Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council

Enabling AI adoption across science and engineering FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions, including common questions asked and answered during the 14th October 2026 webinar. If you have any further questions, please contact AI.Robotics@epsrc.ukri.org

Eligibility

Can an application be submitted to this opportunity before submitting a New Investigator Award (NIA) application without affecting my NIA eligibility?

- There are no exemptions on this AI opportunity. If you apply to this opportunity, it will count as your first application to EPSRC as a Project Lead and make you ineligible to apply for the EPSRC New Investigator Award (NIA). You should therefore apply to the NIA opportunity first.

Can a company in the UK join a university in the UK to apply as a co-lead? Can an industrial partner be funded as project partner?

- An (international or UK) industrial partner can be listed as a Project Partner, however the application must be led by a UK university.
- A project partner is only permitted to receive small amounts of funding from the grant, for instance for travel and subsistence.
- Please see this webpage for further information: Roles in funding applications: eligibility, responsibilities and costings guidance – UKRI

Can you please clarify if there is a limit on the number of applications from one institution and how many applications can an academic be involved with? Is there a restriction on number of proposals submitted as a PL or Co-L? Can teams submit more than one proposal?

- This opportunity has no limit on how many applications an academic or institution can be involved with although individual institutions may have their own restrictions.
- Due to the use of DPR, it is advised that applicants be involved with no more than two projects. This will help to reduce reviewer load, minimise conflicts and to ensure truly ambitious ideas are submitted.

Can a Research Associate or Postdoctoral Researcher lead a project? Can the Project Lead be on a fix-term contract? If the AI expert is a postdoc, is the application still feasible? Can a PDRA apply as the Project Lead?

- Normal UKRI applicant eligibility rules apply. For full details, visit Individual eligibility – UKRI. If the team members are eligible and have the correct expertise for what is being proposed for the application, it is suitable.
- A PDRA cannot apply to lead a project.

Can the expertise on AI be drawn from the same institution as the domain? And what level of expertise is expected?

- The application's AI expertise can come from the same institution as the application's domain expertise. The opportunity expects applications to bring together an AI expert and a non-AI domain expert, but it does not require them to be from different organisations. As long as the expertise appropriately aligns with the opportunity scope it is suitable, however please note that the primary application area must come from the five BIST AI for Science priority areas.

Should both the domain and AI expert be Project Lead and Co-Lead or can one of these be a Project Partner who is paid through procurement?

- We would expect the domain and AI expert to be Project Lead/Co-Lead, not a Project Partner on the application.

Is it possible for an international university to participate in this call with funding or are international collaborators on this call limited to the standard Project Partner role?

- This isn't an international funding opportunity. Only Norway, via the money follows arrangement, and IIASA are eligible under this call. International applicants can be Project Partners.

Distributed Peer Review (DPR)

DPR will be a new approach for most applicant teams, and there will be a wide range of experience with all types of reviewing. Will there be training provided, beyond the guidance document?

- The use of distributed peer review (DPR) in this opportunity reflects UKRI's commitment to testing innovative approaches to funding and assessment that can support appropriate risk-taking, faster decision-making, and a more adaptive funding system.
- No additional training is planned beyond the published DPR rules and guidance documents. Applicants and nominated reviewers are therefore encouraged to familiarise themselves with the guidance provided as part of the funding opportunity.

How are peer reviews moderated / normalised?

- The mean score of each application will be used to generate a ranked list. Published evidence tells us that higher number of reviews leads to more consistent scoring, and there will also be a quality assurance process involved in analysing the review scores.

After DPR, will anyone from UKRI check what are the selected proposals before funding them? Or is it solely based on peer-review?

- DPR will be used to make funding recommendations which will help inform a final decision meeting.

Is there going to be a panel after the DPR process has taken place and/or an opportunity for applicants to respond to the reviews?

- No. For this funding opportunity there will be no Applicant Response stage, and no Expert/Prioritisation Panel stage. Funding decisions will be made by UKRI following the Distributed Peer Review stage. Applicants will receive their application's reviews but will not be given the opportunity to submit an applicant response.

How will Distributed Peer Review accommodate unconventional interdisciplinary proposals, particularly where reviewers disagree strongly about their potential?

- An in-house program will be used to match reviewers with applications, and there is an expertise-matching component to this. The large number of reviews per application that Distributed Peer Review delivers should provide a breadth of views.
- Reviews will be written in isolation by the applicant-reviewers, so reviewers will not be collaborating when writing their reviews. Differing opinions are to be expected. We will apply checks and balances to ensure that review scoring is fair.

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General

The call emphasises communities at an early stage of AI adoption and lists new interdisciplinary capability as an outcome. Would an existing, already-publishing collaboration between AI and domain researchers be disadvantaged or is the test simply that the research question is new?

- Part of the assessment criteria focuses on risk and reward, you would need to be able to adequately address this. Existing collaborations between AI and domain researchers would not be disadvantaged.
- The key consideration is not whether the collaboration is new, but whether the proposed research is sufficiently ambitious and aligns with the opportunity's expectations.

Is there a more general document on the IS8 priority areas so that one can check the remit before deciding if we need to contact you?

- The opportunity's thematic scope is aligned to the BIST AI for Science strategy.
- UKRI AI Research and Innovation Strategic Framework – UKRI provides information on UKRI's AI focus areas.
- UKRI Strategy 2026 to 2031 – UKRI provides more information on UKRI's priority areas, including IS8.

Is there a preference between appointing a PDRA or using more of PL's FTE?

- There is no explicit preference for appointing a PDRA or requesting more PL time. Applicants should request the resources most appropriate to delivering the proposed work. As with standard EPSRC practice, resources should be appropriate, justified, and represent a feasible approach to achieving the project's objectives. The call allows for both options.

Is the Project Lead/Co-Lead limited to two - a domain expert or an AI expert? or can three researchers all with relevant expertise be involved?

- There are no restrictions on number of Co-Leads on applications to this opportunity.

Is the start date fixed?

- Yes, the project start date is fixed. All projects should start 26th April 2027