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Award

Isambard AI

University of Bristol

F15: Voluntary ex ante transparency notice

Notice identifier: 2023/S 000-033353

Procurement identifier (OCID): ocids-h6vhtk-04177e

Published 10 November 2023, 4:16pm

Section I: Contracting authority/entity

I.1) Name and addresses

University of Bristol

4th Floor, Augustine's Courtyard, Orchard Lane

Bristol

BS1 5DS

Email

to22587@bristol.ac.uk

Telephone

+44 01179289000

Country

United Kingdom

Region code

UKK11 - Bristol, City of

Internet address(es)

Main address

www.bristol.ac.uk

I.4) Type of the contracting authority

Body governed by public law

I.5) Main activity

Education

Section II: Object

II.1) Scope of the procurement

II.1.1) Title

Isambard AI

II.1.2) Main CPV code

- 44316400 - Hardware

II.1.3) Type of contract

Supplies

II.1.4) Short description

Isambard-AI is a new GPU-based Artificial Intelligence (AI) computing system to deliver a national AI Research Resource (AIRR) for the UK, as recommended in the “Independent Review of The Future of Compute: Final report and recommendations”, and to support the Frontier AI safety taskforce. This new AIRR will support several initiatives, particularly on AI safety and foundational models, where the UK aims to establish a leadership position. Isambard-AI will be delivered as a “self-contained unit”.

The RFP and Contract covers, in summary, the following mandatory requirements:

1. The scale-out GPU-based production system
2. An early access GPU-based system with AI storage
3. High performance network fabric
4. System management support for multi-tenancy:
5. Support for 5 years of service
6. One or more self-contained units
7. Energy efficiency
8. Storage solutions optimised for AI training and inference
9. AI supercomputing facility access and gateway nodes

10. Data Centre Connectivity and Edge Router for Services

11. UPS

12. Data transfer and mover tool

13. Software and licenses

14. Security monitoring, auditing and compliance

15. Monitoring, reporting and RAS tools

16. Eventual decommissioning

17. Training / handover

18. Environmental impact

II.1.6) Information about lots

This contract is divided into lots: No

II.1.7) Total value of the procurement (excluding VAT)

Value excluding VAT: £175,875,000

II.2) Description

II.2.3) Place of performance

NUTS codes

- UKK11 - Bristol, City of

Main site or place of performance

Emersons Green, Bristol BS16 7FS

II.2.4) Description of the procurement

A call for a mini competition was made on 13 September 2023 under the Southern Universities Purchasing Consortium ("SUPC") Framework Agreement for the Supply of Servers, Storage and Solutions National Agreement ("SSSNA Framework Agreement") by issue of a Request for Proposals ("RFP") to all of the Lot 4 (Solutions – HPC and/or DIC) Panel members. The SSSNA Framework was established pursuant to the Find a

Tender Notice reference 2021/S 000-027936 published on 8 November 2021. Lot 4 panel members were offered a site visit to view the site for the upcoming Isambard 3 Tier-2 HPC service at the National Composites Centre within the Bristol and Bath Science Park. The RFP identified the mandatory requirements (scored on a Pass/Fail basis), the scored desirable requirements, set out the award criteria and scoring methodology and provided a response template and draft call off contract based on the SSSNA Framework Agreement. The RFP gave Lot 4 panel members 2 weeks to respond (until 5pm Wednesday 27 September 2023), the evaluation concluded on 2 October 2023 and a voluntary standstill period concluded on 31 October 2023. Delivery of an initial 150+ GPUs and site preparation is required in early 2024 to enable Phase 1 of Isambard-AI to go live by the end of March 2024, in order to meet milestones set by the Department of Science, Information and Technology (“DSIT”) in the grant funding of Isambard-AI via UKRI. DSIT’s plans for the new AI Research Resource at the University were announced as part of a £900m investment to transform the UK’s computing capacity, by press release of 13 September 2023.

Only one tender was received in response to the RFP (from Hewlett-Packard Limited trading as Hewlett-Packard Enterprise, the provider of Isambard 3). The University proceeded to evaluate the Hewlett-Packard Enterprise tender response, confirmed that it met the mandatory requirements and scored the response to the desirable requirements (see below). Standstill letters were issued to the Lot 4 panel members on 18 October 2023. The call-off contract in relation to the supply of Isambard-AI with Hewlett-Packard Limited (“the Contract”) has been finalised and is ready for signature.

II.2.5) Award criteria

Quality criterion - Name: TECHNICAL CAPABILITY / Weighting: 80%

Quality criterion - Name: Contract & Account Management / Weighting: 10%

Quality criterion - Name: Sustainability / Weighting: 10%

Price - Weighting: 80/20

II.2.11) Information about options

Options: No

II.2.13) Information about European Union Funds

The procurement is related to a project and/or programme financed by European Union funds: No

Section IV. Procedure

IV.1) Description

IV.1.1) Type of procedure

Award of a contract without prior publication of a call for competition in the cases listed below

- The procurement falls outside the scope of application of the regulations

Explanation:

This VEAT notice is issued prior to entering into the Contract and aims to ensure that publicity is given to the University's intentions, the nature of the Contract and the procurement route before the Contract is signed.

No prior publication of a notice was made specifically for the Contract. The University relies on the contract notice published on Find a Tender reference 2021/S 000-027936 for the SSSNA Framework Agreement ("the Framework Notice") and considers it legitimate to award the Contract without prior publication of a notice specific to Isambard-AI as it has used a compliant route to market under the SSSNA Framework Agreement in accordance with regulation 33 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 ("PCR 2015").

SUPC has confirmed that call off contracts awarded to date under the SSSNA Framework, including the Contract, fall below the total estimated value (of £500,000,000) set out in the Framework Notice.

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The University has also satisfied itself, in tailoring the call-off terms (as set out in the SSSNA Framework Agreement) to the RFP requirement and finalising the Contract, the amendments made to the SSSNA Framework call off terms and conditions are non-substantial and permitted by regulation 33 and general principles, including the principles of equal treatment and proportionality and the inherent flexibility, whether pursuant to Regulation 32(2)(a) or Regulation 33 of the PCR 2015, to agree non-substantial amendments.

IV.1.3) Information about a framework agreement

The procurement involves the establishment of a framework agreement

IV.1.8) Information about the Government Procurement Agreement (GPA)

The procurement is covered by the Government Procurement Agreement: Yes

Section V. Award of contract/concession

Title

Isambard AI

A contract/lot is awarded: Yes

V.2) Award of contract/concession

V.2.1) Date of conclusion of the contract

18 October 2023

V.2.2) Information about tenders

The contract has been awarded to a group of economic operators: No

V.2.3) Name and address of the contractor/concessionaire

Hewlett-Packard Limited (trading as Hewlett-Packard Enterprise)

Ground Floor, 210 Wharfedale Road, Winnersh Triangle, Berkshire, RG41 5TP

Berkshire

RG41 5TP

Country

United Kingdom

NUTS code

- UKJ11 - Berkshire

The contractor/concessionaire is an SME

No

V.2.4) Information on value of contract/lot/concession (excluding VAT)

Total value of the contract/lot/concession: £175,875,000

V.2.5) Information about subcontracting

The contract/lot/concession is likely to be subcontracted

Section VI. Complementary information

VI.3) Additional information

Isambard AI

VI.4) Procedures for review

VI.4.1) Review body

Royal Courts of Justice

The Strand

London

WC2A 2LL

Country

United Kingdom