



NetZeroPlus Flexible Fund Scheme: Scheme Guidance Notes

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**UKRI Greenhouse Gas Removal Demonstrator Programme:
NetZeroPlus TreescapE Fund**

Planning the UK's new forests and woodlands to meet the UK's net zero carbon commitments

This is an invitation for proposals to research the agenda specified in these guidelines.
Please read these guidelines carefully before applying.

Operational Guidelines

CALL OPENS: Wednesday 13 March 2024
CLOSING DATE: Wednesday 24 April 2024, 17:00 GMT

The UK Government has committed to the ambitious task of achieving 'net zero' greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. However, some emissions from farming, aviation and other activities are very difficult to eliminate. So, to reach net zero the UK must also directly remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere amounting to the equivalent of 100 million tonnes of carbon dioxide/year. Trees naturally remove CO₂ from the air, and (done well) can help make a significant contribution to reaching net zero emissions.

The UKRI Greenhouse Gas Removal Demonstrator Programme (abbreviated to GGR:D) is set up to improve our understanding of sustainable routes for large-scale removal of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, enabling the UK to take a major step towards achieving net-zero emissions. [NetZeroPlus](#) is one of five demonstrator projects and a coordinating hub, funded by UKRI to investigate different methods for greenhouse gas removal.

The NetZeroPlus project is a collaboration between researchers at the University of Exeter, the National Trust, Forest Research, the University of Aberdeen and University College London. Our research teams are exploring the opportunities and challenges of planting trees at sufficient scale to reach net zero emissions. Planting new forests and woodlands, as well as protecting the woodlands we already have, will require careful planning if we are to store sufficient carbon dioxide and just as importantly make the most of the potential additional benefits for people and nature: things like making space for nature, creating new 'green jobs', improving air and water quality, reducing flooding and creating spaces for people to enjoy for physical and mental health.

NetZeroPlus will administer flexible funding to be awarded to eligible researchers at any UK research organisation.

The NetZeroPlus **TreescapE Fund** will be used to encourage and support projects which seek to fill knowledge gaps in the creation and management of new and existing woodlands and forests, and where this knowledge will contribute to an improved understanding of the potential for greenhouse gas removal and storage from afforestation.

The Fund is intended to support activities including:

- Work to support delivery of the NetZeroPlus research proposal
- Applied research and monitoring
- Proof of concept projects or feasibility studies to overcome blockages
- Desk based studies



- Placement of Impact Assistants with business partners
- Visits to learn new techniques

Funding Available:

- The Treescape fund is able to support activities up to £345,000 full economic cost (FEC).
- The funding will be awarded at 80% FEC in line with UKRI funding rules, meaning funds of £276,000 are available.
- The host institution must be willing to provide the remaining 20% FEC.
- There is no maximum value for each application, but applicants are advised that the panel are likely to support more than one award and may support multiple projects.
- The duration of each individual project is not expected to exceed 9 months.
- All projects must end by **30 April 2025** and be fully invoiced by **31 May 2025**. No extension beyond this date will be possible.
- You must be based at a UK research organisation eligible for UKRI funding.

Scope of the call:

The NetZeroPlus project is playing a critical role in supporting the UK Government commitment to achieving 'net zero' greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Of the Greenhouse Gas Removal (GGR) options available, increasing the carbon stored in the UK's 'treescapes' (forests, hedgerows etc.) has the greatest potential, the lowest cost, and can be started immediately. Planting woodlands can store carbon in standing trees, in forest soils and in timber products. NetZeroPlus is examining these diverse aspects of forestry to identify what makes "The Right Tree in the Right Place".

While addressing climate change is the existential challenge facing societies worldwide, the NetZeroPlus project goes further than this by considering the other potential co-benefits and trade-offs associated with the massive response required to attain net zero. Within the UK the Government's existing commitments already envisage the largest changes in land use since the end of World War 2 and the actions of businesses and other groups in society may well increase this. This will affect not only the UK's net greenhouse gas emissions but also: its production of food; effects upon wildlife and habitats; changes to water quality, quantity and flood risk; access to the environment for recreation and associated physical and mental health benefits; a range of income and employment effects; etc. The NetZeroPlus project seeks to revolutionise decision making both nationally and globally by incorporating these multiple effects into decision support systems which will be made freely available to all. In conjunction with other GGR-D projects we will help determine the appropriate scale of UK afforestation in comparison/conjunction with other GGR approaches.

We recognise that there are many elements relating to natural and social science, economics, regulation, and policy approaches that will not be addressed by NetZeroPlus and are seeking to fund studies to address some of these gaps.

We also welcome proposals that explore connections between afforestation and other GGR approaches within the GGR-Demonstrator programme (perennial biomass crops, biochar, accelerated peat formation, enhanced rock weathering, further details of which can be found at <https://co2re.org/ggr-projects/>).



NetZeroPlus wish to fund projects that:

- Address key knowledge gaps in our understanding of the role of woodland creation and management in GGR in the UK that are not currently being addressed.
- Have potential to lead to future funding applications or commercial exploitation.

Topics of Particular interest include:

- 1 **Land use and Leakage: Water, carbon and biodiversity.** Projects which enhance modelling of the following and assist incorporation within the NetZeroPlus decision support system. This might include the impact of land use change in the UK on:
 - water quality and flooding
 - overseas emissions or storage of greenhouse gases (GHG leakage)
 - overseas biodiversity (biodiversity leakage)
 - UK food security and the effects of dietary change on UK land use
- 2 **Informing approaches to woodland creation and expansion in the UK: designing resilient planting portfolios.** Projects which enhance modelling and user engagement activities to assist with incorporation of resilient woodland creation within the NetZeroPlus decision support system. Including the understanding and modelling of UK carbon storage and emission at high spatial resolution and over extended time horizons for:
 - A wide range of individual tree species including conifers and broadleaves
 - Mixed woodland
 - Resilient tree species mix for future climates and emerging risks (pests, disease, flood, wind, fire)
 - Trees and Hedgerows outside woodlands including agroforestry
 - Understanding barriers to tree planting expansion including uptake of grants across diverse landowners.
 - The relationship between woodlands, trees and domestic biodiversity
 - Impacts of tree planting on above and below ground carbon
 - Impacts of location (at high spatial resolution) on growth rates, timber production, carbon storage (above and below ground)
 - Post felling storage of carbon in woodland products over time and across species
 - Impacts of alternative woodland management strategies on the above.

Funds and Scale of the Award:

- We will fund collaborative research projects lasting up to 9 months from award.
- **Awards are made at 80% FEC** to the lead institution carrying out the project. The lead institution carrying out the project must be willing to provide the remaining **20% FEC**. They will be accountable for the conduct of the research, the use of public funds and for ensuring the proper financial management of grants.



- All applications will be reviewed and assessed by the NetZeroPlus Project Management Board. Full membership given below. Please highlight any potential conflicts of interest in the application form.
- It is anticipated that awards will be announced by **3 June 2024**.

Criteria:

Criteria for funding are as follows:

- **Research Excellence:** Proposals must contain a clear and concise plan with well-defined objectives and deliverables. The project team must be well placed to deliver the proposed project.
- **Fit to NetZeroPlus Programme:** Proposals must demonstrate how they will address a clear gap in our understanding of the role of afforestation as a GGR technology for the UK.
- **Value for Money:** Proposals must evidence that the scope of work proposed is appropriate for the value of award applied and for the project duration indicated in the application (up to 9 months). Project partners are encouraged, but are not mandatory, on applications submitted to this opportunity. Detail any in-kind funding commitments and/or match funding.
- **Pathway for impact:** Proposals must make clear their plans for following-up and progressing the work beyond the initial scope of the Treescape Fund proposal. Might the Treescape Fund enable translation of research activities into the commercial realm and an escalation in the TRLs?

Eligibility:

- Funding is available to higher education institutions, research council institutes and independent research organisations in the UK that are normally eligible for UKRI funding.
- We welcome applications from investigators who work on a part-time basis.
- We are keen to support new researchers where they have the appropriate skills.
- We encourage collaboration across organisations where it will be beneficial to the delivery of a project; where two or more organisations are participating, a single application should be submitted via the Principal Investigator's institution, and they will be responsible for the disbursement of funds to third parties.
- Partnerships with international research groups, where they add value to the project through access to key facilities or in-kind contributions are encouraged. Funding will only be provided to UK eligible organisations, but international researchers can be named as project partners.
- Subcontracting is allowed, although we would not expect to fund proposals where more than 50% of the award is subcontracted.
- Standard BBSRC eligibility rules apply.
- Post-Doctoral Research Associates who are involved in developing an application and who are to be engaged in the research can be named as a 'Researcher Co-Investigator' in applications.
- Individuals may submit or be named on more than one application.



- Matched funding and collaboration with industry, policy and third sector organisations or other programmes is permitted. Partnership be it financial or in-kind with industry is encouraged. Project Partners will not receive funding directly from the award but will play a role in the proposed research. They will be separate institutions to those submitting the proposal. Named Project Partners may include UK or overseas research or user organisations, but an organisation should only be named as a Project Partner if it is providing specific contributions (either in cash or kind) to the project. Any partners should be from an organisation with a research and/or innovation base. There is no limit to the number of Project Partners. A letter of support should be supplied from all project partners confirming:
 - the organisation's role in and commitment to the proposed project and explain how it will contribute to the impact of the project
 - the value of any cash in-kind contributions
- Any financial or other interests with any project partners named in the application must be disclosed to ensure integrity of research.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- principles

Excellence will be achieved through recognising the value of every individual. We commit to developing a strong and enduring culture of equality, diversity, and inclusion and to promoting a positive culture, which celebrates difference, challenges prejudice, and ensures fairness. Our ambition is to instil these values across all our activities, and we wish to support a diverse cohort of participants.

We encourage applications from diverse and underrepresented groups in their fields of research, as we develop the Greenhouse Gas Removal research community.

The principles of EDI will be adhered to across the flexible fund, specific measures include:

- All assessment panel members are encouraged to have undertaken equality and diversity training prior to appointment
- Assessment panel composition will be considered with the aim of maintaining EDI

Application Process:

Applications to the scheme will consist of:

- a. The template application form provided with all fields completed
- b. A 2-page CV for each named applicant
- c. A letter of support from your institution in which it is confirmed they will accept and abide by the terms of the awards, as specified in these guidelines. This should include a statement stating that it is understood that the award will be paid at 80 full economic cost (fEC) to the home institution and confirm that the remaining 20% funding is available.
- d. Letters of support from all project partners (if applicable)



Letters of support should include:

- o the organisation's role in and commitment to the proposed project and explain how it will contribute to the impact of the project
- o the value of any cash in-kind contributions.

Please combine these documents into a single PDF file. The application file should be submitted via email to netzeroplusflexfund@exeter.ac.uk.

Your application should consist solely of the application form, CVs, and letters of support as a single pdf document, any additional materials will not be considered. Any incomplete applications will be rejected.

Applicants will receive an email to acknowledge receipt of their submission within three working days.

All information submitted will be held in strictest confidence by the assessment panel. Unsuccessful applications and associated assessments will be permanently deleted within one-year of the closing date. Successful applications and associated data will be stored until the end of the NetZeroPlus contract - November 2025 and form part of its reporting to UKRI.

Conflict of Interest Guidance:

Applications will be assessed by delegates from the NetZeroPlus Project Management Board, consisting of:

- Chair: Professor Sir Robert Watson, Chair NetZeroPlus Research Advisory Group
- Ian Bateman, NetZeroPlus Principal Investigator, University of Exeter
- Kate Gannon, NetZeroPlus programme manager, University of Exeter

None of the above will bid for funds under this call. Suitably qualified individuals from other organisations may be consulted as required.

Applicants must state on their application form if any conflicts of interest are likely to arise with any of the above individuals. Examples of a conflict of interest include:

- Employed by the same institution as the applicant(s)
- Actively involved in research collaborations with the applicants(s)
- Working closely with the applicant(s), for example as a co-author or PhD Supervisor, or has worked closely in the last 4 years
- Holding a current position on the governing body of, or an honorary position within the institution(s) of the applicant(s)
- In receipt of personal remuneration in excess of £5,000 per annum from the applicant's organisation
- Personal/family relationship with the applicant(s)

Similarly, any Panel Member with a conflict of interest will declare it and will not participate in the review of that application.

Any financial or other interests with any project partners named in the application must also be disclosed to ensure integrity of research.



Evaluation Process:

The deadline for submissions is **Wednesday 24 April 2024, 17:00 GMT**. Any application received after the deadline will not be accepted.

An initial screening will be undertaken by the NetZeroPlus project manager to check:

- Applications meet the essential criteria and eligibility requirements.
- Applicants have submitted all the required materials.
- Any declared conflicts of interest prior to circulation to the assessors and to consider any additional potential conflicts of interest before allocation of proposals to assessors.

All proposals will then be reviewed by two independent assessors, who will score them prior to an online panel meeting.

The panel will be made up of the Chair of the NetZeroPlus Research Advisory Group, The Project Lead, and the Programme Manager for NetZeroPlus and any additional assessors required. Proposals will be introduced at meetings by the assessors, discussed by the panel and ranked by the following criteria:

Criteria	% Contribution of Total Score
	For each of the six criteria, a minimum threshold of 60% of the available score is required before a proposal will be considered for funding
Quality of Science proposed	30
Supporting Delivery of the NetZeroPlus Proposal	30
Likelihood of achieving wider impact	10
Project management	10
Track record of applicants	10
Value for money	10

Communication of Funding Decision

- The lead applicant of successful projects will be notified within two weeks of the panel meetings.
- Applicants who are unsuccessful will be informed promptly and specific feedback that the review panel provides will be made available.
- All decisions will be final.

The Offer Letter and Award Process

- Successful applicants will be informed via email and an electronic award letter will be sent to the Project Lead (PL). It is the PL’s responsibility to inform and circulate the award letter to their institution’s awards/ research office.
- The panel may make a conditional offer of funding, with minor revisions proposed to the project PL.



- Applicants who receive an offer or conditional offer of funding will have 10 working days to accept the offer.
- The awarded funds are held by UKRI and released to the project team on completion of the project, and associated paperwork.
- The University of Exeter will provide a simple contract for the awardee, assigning all rights to the awardee's University or consortium but requiring funds to be spent as detailed on the application and a final report to be sent to the NetZeroPlus project manager.
- A signed contract will be required prior to project commencement. Consortia of applicants will need to have signed agreements in place prior to funded projects commencing; the NetZeroPlus project manager will check this is the case.
- **Funds will be transferred at 80% FEC from BBSRC to the University of Exeter in arrears on final project costs once a project has completed. The University of Exeter will then pay invoices to awardees' institutions.**

Monitoring, Reporting and Finances:

At the end of the project, grantees are required to provide, by email to the NetZeroPlus project manager at netzeroplusflexfund@exeter.ac.uk the following documents:

- A final report (a template will be provided), outlining results against objectives.
- A 1-page explanation of the project including at least one picture or graph (a template will be provided), that NetZeroPlus is able to use for public dissemination of the results.
- Financial Expenditure Statement (a template will be provided). We will not require receipts to be submitted, although these must be kept, as they may be required for possible future audits. The grantee's host institution will follow their standard procedures for financial accounts.
- Invoice

The documentation must be submitted within 21 working days of the project end date. This will ensure that all arrangements with the BBSRC can be finalised swiftly.

- All reports will be checked by the NetZeroPlus project manager, and they will be made accessible in confidence to the NetZeroPlus project management board for approval.
- NetZeroPlus may choose to use the case studies in publicity material.

Acknowledgement:

Any presentations, posters or publications should acknowledge funding support as follows:

'We acknowledge the financial support provided by NetZeroPlus, a UKRI BBSRC grant BB/V011588/1 via the Treescape Flexible Fund grant'.

Data Protection Regulations:

Please be aware that copies of proposals will be made available to the Treescape Fund Assessment Panel who will use information provided in the application for processing the proposal through assessment, the award of any consequential grant, and for the payment, maintenance and review of the funds.



Funding comes from UKRI-BBSRC, so to meet the Research Councils' obligations for public accountability and the dissemination of information, non-confidential details of awards may also be made available on the Research Councils' websites and other publicly available databases, and in reports, documents and mailing lists. All parties involved in the Treescape Flexible Fund assessment and monitoring will be required to sign a confidentiality undertaking.