Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade (BIST)
Public Compute and AIRR Directorate
Old Admiralty Place
London
SW1A 2DY

12th November 2026

Scheme Name: AI Research Resource Heterogeneous Supercomputer Host Site and Data Centre Grant Competition

Grant Reference: G2-SCH-2026-10-17902

To whom it may concern,

The Department for Business, Innovation, Science & Trade (BIST) invites eligible organisations to submit applications for grant funding to host and deliver the data centre facility for the AI Research Resource (AIRR) Heterogeneous Supercomputer ("the System").

Announced as a flagship £750 million investment, the System will combine conventional and novel hardware modules to provide a national compute asset dedicated to frontier AI, large-scale inference, and scientific research. This competition is an open grant competition published on Find a Grant, accessible to any UK lead research organization, applying individually or in a consortium, that satisfies the mandatory eligibility criteria and technical requirements set out in the application pack.

Scheme & Project Overview

This grant competition will select the winning host site and provide capital funding under Section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 to develop, operate, and upgrade the necessary data centre infrastructure. Funding is strictly for the provision of the data centre, including land/accommodation, civil construction or modification, power infrastructure (including grid connections and substations), direct liquid cooling, high-speed research networking, physical/cyber security, and ongoing facility support services.

The grant covers the data centre facility and its support services only; the procurement, installation, integration, and user-facing administration of the supercomputer hardware itself are funded separately by BIST and fall outside the scope of this grant.

The host will be required to deliver:

- **Phase 1 Readiness:** A data centre environment providing up to 10MW of usable IT power, high-density liquid cooling, and network connectivity by 31 March 2028.
- **Phase 2 Expansion:** Clear physical and power headroom to scale up to 20–30MW total capacity by FY2029/30.

- **Security & Connectivity:** ISO 27001, Cyber Assessment Framework and a route to Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation by 01 January 2028, alongside high-bandwidth links to national research networks such as JANET.

Funding Parameters

The grant scheme operates within an approved AIRR Expansion R&D CDEL envelope of up to £750 million for the supercomputer, which accounts for a £400m commitment to specialised inference hardware. The host infrastructure capital grant for the data centre is, therefore, expected to fall within an indicative range of up to £180m. The total grant expenditure to 31 March 2030 (capital and resource) is subject to an in-SR Affordability limit of less than £200m.

Application and Assessment Process

Stage 1: Mandatory Eligibility Screening (Pass/Fail): Applications must satisfy all eligibility (marked E) and mandatory gateway criteria (marked M) and applicants will be asked to confirm feasibility against all technical requirements (marked M) and delivery milestones. Any failure at Stage 1 results in immediate exclusion. The mandatory requirements will include confirming UK legal personality, UKRI research organisation eligibility, written Vice-Chancellor/CEO backing, demonstrable experience hosting comparable large-scale compute services, single-point accountability for facility provision and services, and signed consortium MoUs where applicable.

Stage 2: Scored Evaluation: Compliant applications are scored by an independent multidisciplinary panel across four weighted categories:

- **Infrastructure Readiness (25%)**
- **Delivery Capability (25%)**
- **Value for Money and Affordability (30%)**
- **Strategic Value (20%)**

Stage 3: Due Diligence & Final Selection: technical due diligence on the highest-scoring applicant which may include structured dialogue, clarification questions, site visits and review of supporting evidence; together with financial, legal, subsidy control, fraud and security checks. Stage 2 scores may be revised in light of the findings of due diligence. BIST reserves the right to take account of wider strategic policy objectives across public R&D compute investments, solely to ensure alignment with and delivery of the Compute Roadmap. This will include consideration of how proposals complement existing and planned public compute infrastructure and contribute to a diverse and resilient public compute research landscape. These considerations will be applied alongside the evaluation criteria. A proposal other than the highest-scoring proposal may only be selected where there is a clear and evidenced strategic rationale, based on these considerations, demonstrating stronger alignment with the Compute Roadmap.

Application Pack Documentation

The following documents form the formal Invitation to Apply pack:

1. Document 1 – Invitation to Apply Cover Letter
2. Document 2 - AIRR Host Site and Data Centre Grant Competition Scope and Evaluation Criteria
3. Document 3 – Draft Grant Funding Agreement
4. Document 4 – Financial and Budget Template
5. Document 5 – Application Form

Key Dates & Submission Process

- **Competition Launch: 11th November 2026**
- **Clarification Deadline: 20th November 2026, 12pm noon GMT**
- **Final Clarification Responses Published: 24th November 2026 12pm noon GMT** ***(note clarification responses will be published at regular intervals prior to this deadline)***
- **Application Submission Deadline: 26th November 2026 12pm Noon GMT**

Key Conditions

- **Non-Commitment:** This invitation does not commit BIST to award a grant, proceed with any proposal, or incur any liability for applicant preparation costs. BIST reserves the right to cancel, pause, or amend the competition at any time prior to agreement signature.
- **Condition of Award:** Signature of the final Grant Funding Agreement is strictly conditional upon the preferred applicant holding an accepted DNO/NESO connection offer (or existing contracted capacity) or an executed contract for alternative committed provision securing Phase 1 and Phase 2 power requirements.
- **Transparency & Subsidy Control:** All awards will be administered in full compliance with Managing Public Money, the UK Subsidy Control Act 2022, and the Government Grants Functional Standard (GovS 015).

We look forward to receiving your application.

Yours sincerely,

Hannah Boardman
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Director of Frontier and Emerging Technologies
Department of Business, Innovation, Science and Trade