# AI Research Resource (AIRR) Heterogeneous Supercomputer Host Site and Data Centre Grant Competition - Response to Clarification Questions (Batch 1)

19th November 2026

**Q1. Will BIST extend the competition window, to enable bidders to provide more detailed and well-developed responses?**

A1. After considering market feedback from prospective bidders, BIST has agreed to extend the competition deadline to noon GMT on Monday 30 November. BIST will also extend the deadline to submit clarification questions accordingly, to 5pm GMT on Monday 23 November.

**Q2. How was the specification was developed and how was consistent treatment of applicants assured?**

A2. The specification was developed through a combination of BIST's underlying technical and delivery requirements for the AIRR Heterogeneous Supercomputer system, and evidence gathered through the recent AIRR Heterogeneous Supercomputer Host Site Selection Expression of Interest (EOI), which ran from 17 July to 10 August. The EOI enabled BIST to test the market, understand the hosting solutions that could credibly be delivered and identify practical constraints including power availability, infrastructure readiness, delivery capability and operating requirements. Responses were considered by policy, delivery, technical, commercial and analytical teams and used to refine the subsequent grant competition requirements to encourage responses from a diverse range of solutions.

All applicants to the grant competition are assessed against the same published requirements and evaluation methodology. It will be possible to see consistency in areas of interest between the EOI and this grant competition, but greater detail is now being requested of respondents at the current grant competition stage.

**Q3. Clause 18.6 within 'Document 3 – Grant Funding Agreement' provides for Authority ownership of grant-funded assets unless otherwise agreed, while the university retains substantial delivery and supplier obligations. The absence of an express recipient liability cap, broad indemnity, cost-overrun exposure, clawback provisions and termination for convenience create significant institutional concerns.**

A3. Regarding asset ownership, BIST confirms that Section 9 and Section 6.2 of the Grant Funding Agreement reflect the commercial intent for what will be an arms' length transaction. Legal title to grant-funded assets rests with the Grant Recipient (or asset-owning consortium entity), subject to BIST consent before disposal or repurposing, a step-in right, and an end-of-term option. Clause 18.6 (""unless otherwise agreed"") will be conformed at grant award to align with this position. The indemnity provisions refer to acts and omissions of the grant recipient that cause loss or harm to the Authority and are properly reflective of an arms' length transaction. Subject to the below, the absence of a liability cap, recipient exposure to cost overruns, clawback and termination for convenience are governed by similar considerations.

Regarding liability and cost overruns, BIST is open to agreeing a proportionate cap on general liability during Stage 3 due diligence, subject to standard statutory carve-outs (fraud, personal injury/death, Subsidy Control breaches, and grant clawback). Applicants manage overrun exposure via the Partial-Risk schedule (Section 6.2), pricing contingency only for the risks they retain.

Regarding clawback and termination, clawback applies proportionately to ineligible expenditure, Subsidy Control breaches, or un-remedied milestone defaults following the 30-day cure period (Section 9). If BIST terminates for convenience, properly incurred and unavoidably committed eligible costs up to the termination date will be reimbursed.

**Q4. Successful grant award will not secure the eventual host's appointment to operate the supercomputer. Can BIST clarify the planned relationship between the data centre grant hosting arrangement and the system operation and service layer arrangement? This would be helpful in enabling bidders to gauge required responsibilities and the institutional benefits of participation.**

A4. As set out in 'Document 2 – AIRR Host Site and Data Centre Grant Competition Scope and Evaluation Criteria,' facility hosting (Section 3.1) and system operations (Section 3.2) are to be procured separately (Section 3.4). Award of the facility grant neither guarantees nor precludes the host or its consortium members from competing for future System-operating roles, subject to conflict-of-interest controls. With regards to the operational interface, responsibilities demarcate at the physical rack power, cooling manifold, and network boundaries, governed by a mandatory operational MoU between the host site and BIST's appointed System suppliers (Section 9).

**Q5. Can BIST provide more technical details about the number of compute racks and cooling flow rates required? This will be helpful in providing a fully price fixed design.**

A5. Detailed rack configuration and cooling flow rates will be confirmed as part of the system design and hardware procurement, which remains in development while understanding the novel hardware elements of the system. For the purposes of this competition, bidders should develop their proposals using reasonable technical assumptions based on their experience of comparable high-density compute environments. Where different assumptions could materially affect design or cost, bidders should identify these and set out the associated pricing sensitivity.

**Q6. Can specialist electrical equipment and service suppliers participate through an eligible lead or named consortium partner, and must such specialist suppliers be named in the application-stage memorandum of understanding?**

A6. Yes, such suppliers can participate in this grant competition, if they collaborate with a lead consortium partner that meets the eligibility requirements set out in 'Document 2 – AIRR Host Site and Data Centre Grant Competition Scope and Evaluation Criteria.' Such a supplier would need to be named within the application-stage memorandum of understanding (MoU), if they were to join as a consortium partner, but they would not need to be named if they were to join as a subcontractor or specialist supplier.

**Q7. What is the final submission deadline for the competition - the 25th November or the 26th November 2026 at 12 noon? Both deadlines were included within the competition documentation.**

A7. Please see A1. All competition documentation was updated on the 19th November to ensure that the final submission deadline was reflected consistently.

**Q8. Is the Risk Register template referenced within 'Document 2 – AIRR Host Site and Data Centre Grant Competition Scope and Evaluation Criteria' the same document as the Risk Allocation and Pricing Qualifications tab within 'Document 4 – Financial & Budget Template.xls?' Or, should the bidder provide a separate Risk Register template?**

A8. There are two separate documents and intentions. The Risk Allocation tab in the pricing spreadsheet ('Document 4 – Financial & Budget Template') defines commercial

risk transfer for pricing purposes, whereas Question 7 requires a separate Project Risk Register covering delivery and technical risks with an unmitigated severity (5x5 scale).

Commercial risks are set out in the risk register tab of Document 4. As part of project delivery we expect the host institution to share an all encompassing risk register as part of delivery management. Our expectation is that responders will already have developed an extensive risk register. If there are specific risks they wish to highlight, then please do so in the body of the response, for example highlighting the exposure to the project (and proposed allocation) and the proposed mitigations.

On format, no standalone template is prescribed; applicants may submit their own Excel or PDF risk register (and will not be penalised for format) provided it includes Risk ID/description, unmitigated 5×5 score, owner, mitigations, residual score, and proposed allocation.

**Q9. Can BIST confirm if the organisation(s) responsible for designing and delivering the data centre facility will also be involved in the subsequent hardware procurement phase, or whether that phase is run as a separate competitive process that could be led by a different team with no obligation to engage the facility delivery partners?**

A9. The main scope of the ongoing grant competition covers the capital investment required to develop the AIRR Heterogeneous Supercomputer data centre to BIST's specifications. Any contracts or other arrangements related to the downstream operation of the AIRR Heterogeneous Supercomputer itself are out of scope of the current grant competition. However, it is our expectation that the host site will have a role in any forthcoming hardware procurements and that this relationship will form a partnership that delivers the whole AIRR Heterogenous Supercomputer. This scope of involvement will be agreed as part of those procurement activities and should not be priced into the cost of this grant.

**Q10. If the hardware procurement is run separately and could be awarded to a different team, is there a mechanism for ensuring continuity between the facility design assumptions (e.g. rack power density, cooling configuration, floor loading) and the hardware ultimately selected, where the two decisions may not be made by the same parties?**

A10. Please see the response to Q9.

**Q11. Regarding the JANET connection, [does] BIST anticipate data sources/traffic being outside the UK education and research environment, and if so can BIST give an approximate percentage?**

A11. We have no estimates of this. If this results in a significant cost/risk premium, please highlight it in your response. We encourage the use of transferrable learnings gathered from networking arrangements used in other public compute infrastructure.

**Q12. For the purposes of NET-03, how does BIST define "the building" in the context of a modular/containerised data centre solution where IT capacity is delivered via multiple discrete containers/modules rather than a single conventional building?**

A12. In the context of the requirements, please interpret “the building” in the widest possible way such that it encompasses all relevant structures provided to meet the requirements.

**Q13. Where a facility's design distributes capacity across multiple linked modules/containers (as described under SPC-01/SPC-02), is the ≥20 metre fibre entry diversity requirement intended to apply: (a) across the site as a whole, (b) between designated meet-me points/communications rooms serving the facility, or (c) within each individual structure?**

A13. The 20 metre distance between incomers is with reference to the edge of the site. This is our tolerance based on being able to present the system as whole single system.

**Q14. There is a broken formula in line 12 of Document 4 - Financial budget template. Please could this be fixed?**

A14. BIST has reissued this Excel document and extended the grant competition timeline for response.

**Q15. Please could you share the default electricity cost that you are using?**

A15. BIST has reissued the relevant Excel document and extended the grant competition timeline for response. The assumed cost can be found in the updated 'Document 4 – Financial and Budget Template.'

**Q16. We are assuming the staff can be costed at 100% full Economic Costing (fEC). Please could you confirm this is correct?**

A16. Yes, this is correct.

**Q17. Will the funding be flowed through UKRI?**
A17. After completing the required internal assurance and approvals, BIST will issue the grant funding directly to the eventual host institution.

**Q18. What will be the approach for the funding calls for the systems; how will the successful site be able to bid for operational staffing costs? What will the timing for this?**
A18. Please see A4. The timing is still to be determined.

**Q19. There some roles for the site delivery that we will need on an ongoing basis once the systems are operational, such as a Facilities Manager and administrative staff. Should we cost these roles until the end of the grant period (i.e. 2036) or is the expectation that funding for these roles would be from the grants relating to the systems?**
A19. Any roles relating to site delivery and data centre maintenance should be costed in 'Document 4 – Financial and Budget Template.' The roles provided are examples only.

**Q20. BIST requests Appendix E to contain a completed Subsidy Control Act 2022 Declaration Form. In certain other projects this form has been provided by the requester to include specific questions that Government would like to be answered. Could BIST provide the subsidy control form?**

A20. BIST has now issued the standardised **Appendix E: Subsidy Control Act 2022 Declaration Form** alongside this clarification update. The Lead Applicant must complete and sign the form on behalf of itself and any Consortium Members.

**Q21. Is there a CV template for this competition? If not, can BIST provide guidance on how much information is required to be provided for key personnel?**

A21. BIST does not prescribe a specific CV template. Applicants may use their own format, compiled into a single PDF alongside the project organogram as Appendix D. CVs should be concise (indicatively **1–2 pages per person**) for key delivery and operational roles - specifically the named Programme Manager and Technical Lead required by grant signature, plus senior engineering and security leads. Each CV should summarise relevant qualifications, track record delivering or operating comparable large-scale compute/data centre infrastructure, proposed role and time commitment, and current national security clearance status.