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OPP1328: Enabling AI adoption across science and engineering

Webinar

14th October 2026 | 10am to 11am UK time

Today's agenda

Welcome and introductions
Introduction to IS8 AI programme
This opportunity: OPP1328
Purpose and scope
Eligibility and funding available
Application and assessment
Q&A session

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Introducing the UKRI IS8 Programmes

- The IS8 Priority Programmes are a new cross-UKRI mechanism intended to strengthen strategic coordination, prioritisation and delivery across areas of national importance. They are being established to support more coordinated, mission-oriented working across UKRI.
- Delivery will continue to rely on distributed expertise and capability across UKRI rather than large centralised delivery teams.

The IS8 Programmes are not intended to replace councils or existing expertise. They are intended to strengthen coordination, alignment and strategic impact across a complex and increasingly interconnected landscape.

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The IS8 AI Programme

Our role – To build UK AI capability, accelerate adoption, deliver growth.

The overall vision for the AI IS8 Programme is to:

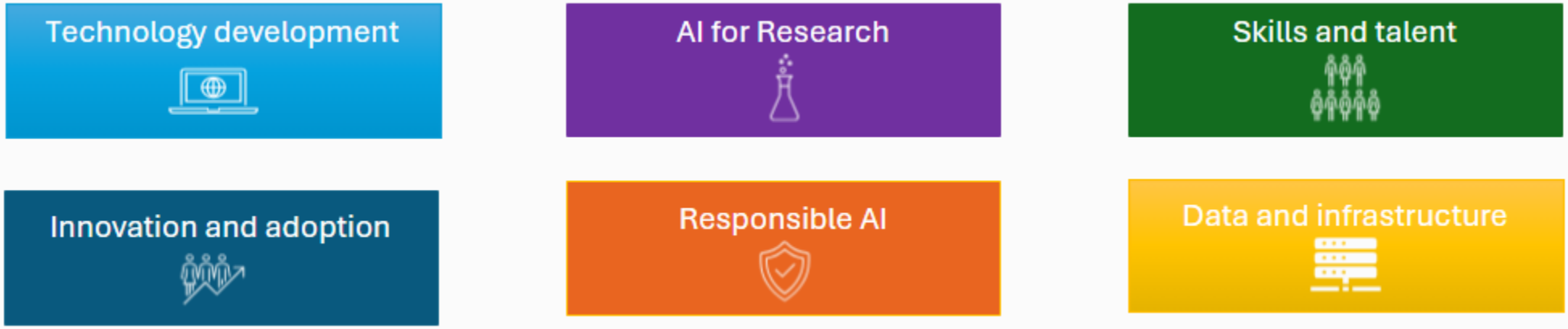
1. Support the UK being a global leader in AI
2. Contribute to UK growth by growing the AI sector
3. Create a coherent Programme across Research and Innovation

The Programme's role in the AI ecosystem is to intervene in:

- Long-horizon or market missing technology development,
- Shared compute and data infrastructure,
- Areas of strategic UK advantage to support novel markets e.g. AI for Science,
- Priority market areas; AI-Enabled Health & Life Sciences, Advanced Materials with AI and Secure AI for Defence & Autonomy and
- Talent pipelines.

UKRI's AI landscape

- AI-related activity exists across councils, Innovate UK, institutes, infrastructure and strategic partnerships.
- The six pillars below – provide a strategic framing for UKRI AI activity and areas of long-term capability development.



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Purpose and Scope

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Enabling AI adoption across science and engineering

AI is transforming research, helping scientists analyse complex data, generate hypotheses, design experiments, and accelerate discovery.

The UK has world-leading strengths in both AI and science, but many research communities are still exploring how AI can best be applied within their disciplines.

Bringing together AI and domain expertise to identify opportunities, overcome barriers, and build the foundations for future AI-enabled research.

Projects will have the potential to unlock new opportunities for applying AI to important research challenges in priority science and engineering disciplines.

Opportunity at a Glance

£5,000,000

Total fund

£250,000

Maximum full economic cost per award

UKRI funds 80%: up to £200,000.

1st Dec 2026

Application deadline

26th Apr 2027

Fixed Start Date

12 months

Maximum project duration

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The opportunity aims to

- Drive the development and wider adoption of AI capabilities across research fields
- Strengthen collaboration between AI specialists and domain researchers
- Embed AI as a trusted research tool in a fair, inclusive and responsible way.
- Develop researchers' understanding and practical capability to use AI tools and methods effectively within their disciplines
- Create lasting impact through sustainable networks, partnerships and resources.

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Scope

In Scope

- Applying existing AI capabilities in engineering/scientific domains in novel ways
- Exploring AI solutions to important research challenges
- Projects with potential significant impact that may also involve some uncertainty/risk

Out of Scope

- Projects focused primarily on advancing AI methods, models or algorithms
- AI research without a clear link to accelerating progress in a research domain

Applications must address one of the following Priority Research Areas:

- Engineering Biology
- Advanced Materials
- Quantum Technologies
- Medical Research
- Fusion Energy

Need advice on whether your idea is in scope or aligns with the priority research areas?
Contact ai.robotics@epsrc.ukri.org

Desired Outcomes

- Demonstrate the feasibility and value of applying AI to a research challenge.
- Develop prototype tools, workflows or proof-of-concept approaches.
- Identify future data, infrastructure, benchmarking or capability needs.
- Build new interdisciplinary capability through AI and domain collaboration.
- Create roadmaps and strategic priorities that support longer-term AI-enabled transformation.

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Eligibility and Funding

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Applicant and Application Eligibility

You must be based at a UK research organisation eligible for UKRI funding. Standard UKRI eligibility applies

International Researchers

- An international researcher may only be a project co-lead (international) through the UKRI-RCN Money Follows Cooperation agreement or the UKRI-IIASA agreement.

Project Partners

- Other international collaborators should be included as project partners.
- UK collaborators outside approved organisations should be included as project partners.
- Project partners may be from industry, academia, government or the third sector, in the UK or overseas.

We will not accept uninvited resubmissions of projects that have been submitted to UKRI or any other funder.

Eligible Costs

Eligible Costs

- Salary contribution for project leads and co-leads
- Research, technical and project management staff
- Research consumables, including compute
- Travel, subsistence and cohort activity costs
- Data preservation, sharing and dissemination
- Estates and indirect costs

Non-eligible Costs

- PhD studentship costs
- Equipment valued above £25,000 per item, including VAT

    Equipment below £25,000 should be entered under Directly incurred – other costs

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Application and Assessment

Application Key Information

- The challenge, opportunity or research question to be addressed
- Why collaboration with AI expertise is necessary
- The AI approaches that will be explored
- How these approaches could advance the state of the art within the application domain

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Application Assessment Areas

- Vision and Approach
- Applicant and team capability to deliver
- Resources and cost justification
- Ethics and responsible research and innovation (RRI)
- Risk and reward

- Also required: Summary, core team, reviewer nominations, partner information, facilities and relevant declarations

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Application Assessment Areas

Vision

- Is of excellent quality and importance within or beyond the field(s) or area(s)
- Has the potential to advance current understanding, generates new knowledge, thinking or discovery within or beyond the field or area
- Is timely given current trends, context and needs
- Impacts world-leading research, society, the economy or the environment

Approach

- Is effective and appropriate to achieve your objectives
- Is feasible, and comprehensively identifies any risks to delivery and how they will be managed
- Uses a clear and transparent methodology
- Summarises the previous work and describes how this will be built upon and progressed
- Will maximise translation of outputs into outcomes and impacts
- Describes how your team's, research environment will contribute to the success of the work

Application Assessment Areas

Applicant and team capability to deliver

- The relevant experience and track record to deliver the proposed work.
- The right mix of AI and domain expertise to address the challenge.
- Appropriate leadership, management and development skills.
- Contributed to a positive research culture and wider research community.

Resource and cost justification

- Justify the application's more costly resources, in particular:
- Comprehensive, appropriate, and justified
- Represent the optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes
- Maximise potential outcomes and impacts

Application Assessment Areas

Ethics and responsible research and Innovation (RRI)

Demonstrate that you have:

- Identified key ethical and responsible research and innovation (RRI) considerations.
- Considered the wider societal, environmental and economic impacts of the project.
- Planned how these issues will be managed throughout the project.
- How data will be collected, stored, shared and protected.

Risk and Reward

- Transform or significantly advance a research field.
- Explore new AI-enabled approaches, tools or techniques.
- Open up new research opportunities or directions.
- Generate long-term scientific, technological or societal benefits.

Assessment: Distributed Peer Review (DPR)

Applicants are also assessors and review other applications submitted to the same funding opportunity.

You must nominate 2 members of the team to participate in the DPR process which includes representatives who are AI experts and those who are domain experts.

All applicant teams will receive around eight proposals to review.

The reviewer team is expected to carefully read all the assigned applications, score them and provide feedback to the applicants following the rules and guidelines.

Failing to provide the reviews by the deadline will lead to the automatic rejection of the application submitted by the given applicant. Exceptions may only be permitted in extenuating circumstances.

Application and Assessment Timeline



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Questions

Opportunity enquiries

ai.robotics@epsrc.ukri.org

Funding Service support

support@funding-service.ukri.org
01793 547490

Helpdesk hours

Mon-Thu 8:30am-5:00pm
Fri 8:30am-4:30pm

Include the council, opportunity name and application reference in your query. Contact one mailbox at a time.

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Question and Answer Session

- Pre-submitted questions will now be responded to
- We will then aim to respond to questions submitted using the Q&A function of this webinar – these questions will be answered verbally, not using the Q&A function
- If your question is not answered today, it will be included in an FAQ document which will be added to the funding opportunity in due course
- If you have a very specific question to do with scope or eligibility, please email ai.robotics@epsrc.ukri.org