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Planning

AIRR Expansion AI Cloud Compute

Department for Science, Innovation & Technology

UK2: Preliminary market engagement notice - Procurement Act 2023 - [view information about notice types](#)

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Scope

Reference

prj_5950

Description

This notice is to alert the market that the Authority has begun formal market engagement in advance of its procurement for an innovative, scalable and flexible cloud solution to bolster the existing compute capacity of the AI Research Resource (AIRR). The Authority shall procure a solution that seamlessly integrates with the existing AIRRPortal, which is the current method by which users access AIRR's two existing supercomputers: Isambard-AI (at the University of Bristol), and Dawn (at the University of Cambridge).

The Authority has three key objectives for this procurement:

- Expand National AI Compute Capacity

To significantly increase the UK's AI research infrastructure by expanding national compute capacity, supporting the government's long-term ambition to expand to increase capacity twentyfold by 2030.

- Unlock Technological Flexibility and Scalability

Harness the flexibility of and scalability of cloud computing to ensure that AIRR users have timely access to the latest, most advanced hardware, enabling rapid adaptation to evolving research and industry needs.

- Drive Innovation and Societal Impact

Equip UK researchers from academia, public institutions and SMEs with world-class facilities to accelerate innovation and deliver transformative solutions in critical domains such as climate science, energy, medicine, and advanced materials, supporting economic growth and public good through Social Value commitments.

Pursuant to this, the Authority shall be conducting a procurement exercise to secure a contract worth up to £250,000,000 over a period of up to 4 years. The solution must include:

- A baseline capacity of cloud resources accessible to authorised users via the AIRR Portal, either provided directly or via a brokered/multi-cloud provider model;
- On-demand scalability to enable access to additional GPU capacity beyond baseline capacity;
- A managed service that will include secure data storage, orchestration for machine learning workloads, usage monitoring, reporting, demand forecasting and active security management;
- Technical support and integration that shall enable full integration into the existing AIRRPortal.

Out-of-scope aspects include any user assistance not directly related to compute provision, such as support with AIRR access agreements or administration of the AIRRPortal; these functions are handled by UKRI and the Universities of Bristol and Cambridge, who operate the AIRRPortal in collaboration with DSIT.

This notice is solely for the purpose of engaging the market to gather information. It does not constitute a call for competition or form part of a competitive process. Participation in this engagement will not confer any advantage or disadvantage in any future procurement, nor will it bind the Authority to proceed with any specific course or action.

Total value (estimated)

- £214,439,710 excluding VAT
- £250,000,000 including VAT

Above the relevant threshold

Contract dates (estimated)

- 18 May 2026 to 31 March 2030
- 3 years, 10 months, 14 days

Main procurement category

Services

CPV classifications

- 72000000 - IT services: consulting, software development, Internet and support
- 72317000 - Data storage services
- 72315000 - Data network management and support services
- 72416000 - Application service providers
- 72500000 - Computer-related services

Contract locations

- UK - United Kingdom

Engagement

Engagement deadline

15 January 2026

Engagement process description

Previous Consultations:

The Authority has previously issued an RFI to develop the Authority's commercial strategy for compute.

(Expanding the AI Research Resource: Request for Information - GOV.UK)

On 14th November 2025, The Authority issued a brief questionnaire to suppliers on RM6292 Cloud Compute 2, and respondents to the previous RFI issued in Spring (Expanding the AI Research Resource: Request for Information - GOV.UK). The questionnaire focused on the challenges and opportunities relevant to procuring and integrating AI cloud compute services for the UK research community.

Upcoming Engagements:

The Authority now intends to open formal market engagement to discuss the specific requirements and solutions for expanding the compute capacity of AIRR through cloud solutions. This engagement shall consist of the following key events:

Supplier Webinar 1 - 'Meet the Buyer' event on 9th December 2025 @ 13:30.

At this session, the Authority shall:

- Introduce the Authority team;
- Give a brief overview of the current AIRR environment;
- Introduce the:
 - o objectives of the procurement;

- o proposed requirements and approach to the procurement strategy; and
- o proposed contract terms and conditions;
- Allow suppliers an opportunity to meet the Authority in order to discuss:
 - o the current landscape in the AI cloud compute market;
 - o potential solutions and capacity among suppliers; and
 - o the proposed routes to market / contract terms and conditions.

In advance of this session, the Authority shall distribute supporting materials that allow suppliers to engage with our specific challenge statement and begin to formulate solutions. This shall feature:

- A description of the AIRRPortal and its current user journey;
- A high-level overview of our requirements including Target Operating Model;
- Mandatory functional requirements;
- Discretionary requirements;
- A supplier questionnaire which will seek comments from suppliers to allow the Authority to develop its requirements and approach to the procurement.

To register your interest in this session, please complete the following Microsoft Form: <https://forms.office.com/e/KyrpM60k4h> [form now offline].

The slides for this webinar are now available upon request via compute@dsit.gov.uk.

The above supporting materials shall be issued to the Lead Contact from your organisation via the email address supplied on the above Microsoft Form at least 3 days prior to the first Webinar.

If you cannot attend the session but would like access to the supporting materials, please indicate this on the form. The materials will be sent directly to the email address you provide.

After the event, all supporting documents and the slide deck used during the session will be uploaded as an amendment to this notice.

Supplier Webinar 2 - January 2026 / February [Time & Date TBC]

This session shall build on the previous workshop and discuss in greater detail the scope of requirements and proposed route to market.

Please direct any questions to compute@dsit.gov.uk. Do not reach out to individuals at DSIT.

Participation

Particular suitability

- Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME)
- Voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSE)

Contracting authority

Department for Science, Innovation & Technology

- Public Procurement Organisation Number: PVWZ-3216-PVQL

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London

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United Kingdom

Email: compute@dsit.gov.uk

Website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-science-innovation-and-technology>

Region: UKI32 - Westminster

Organisation type: Public authority - central government