North Sea University Partnership

NSUP RESEARCH SEED FUND - CALL 2026

OVERVIEW

The North Sea University Partnership (NSUP) is a collaboration of leading universities in the UK and Norway, established to strengthen knowledge exchange, foster research collaboration, and enhance academic cooperation between the two countries. The partnership is underpinned by a Letter of Intent, signed on Monday, 2 December 2024, in London by representatives from four UK and four Norwegian universities. NSUP provides opportunities for researchers at all career stages to build international and interdisciplinary connections, while engaging external stakeholders to stimulate joint initiatives. The NSUP partnership builds on the 2022 UK–Norway joint declaration on science, innovation, and wider strategic cooperation, and was welcomed by both Prime Ministers in December 2024 as a significant step in strengthening bilateral research, innovation, and academic ties. An addendum to the 2024 Joint Declaration on the Norwegian-UK Strategic Partnership (updated December 2025) further strengthens the recently established North Sea University Partnership (NSUP) to expand collaboration on North Sea priorities (energy, maritime, security) and to deepen the quality and scale of joint projects. Collaborative research between partners will continue to be supported through existing mechanisms, including Horizon Europe, national research councils, and institutional arrangements. NSUP also intends to draw on the bilateral UKRI–RCN agreement (Money Follows Cooperation) to support joint activities.

NSUP marked an important milestone with its inaugural conference in Brussels in November 2025. The event brought together academics, policymakers, diplomats, representatives from the European Commission and NATO, and industry leaders to explore how the North Sea can drive Europe's green transition while maintaining energy security and safeguarding marine ecosystems.

The conference highlighted the North Sea as a strategic testbed for solutions that balance the green transition, energy security, broader maritime and geopolitical security, biodiversity and cultural heritage. Discussions emphasised the importance of coordinated, cross-border approaches to sustainability, including the role of coastal communities, and informed the submission of an NSUP **position paper** to the European Commission. These priorities now underpin NSUP's ambition to stimulate collaborative research and innovation through targeted seed funding.

Building on this mission, NSUP is launching its first call for seed funding to further strengthen research collaboration among its partners. Through a competitive process, NSUP will jointly advertise, select, and fund collaborative research projects involving at least two NSUP institutions. Successful projects are expected to lead to outcomes such as third-party funding applications, larger-scale interdisciplinary collaborations, and significant joint publications. In its first year, the call will prioritise proposals addressing the NSUP key priority areas:

> North Sea priorities: energy, the green transition, marine/maritime research, and resilience/security. We encourage interdisciplinary perspectives across science, humanities and social sciences related to these North Sea priorities.

The selection panel will aim to achieve a balanced portfolio across these priority areas. Projects may request up to £25,000 for activities lasting 12–24 months, with each project researcher funded by their respective institution. Participation of each applicant will be funded and supported by their home institution.

The call will open on 19 February 2026, with a submission deadline of **20 May 2026 at 12pm (GMT)**

Durham University | Newcastle University | UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS | UNIVERSITY of York

NTNU Norwegian University of Science and Technology | UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN | UNIVERSITY OF OSLO | UiT The Arctic University of Norway

CALL TIMELINE

- Call 1 opens: 19 February 2026
- Submissions deadline: 20 May 2026 12 pm GMT
- Selection Panel: June 2026
- Communication of Results: June 2026
- Projects start date: Earliest August 2026 and by September 2026

OBJECTIVES

The NSUP Seed Funding Scheme has the following core objectives:

- Strengthen research collaboration between NSUP partners.
- Support interdisciplinary projects involving at least one UK and one Norwegian institution.
- Encourage the development of larger-scale collaborations and third-party funding applications.
- Deliver high-quality joint publications and long-term partnerships.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Joint applications for external research funding.
- Expanded and sustainable collaborations between institutions.
- High-impact joint publications.
- Strengthened UK–Norway research ties across disciplines.

ELIGIBILITY

- Proposals must include researchers from at least (1) UK and (1) Norwegian NSUP institution, with any bi-lateral projects having a strong element for multi-lateral collaboration. Proposals including more than two NSUP partners are *strongly* encouraged.

- Lead applicants must be eligible to serve in the role of PI at their own institution.

- Applicants must have proven expertise in the project proposal being submitted.

- External collaborators cannot lead an application but can be involved in the proposal at their own expense, where the benefit of their involvement to the collaboration is justified.

SELECTION CRITERIA

There will be a competitive process jointly advertised and managed by NSUP. The selection panel, chaired by Margareth Hagen and Claire O'Malley, will include representatives from all participating partner institutions. Proposals will be jointly evaluated by a panel of senior academics with responsibility for research at each university. Where possible, the selection panel will award an equal number of awards to all participating NSUP partner institutions and consider the balance between the thematic areas. Proposals will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- Academic quality of the proposal including ambition, value for money, impact and originality (50%)

- Importance of funding for the likely success of any future, external grant applications (25%)

- Clarity of intentions, including a tentative project timetable (25%)

Participation of applicants will be supported by their own institution, and each institution will fund its own researcher(s) involved within each project.

A clear breakdown of expected costs per partner must be provided in the budget.

Budgets should indicate spending over the full duration of the proposed projects.

Applicants should consider the 'value for money' of each of their costings.

The funding provided is intended to support expenses, including costs of travel between the institutions, and costs associated with workshops, meetings and project-related research costs. Details of eligible and ineligible costs are listed below.

Project budgets should reflect a reasonable distribution among project partners to reflect the needs and expectations of the project, rather than being heavily-weighted towards one partner.

NB – The panel reserve the right to withdraw or reduce funding for elements of the project if deemed ineligible, excessive or inappropriate.

ELIGIBLE COSTS:

- Research costs including consumables (up to a maximum of 1/3 of total grant amount)
- Travel, accommodation and subsistence
- Facilitation of a workshop with potential academic or non-academic partners, with the aim of refining the content and objectives of a research proposal, or developing strategies for external impact
- Catering and room hire
- Administrative costs of organising meetings or workshops (e.g. materials and supplies; excluding staff time).
- Ad-hoc / short-term assistance from a research assistant (RA) **Research Assistant (RA) Costs:** Where short-term support from a Research Assistant (RA) is requested on a flexible/casual basis, applicants must provide the RA's name, current status (e.g., postgraduate student or existing employment contract), and proposed dates of engagement. This information is required to confirm the RA's eligibility to undertake the work. RA costs are considered direct costs (salary, taxable fees, or stipend), not overheads. All RA engagements must comply with the host institution's recruitment procedures and policies. The RA's role, responsibilities, and duration of involvement must be clearly specified, proportionate to the proposed activities, and fully justified. The RA's work is expected to be directed and supervised by the lead applicant.
- For institution specific guidance, please refer to your organisation's internal webpages.

INELIGIBLE COSTS:

- Computers, equipment, software (including significant shipping costs)
- Salary support for the applicant(s)
- Teaching buy-out
- Business start-up costs
- Travel or accommodation for non NSUP project partners
- Consultancy costs (external consultants)

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HOW TO APPLY

- Deadline for submissions is 20 May 2026, 12pm GMT.
- Proposals are to be prepared jointly and submitted by the Lead Applicant.
- Note that you need approval from the relevant Head of Department/School and other relevant stakeholders and that you need to follow all internal guidelines at participating Institutions before submitting.
- It is strongly encouraged applicants should contact their research support office before submitting a proposal.
- Applications must be submitted through the online **Application Form**
- The form allows you to save and continue at a later stage (select the option 'finish later' at the bottom of each page in the application form).
- After you have submitted your application, the NSUP secretariat (abir.van-hunen@durham.ac.uk and annette.servan@uib.no), will send an email notification with the pdf version of the application to the applicants listed on that application and their Heads of Departments.

COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS

All Applicants will be notified of outcomes at the start of June 2026. A record of the outcome of each application will be maintained by the NSUP Secretariat.

- Approval: Where an application is approved for funding, funds will be administered by their respective institution. Award letters will be issued to the academic lead and co-lead(s) of the successful projects, including a detailed budget breakdown of their share.
- Refusal: Where an application is refused for funding, the applicant will be informed of the decision.

MONITORING AND REPORTING

Projects must start by 1 September 2026 and must end no longer than 24 months following their start. All project expenditures and final reports must be submitted no later than 2 months following their completion.

A Project Completion Report must be completed by award holders on completion of the work defined in the application. For projects longer than 12 months, a half-way progress report is also expected.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PRACTICE

We recognise our responsibility as research-intensive universities and support world-class and world-changing research which aims to address issues of environmental sustainability, while minimising the negative environmental impacts of our research.

CONTACT

For institution specific queries please contact your local NSUP Coordinator and your university's research office in the first instance.

All general queries related to this call should be directed to the NSUP Secretariat: abir.van-hunen@durham.ac.uk and annette.servan@uib.no