change over the years. But although at the, the end of it, it is a race or a competition which you need to be fantastic at. You need to, sort of, shine more than other people. Quite often, people will, sort of, put an application in and fill in the word count. And that's the wrong approach because you really have to be a very successful application and therefore have to shine in that application. We are primarily looking against the Innovate UK funding today and, as I say, I, I work for that organisation. However, the principles that you'll see are applicable to other organisations and other funds, so even if you're considering, sort of, other funds beyond Innovate UK, some of the principles we'll talk today are relevant to that and, and consider as you move forward that this is gonna be, sort of, something that'll carry you into other places. The grant writing masterclass is broken down into three general areas. The, the first around telling a good story. The second about what does it feel like to be an assessor and, and the last part really around the, the tips and summary. You'll see at the bottom I have this, sort of, assessor's prayer of, 'Send me a good one,' and it is worthwhile just to-, or initially just, sort of, thinking through, if you're gonna write an application, you've got to put your heart and soul into that and for somebody on the other side of this receives a bunch of assessments and they therefore have to work through and grade it in a manner that, sort of, says that these-, this is successful, this is unsuccessful. But do, do be mindful that there are two parts to this process. Use the submitting, sort of, information but there's also somebody considering is this a good one?

And, and that, sort of, human element in the back of your head as you're trying to present is useful, I think, for everybody. As you then start to go through this, this first section really, first section, we're really, sort of, asking you two parts. One is the element of an exam, so have you done all the things which you have been asked? Have you filled in the right questions, etc? And, so that, sort of, concept is, is easy for us to get our head around, the idea of an exam as a movement, completing-, where we're providing what has been asked of it. But the other part of that is the concept of a story and the person who's gonna assess your application has not heard of you. They don't know about you, they don't know if you're good or if you're bad. They don't know if your, your technology is really advanced or is very basic. So, you, you really have to, sort of, get this idea of you need to convince the person, you need to bring a story as well as answer the question. And bringing the two of these together is, is quite a, a good approach to try and consider am I telling the story effectively? Can I tell it in a different way? Is there ways that I can bring it-, a much stronger case so that somebody reading it will really be quite excited about it? So, there

are elements of this slide, you see, where we need to answer the question first of all. If they're asking you about the business case and you're answering about the technology, you're not answering the question. If you're telling them what you've built but actually the question is about the markets, it's the wrong approach. So, really have that, sort of, piece of just, 'What was the question I'm being asked?'

Start re-reading it and start by re-reading it, or re-reading it and then re-read it and then re-read it, so that idea of answering the questions. This next part then, just about high scores in all questions, quite often we see where an applicant is particularly excited about, sort of, telling me the business case round it but whenever it comes to the project plan, it's very weak. Or they, they left out sections about the risk management and, and immediately you, you're removing scores because they haven't answered what you've asked them, or they've done a very weak response in sections but have-, but have been strong in other sections. You need to just go in high across all of it, so even if it's a bit that doesn't excite you, you need to be having that ability to respond with high-, with high scores. And the story has to be convincing. I will read lots of technology responses. I will read lots of, of applications. Therefore I need to be convinced that your story is better than the last one I read, and you could go straight on so that it, sort of, starts with the, the use case and then works its way through, how you're gonna change the world and then delivers into the, the finances that you're gonna fund your company and help you grow. So, that golden thread from the start right the way through, not disjointed, and particularly we see that where two or three people have written the same application. One person is responsible for section one, one person is responsible for section three, and they don't line up, or the language they use is completely confusing.

Consistency through it all, cohesive, it joins together, and avoiding red flags, which we'll talk about in a second, but that, concept of not doing things which you're scored downwards. So, Lisa mentioned this a second ago, alignment to the competition scope. You might be very excited, the fact that this is £100,000 fund and you think, 'Oh, my company could do with £100,000,' to-, but is this the right competition for you or if it's not the right competition, should you be looking at other options? So, start from that position of is this the right thing for me? If you find that you're trying to squeeze yourself into the scope, it's probably one you wanna step away from, from and not waste your time. And, and there, there is an element of, of wasting your time if you fill in an application which is not relevant to the competition, you're not gonna be scored highly and therefore you should be considering something else to, to develop your business. So, consider that, 'Do I, as a business, line up with what they're asking me?' Each competition will be slightly different. Some will be about newer companies, some will be about different types of technologies, some are about healthcare or AI or something else. Make sure you're in, in the right competition. Moving then beyond that, sort of, first impressions so, again, the story concept. I may have read five or six applications before I get to yours.

I may have another bundle to go beyond that so that, sort of, sense of actually how do I get, get what is being presented very quickly? And quite often if I'm feeding back to companies who are making an application, there's, there's usually a, a very simple response, a, sort of, 'I don't get it. It's not clear to me what you're offering. It's not clear to me what the, the details-, so that, sort of, sense of the short

summary. Just I get what you're offering, it tells the story quickly. I can then look to the rest of the details beyond that. There's some tips in there about the style of the presentation. If it's very long, long sentences, so it's difficult to maintain your, sort of, focus right through it, so maybe shorter, sharper sentences, active tense or all, sort of, part of that. Sell the project, be clear, concise and, and think of that, sort of, concept of, of an elevator pitch. If you have somebody for a very short period of time, you need to convince them what is the 30 words or 50 words that's gonna be-, something that's going to convince that person fully of the elevator? So, bringing all that, sort of, style and, and story-telling element, again, is quite useful. So, moving on then, a need or a challenge. Again, sort of, if I, sort of, talk about, sort of, companies that I've, I've dealt with who perhaps don't get this bit, is they perhaps start with the technology, so they convince me that-, they're trying to convince me that their new, new piece of software or new piece of engineering kit is, is something which is really worth investigating. I, sort of, missed the step before that, why they need this technology.

What's wrong with the business today? What's wrong with the health service? What's wrong with banking or somewhere that you're applying into? So, start backwards and you'll, you'll quite often see a, a question around this concept of, of a need or a challenge. What is it you're trying to solve in the world? Why does your-, the world need your new technology or your new solution? Bring the evidence behind that, bring the facts and figures, bring detail of how this will be impacted. Explain to them who-, what other companies are in that area, why your product or solution will be different to what's already there, why will it be a step change beyond that and, and define the unmet need. This is quite often missed by most companies as, as, sort of, 'Oh, yeah, we'll, we'll, we'll tell you about the story of our product.' Well, we need to step back slightly and actually define why do we need your product? What's the underlying case behind that? Moving on then to your idea. So, how does your idea address that previous question about the problem? So, we're not just trying to push the technology in for the sake of it, or a solution in there that doesn't really need to be there. We're actually gonna say something is going change here as a result of my technology. How big a change is it going to be? How many people will be impacted by-, be impacted by this change? How long will that last? What, sort of-, how does it fit within the market? Those are, sort of, all important about how you, your solution is gonna fit into the future.

Is it going to be a slight improvement? Is it going to be incremental? And then do you have the, the freedom to operate within that so on, another time. Have you just taken someone else's technology and you're gonna apply it, or do you have the ability to, sort of, influence how this is gonna grow and develop? Is the market ready? Very interesting, sort of, space. Sometimes a product can be too early and you, you'll find, sort of, that, sort of, something which is really futuristic needs to have a number of steps because it gets there so, considering that, sort of, how will the market adopt it and how will you get it beyond your idea through to something deliverable? The team in resources and delivery, this is quite a, a-, it's one that's repeated across most, sort of, competitions but who, who is going to deliver this? Who is-, what is the gathering people who will actually bring your technology or your solution to market? A few companies get a bit obsessed about things around, sort of, ownership of companies. That's not what the question's about. It's really got to be this, sort of, question about who's gonna deliver your, your project? So, if you're buying in some time from an expert or consultants or, you know, advisors in there or wider, sort of, roles, I'm not-, yes, and that together builds up a good team. That's a much more compelling

answer than actually, 'It's me and my brother doing this.' You need to think about who are the teams. What about the resources you need, what about the skills that you don't have? What are the things that, sort of, are beyond, sort of, your current scattering of people that are going to be important to get it to market, to commercialise it, to bring the plan beyond tomorrow? So, think about that there probably, and just who, who is the owners of your business.

Think about the wider service delivery on it. Thinking about the market awareness side of it, again, how will you make money from the idea? Where's the opportunity? What are the trends around this? You see the questions are on the slide. But this is really just about questioning of, of we're gonna invest a, a large amount of money from government into your idea. The expectation is you're gonna be able to commercialise that and you're gonna make much, much more money than we were able to invest into it. So, how are you aware of the size of the market, the scale of the market? Where will your product take, take us in the future? What's your method of getting there? Who are you gonna sell to? So, whenever you come in with very generic questions, for example, 'We will sell into the NHS,' that tells me you don't understand your market because, 'Which part of the NHS? Who's your buyer? What does the buyer need?' If you're, sort of, giving very generic answers around, sort of, 'Yes (ph 24.06), then they will come and buy it,' that sort of tells me you don't understand your market. If you come in and say, 'Well, actually we've built up relationships with these three people, they're telling us that they will buy this level at this cost' or, 'Here's the distribution pathway' or 'Here's the framework that we'll sell into' that gives me a sense, as an assessor, to say you understand the market, you understand the path and (audio distorts 24.25) how to get there. And you understand that the likely, sort of, challenges around cost points or price points. So, just that sense of market awareness is really quite important. Moving then, onto outcomes, route to market etc. Again, links into the previous one. You understand the market and you've now got, sort of, a a number of ways to get there, so the two then tie together, one's more on the scale and the other's more in, in, sort of, 'What's your next steps? Or, 'How-, if you build this product over the next six months what happens in month seven? What happens in month ten? How are you gonna get it to a fully fledged delivery?' It, it will vary, depending on the conversations, how they ask these couple of questions but there's usually something about the market scale and then the, the delivery and method (audio distorts 25.10). The right kind of risk. A lot of people don't like to talk about risk because they'll say (ph 25.16), 'Oh yes, we've got this sorted and we, we know everything that's gonna happen.' That doesn't happen in any project, there is always gonna be an element of risk. What the assessment is looking for is not an absence of risk but is that you've controlled, and managed and understood the risk. So, if you understand, sort of, actually there's gonna be three points which might mean that we're not gonna make it to market we wanna understand those risks. But we also want to understand (ph 25.40) what's the mitigation you're gonna out behind that?

So, if, if your technology might not work but then there's a, a technology two or a version, different version or there's a different approach, that's the way you write it up, as, 'This is perhaps not gonna work, however we've got another option behind that.' So, that sort of sends out, 'We understand the key risks, we've got mitigation options in there. We're ahead of the game and, sort of, understand both the impact on that, what mitigations are there and how they're gonna control it. So, a well-written plan will have that sort of detail of just a reasonable risk. You're looking to the assessor to say, 'That's reasonable, we-, you

understand your market and you understand your product.' So, you also see, sort of, various questions and these, these come through in different types and natures. There will generally be questions about costs. My recommendation to your-, yourself is just to, sort of, be sensible about those in that you're not trying to, to throw the largest costs at everything, you're tryna say, 'Well, if this is my money I will look at your three options, I will consider which one's gonna give me the best return for that small amount of money and, therefore, choose option three as opposed to option two.' So, you're tryna look at the costs, 'Is it reasonable?' And then put a little bit of justification to say, 'I've considered options.' You're then, sort of, looking behind that to say, 'Well, is there other ways of doing it that would perhaps be more value for money?' So, that sort of sense of, 'This is public money. I've made a reasonable case to consider what's the options and I've got some consideration as to, 'Will this give me a, a, a reasonable return to myself?'" Those are, sort of, some of the general, sort of, principles around costs. You also see questions sometimes around additionality, so would you do this project without this funding? Well, if you would do the project without the funding why do we need government funding involved?

So, really you're trying to argue an additionality question to say, 'Well, the reason that we think this money's gonna be important for us is we, we think we can get to market faster. We can think we can get the bigger market as a result of this funding. We think that there's options beyond our current, sort of, capabilities, that this will accelerate our route to market.' So, value for money comes into the, the, the first part around, sort of, 'Is this a good investment?' So, we see a (ph 27.50) number of different things there, some of them are about justifying the cost, some about additional, sort of, contributions from the government and the funding innovation. And then you'll see, occasionally, questions coming through around, sort of, net zero, public value etc. So, this may also create jobs, it may also reduce carbon emissions, it may create some sort of a, a reduction in public services or improvement of public services. So, what else can you, you build a story around, beyond just delivering a-, an innovative product? So, that was section one, you're gonna apply for a grant. Have you applied in the right way? Have you answered the questions effectively? Have you told a story which is compelling, which puts you to the top of the rankings? So, let's think about this slightly differently. So, I'm looking at it from the view of the assessor, so there are people like myself, across the UK, who will get this in, in some form of batch, they will be asked to put a score against it and that score will determine whether you're funded or not. It's as simple as that, they will rank you against other people. So, let's think about that, and I've used a quote in the bottom left around walking in somebody else's shoes. So, I want you to walk for a few moments in the shoes of an assessor, because if you can understand that then you're gonna write slightly differently. So, I'm trying to look at the negative side of it as an assessor, the red flags are things that will frustrate an assessor, things that irritate assessors is, is quite a, a good way to, sort of, consider the negative side of it. So, they're, they're out of scope so they're not eligible, we talked about earlier on but why would you put an application in if you're out of scope? It's just wasting your time, it's wasting assessors' time, it will get thrown out quite quickly.

Something that's a little bit, sort of, less black and white is this overly technical language, difficult language, lots of acronyms thrown all over the place. You might understand your acronyms, the assessor might not, the assessor may confuse acronyms. So, it would be-, it's difficult language, it's complicated language, it's technical language which doesn't tell the story, be very, very cautious. If you have some

very technical things describe it in layman's language and then perhaps put in brackets, or somewhere (ph 30.04), the actual technical description of it. Some way convey something which is very technical to someone who may or may not understand everything. Depending on the competition, they will have different levels of technical insight about the area, so just aim for that, sort of, middle ground where someone who is reading it may not understand all of the technicalities, you may just need to put some bridge words in there to give them some, sort of, understanding about the area you're talking about. Poorly articulated offers, so again where the language is all over the place, it's not well-structured, it-, it's not telling the story clearly, it, it makes it difficult for the assessor. Unclear level of innovation, if I'm reading this and I'm thinking, 'I've seen ten of those,' especially in areas around AI and sustainability, probably 70%, 80% of our applications at the minute say that they are AI or that they're gonna solve sustainability challenges. So, 'How does this separate from everything else that I have read? Why is this special? Why do I think that this is scoring higher on the levels of innovation than anybody else that I've, I've read today?' Lacks commercial focus, so fantastic technically, product-wise however it's not gonna actually sell, 'I don't see how you're gonna sell that to anybody else.' Conflicting statements and lack of cohesion, we've, we've seen it in other parts of the presentation but just that sense of, 'It, it frustrates me, it conflicts with things, I, I, I don't get it.'

And then lastly just, now this has probably appeared more in the last year or two, obviously, the Chat-, it's clearly ChatGPT-written. This, this starts to appear most in, sort of (ph 31.37), of the assessor's, sort of, windows is that if this looks and feels like it's been written by ChatGPT, I'm, I'm sort of looking for where's your fingerprints of it (ph 31.45)? Or around it? Why is this special and why is this yours, as opposed to written by a ChatGPT and is, is clearly not your background? So, we, we understand that there are tools in the background which will help you to write a better application, remove grammar issues etc we can talk about, but you need to put it in a context, is this needs to feel like you're application, it doesn't need to feel like ChatGPT's application. So, be cautious in using some of those tools because it needs to still feel like yours and your, your DNA is right the way through the application. Moving on then, to, to top tips to delight an assessor. Do, sort of, keep in that mind is that, myself as an assessor and I know many of my colleagues, we love to get a good application, we, we look forward to something which excites them or interests them and actually tells something that they didn't know about, in, in an exciting way. That is something we, we will delight in. So, highlight where the project fits for the cause, make it easy for us to see that. Make it easy to read on the first pass, I read through and I get it, that's, that's a beautiful thing to an assessor (ph 32.51). Use other people to read the application as a critical friend, Lisa mentioned this earlier on. So, is that with Invest NI? Is that with colleagues? Is that with your aunty, your aunty Flo who's done these things? Use people who are not part of the writing the assessment, outside the application (ph 33.08), because they will not have had the mind that you have with how to write this thing, so therefore they will-, they will be an external view person, saying, 'Well, what about this? Why have you not included this? I don't understand that piece.' Ground everything, every statement in evidence. So, if you have said you-, this is gonna make 70% improvement,' why is it 70% improvement? Where's the detail behind that which is gonna convince us? Sell the project early on, use impact statements to nail it. And what we mean by that is this is gonna make-, 'We're gonna sell this, sort of, as a project which is gonna change the world in this type of area. And we think it's gonna make this level of impact on the day-to-day working of people who use that.' So, that sort of sense of, 'Here's the project and actually the impact on, on the people who will use it,' is quite important.

Within the assessor's side you will always have some sort of a, a scoring matrix, in pretty much every competition they will give you some insight as to what that scoring matrix looks like. And what I have done is I, I went through quite a number of scoring matrixes and drew-, drawn out some of the, sort of, key words that come through. So, there will be a much longer, sort of, statement about what is the need and how that should be defined etc, but I just drew out a number of the words which were within that to give you a sense of what a high score looks like and what an okay score looks like. Now, if you know that the application, the success application is a very, very small percentage of the total, you need to be up in the scoring nines and tens, you need to be aiming there from the-, the, the first word that's put on your application form. If you're aiming for the okay and you, you know that the success rate is gonna be, maybe, 80%, or 20%, or 30% or 10%, you need to be thinking more, 'Actually, it's probably not worthwhile me writing this unless I can get up to that top level score.' So, let's look at the words that are across the scoring eights, nines and tens. Is the need compelling and motivational? Is it a significant innovation? Does it look realistic? You can clearly see how it's gonna exploit it. They understand the market drivers. Carefully considered the risks. And the impact is significant or compelling. If your application is okay you're not gonna win this competition, you're not gonna get funded. So, somehow you've gotta get yourself up to somebody reads this and says, 'That's a compelling application, it's significant impact. And my application has been based around that everything-, every text piece in this is gonna be in that nines and tens in the scoring.' Otherwise, what's the point of making your application? So, therefore you need to start with the position of, 'I need to be able to convince at that level of nines and tens right the way through the application.' Put a comment in the bottom left there about a-, an assessor's view.

An assessor will take a longer time to review a, a bad application, and the reason we say that is that whenever everything is presented clearly and concisely it, it just flows right the way through from start to finish. If an assessor's looking at something-, looking at something that is not flowing well, it's disjointed, they're having to look for the detail etc, it generally takes them a longer time because they're tryna justify how it doesn't fully meet the various requirements. So, just consider that as you make your application, you need to be in with that great side of things, in the nines and tens, you need to be convincing right the way through and it needs to flow. So, other part I mentioned about sort of around just (ph 36.46) standing out from the crowd. I mentioned about AI and sustainability being a, a high, sort of, dominant trend at the moment in many applications, and what, what again I'm just, sort of, pushing out to you to make sure you draw out why you're standing out from the crowd. Be creative, solve the problems very compellingly and, and give the assessor this sort of sense that, actually, they're reading something that they think in five years time will be a significant business and significant growth, and they'll be excited they have had a small part in assessing that on the way through. So, that sort of concept of, 'We're not the same as everybody else,' the assessor is excited that he or she has read that and to be part of that small journey. So, summary and moving towards the end, I think there's questions afterward, but the summary of some things just to draw out a little bit further. Do you fit with the scope? Have you agreed, sort of, key points with partners? Are you clear and concise? Is there a clearer way you can write it? Can you rephrase those things? Can you take out a few words that take away from the story? Have you been consistent and had a golden thread right the way through the application? Have you convinced? Have you considered reasonable risks for the level of innovation that you're putting forward? Can you quantify and justify any

statements you've put in there? Have you considered everything like an assessor? Have you refined it until it read well, and then re-refine it and then remove anything that's not adding to the story?

And then, sort of, the last part, around allowing enough time. And what we mean by that is this is never an eleventh hour application, generally it won't work. So, have that thought of there will be a number of, of phases of application build (ph 38.29) and refinements, and therefore leaving it to the last minute just won't work. Again, a small point, a very basic diagram around, sort of, the numbers of applications on the days before, days and hours before there, sort of, final date. And you'll see at about midnight the day before, when applications start to ramp up, and then there's the last couple of hours where everybody's tryna fill in their application, just before the, the deadline, at 11 o'clock or 12 o'clock, whenever, whenever is published. I've also put this little heart, so, so it's just broken just after that, and what I mean by that is that quite often, as assessors and people involved in this system, we get phone calls saying, 'Oh, my computer crashed three minutes before the application, I can't get into the system, something else has happened, we've lost such and such. Is there anything we can do?' And generally the answer is no. Just keep that in mind, do not allow anything to stand in the way of you putting your application in, if you have put all that effort into it. So, move it back three hours, four hours, the day before, why take the risk of leaving to the last minute and then something goes down? It will lead to heart break and, and I can't do anything about it and my colleagues can't do anything about it, they are reasonable fixed on hard deadlines. Regardless who's fault it is or if you have a, a very sad story about how you couldn't submit it because of X, it doesn't really matter. Keep that, sort of, sense of, 'Actually, there's a hard deadline, I don't need to wait till 11:59 or 10:59 for the application, I could put it in the day before,' build that into your thinking.

Then beyond this, I-, I've sort of went through a number of different things. There are good application guides available, you can scan through them, sort of, get other tips and hints etc, they will, will hopefully complement what I've said but they may draw out a few points differently and, and I do recommend those. And I'm coming to the close of my points, and I think I hand back to Barbara, who's gonna lead some questions?

Moderator: Thank you very much, Stephen. That, that was really informative and hopefully everyone got something out of that for, for looking at how they can submit an Innovate UK grant application and these other applications that we have. We have some questions that have come through, I just had one to start off with, Stephen (ph 40.59), what are some of the common pitfalls that you see in grant applications that come your way?

Stephen McComb: I think the, the one that I keep repeating, probably, is that I don't get it. So, just that sense of they haven't communicated, sort of, what the-, their story of the business. So, they may (ph 41.17) be burying their head if they think they know what they have they might even convince themselves that it's really compelling, but whenever I look at the application I just don't get it. And so that, that would be, sort of, one of my most common ones and then probably slightly beyond that was just, sort of, then

the, the evidence case behind it. So, if I do get it but actually reinforcing sort of the-, those facts and figures there to, sort of, build that case, probably need to (ph 41.39).

Moderator: Okay. We, we have another question here, 'We, we are currently part of a New Innovators Innovate UK grant (ph 41.48), concluding in March next year, focused on developing our product's foundation technology. Would I be eligible to apply for the upcoming Launchpad grant project, starting in May, to fund the pilot study specifically for validating this project?'

Stephen McComb: I think, sort of, for today, sort of, we're tryna keep it reasonably generic in terms of, sort of, this is a, a general application. Anything very specific about that you will see, sort of, on the, the grant application form, there will be a-, an email linked into Innovation, the IFS system and this is if you have further queries. So, if you think there's a question mark around eligibility, I, I do recommend you, you send them a note. My, sort of, response from companies who have done that is that they are quite quick to respond, they're very clear and, and there's been a very positive feedback. So, rather than me, sort of, confusing the, the applicants (audio distorts 42.41)-,

Moderator: Yep.

Stephen McComb: But my gut feeling is probably send a quick email and they will get a quick response to say, 'Yes, that's (ph 42.47) reasonable or there's an issue in there.'

Moderator: No, there-, there's, there's actually a Q&A session tomorrow at 1 o'clock. So, to the person who asked the question, if they want to register for that it's on at 1 o'clock tomorrow. We can-, we can put a link in, in the chat to, to (audio distorts 43.05) if they wanna register for that, and there's clinics that'll be running on Friday in Belfast and in Derry. So, if you-, if you want to speak to-, speak to a member of the team directly you can as well at that. Just, just another question is, 'Can I get my application reviewed before I submit? And how do I do that?'

Stephen McComb: Is that one for Lisa?

Lisa Braniff: (Talking over each other 43.26), so-,

Moderator: (Talking over each other 43.26)-,

Lisa Braniff: Yeah, so, Invest NI, along with colleagues in Innovate UK Business Growth, can offer a, a application review service. So, we can do this in the best way if you're able to share a draft application well ahead of the deadline. So, an order of what, what we will do when we look at your application is

assess the answers you've given against the criteria for the competition, in the same way that an assessor will be doing after you have submitted. And in that way we can highlight areas where maybe you need to strengthen your response, areas where maybe the story isn't clear or you haven't evidenced what-, the claims that you've made in relation to the technology or the market. So, we can, I suppose, highlight those areas where there's potentially weaknesses in the application to give you an opportunity to then strengthen it before you submit to the competition. As Stephen has, has highlighted, when you submit to the competition that is final and it must be done by the deadline. But in, in the application review process it's a more iterative (ph 44.34) process where you can share a draft, get feedback, try to strengthen it. And you'll have a, if there's time permitting, you'll get some, I suppose, final words of advice before you submit to the competition, at which point no further amendments can be made for an Innovate UK funding competition in particular.

Moderator: Great, thank you. I'm just gonna check to see if they've got some more questions here, just give me a wee second. Another question that I've been asked is, 'I believe that you cannot submit the same idea more than twice, could you elaborate, please?'

Stephen McComb: I'm just tryna cautiously elaborate, there's, there's-, I think that is the rules around that. I would say from my experiences, so there's, there's a little bit of space there for adjusting your ideas as well. So (ph 45.24) , if an idea was rejected and clearly doesn't need a market need etc, so then you need to, sort of, pose questions, so is, is it the same idea again or should I have gone and developed a further idea? Or we should have looked at other markets (ph 45.36) ? Or should I read , sort of, stepped back to the drawing board and considered, 'Is this the right approach to things?' So, I think the rules are around the, the submission twice etc, however I would also sort of question why would you be submitting the idea twice if it's-, was failed the first time? You've obviously not understood something along the way or you need to really go back to the drawing board of considering, 'Should a new idea be brought forward?' So, I think there's rules and then there's also taking feedback from a competition.

Moderator: Okay. And then another question is, 'Do I need to have worked with a partner if I'm collaborating with them on an application, before I apply?'

Stephen McComb: I'll give a, sort of, general-, so obviously I don't know the details of that one but what I would say is that, from a risk point of view, from an assessor looking at someone where there's been an existing partnership beforehand and they've built up a relationship etc, you get a sort of sense as an assessor, 'Well, actually this is a, a relationship that's gonna lead to something bigger and better.' So, I would say probably the best case would be that you have worked with that, that collaborator, that partner, you've built up trust in each other, you know your strengths and weaknesses, that's quite a compelling story. If you haven't done that then, sort of, the-, that would be a little bit of extra, sort of, question marks in the back of the assessor's head. So again, how are you gonna mitigate that risk of, sort of, the, the relationship breaking down? So, I, I would say find ways to work together, find ways to minimise, sort of, that risk side of it and make it look like this is gonna be a really successful partnership. I, I think that, sort of, sense of building with friends and connections etc in a, a compelling way is, is quite a, a nice way of writing an application.

Moderator: Okay, that's great. I-, I'm not seeing any other questions coming through here at the moment so I'd like to thank you so much, Stephen McComb, to Lisa Braniff for, for hosting this even this morning. Thank you.

Lisa Braniff: Thanks very much, Barbara.

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