

Future Open Networks Research Challenge - Clarifications

Scope

Whether the challenge is limited to RAN focussed projects only

The content of a proposal can span networks more generally, including the core, provided the Open RAN Principles are embedded and addressed in the proposal. The need for progress on openness primarily lies in the RAN at present, but since this challenge is about future networks, the architectural distinction between the RAN and core may not be so sharply defined. Note however that this challenge is primarily related to addressing network challenges, not end user applications or services.

Is there a preferred TRL that the research would take place within?

Whilst we acknowledge that the range of TRL's is broad, we would like to see high quality research taking place between TRL's 1-5.

Consortium

The definition of Large RAN Vendor

By 'Large RAN Vendor', we mean vendors who are currently deployed in the UK's mobile operator networks, as well as those who have the capacity to deploy into the UK's network at scale.

Organisations eligible to be project leads

The project lead or lead partner of a consortium must be a UK University. Organisations of any other type, including Research and Technology Organisations (RTOs), can be partners or members of a consortium, subcontractors or involved in any other way. Please see section 4 of the competition guidance for further information regarding eligibility criteria.

Multiple universities involved in individual consortium

Multiple UK Universities could be involved in any one consortium.

Whether a consortium is required to partner with a Large RAN vendor

All consortia are required to partner with a large RAN vendor, as detailed in section 4.1.1 of the competition guidance. If your consortium is unable to partner with a large RAN vendor, you will not be eligible for funding.

Engaging with other potential consortium partners

UK5G have dedicated a [page](#) on their website to help businesses find consortium partners for the challenge. The recording of the briefing event will also be circulated by UK5G in the coming days, this features pitches from a number of UK businesses and Universities who are also looking for consortium partners, many of whom have included their contact details in their slide decks.

The limit on the number of consortiums that a university can participate in as a lead, or as a partner

There is no limit to the number of consortiums a University can participate in, either as a lead or as a partner.

Clarifying the eligibility of a consortium

Should you wish to clarify the eligibility of your consortium, please refer to section 4 of the competition guidance. Alternatively, queries regarding this matter can be forwarded to the Open Networks Programme inbox (ONP.enquiries@dcms.gov.uk).

The level of detail required in the 'letters of support'

A letter signed by a senior person in the organisation should be submitted from each partner and any Large RAN Vendors being subcontracted by the consortium. It does not need significant detail about the contribution of the partner, rather is intended as a senior commitment to the project.

Whether each member needs to agree to the T&Cs on the GFA 'in principle'

The lead organisation agrees 'In Principle' as no GFA is signed until after notification.

Whether RAN vendors need to be UK based, and what kind of presence is required to participate as a partner or subcontractor

All consortium partners must have a UK presence (for example if they are a company, they must have a UK Ltd. registry). If they are a partner, a Large RAN vendor must also have a UK Ltd. registry. Subcontractors, however, including any Large RAN Vendor, do not necessarily require a UK arm.

Whether a RAN vendor can participate in a consortium as a subcontractor who simply supplies open RAN equipment (hardware/software) that enables the research on the project

Yes, a large RAN vendor can participate in a consortium as a subcontractor who supplies equipment. This would satisfy the requirement to have a large RAN vendor as part of the consortium.

Whether a RAN vendor can be a partner in a consortium with all their project related R&D work conducted outside the UK on a non-funded basis

All funded R&D activity must take place in the UK. Consortia are free to explore models whereby certain non-funded activities take place outside the UK, for example on an in-kind basis.

Whether JeS is a requirement for Universities

Universities are not mandated to submit via JeS. JeS is provided as an option. Alternatively, universities may submit a standard finance form.

The importance of collaborating with government initiatives such as SONIC labs and UKTL

This is a key objective of the challenge. We would like projects to demonstrate how their work may integrate with these initiatives either presently or in future.

Can subcontractors not based in the UK join a consortium?

Yes, subcontractors not based in the UK can join a consortium however, we would require evidence that the bulk of activities would take place in the UK.

Application Form

Detailing the contribution made by subcontractors to the project

Contributions made by subcontractors should be throughout sections A and B of the application form.

Submitting separate finance forms for academic institutions and subcontractors, if they are claiming at different subsidy rates

Separate finance forms should be provided, providing further breakdowns by partner where applicable, this will compliment the JES form for academic institutions. Any subcontractors should be listed on the appropriate tabs on the finance forms.

Whether key aspects of the project structure can be outlined in the Gantt chart in section D1

Aspects of the project structure such as work package titles, task titles, milestones and deliverables titles can be demonstrated within the Gantt chart. However, descriptions of these aspects and how they contribute to the project's outcomes and benefits should be within the text of D1.

Providing detail regarding the key entities, key individuals to the project covered

The narrative should be detailed across the three questions of section B. Section E, the resource plan/ appendix should not be descriptive and should instead list high level details such as salaries and roles.

The level of detail required in the IP plan

The more advanced and detailed the IP plan is, the better. Please refer to the competition guidance for further information regarding the IP plan.

EOI

Estimated costs in the EOI

The figures that we are requesting in the EOI are not binding and we would expect them to be a ballpark figure.

Submitting an EOI proposal prior to partnering with a Large RAN vendor

Having a Large RAN vendor as part of a consortium is not a requirement at the EOI stage, but will be expected to be evidenced on submission of a full proposal.

The number of EOI submissions expected per consortia

We would expect to receive one EOI per consortium.

Receiving feedback if I am unable to submit an EOI

We are unable to provide feedback on applications once the EOI window closes. After the full application window closes and all the bids are assessed and winners notified, there will be an opportunity to receive feedback on the finished application.

The deadline for full proposals and whether or not this will be extended due to the delay in circulating EOI feedback

Whilst we appreciate that there was a delay in circulating feedback, we are unable to extend the deadline for the submission of full proposals. Can you please try to submit all full proposals by mid-day on the 3rd of October.

Subsidy control

Cost recovery for academia, large industry and SMEs

The advice regarding state subsidy is that we would like the lead partner to take a view of what subsidy regime this would fit in. If it includes large RAN vendors, this is likely to be an experimental/ development approach which is between 40% - 60% for undertakings, with 80% to Universities. Some universities' solicitors may consider this a no subsidy approach so you will be able to recover 100%, provided you can demonstrate this.

Fixed caps for funding of eligible costs for industry members

Whether there are fixed caps for funding of eligible costs for industry members depends on the subsidy approach. In the experimental/development approach as is anticipated for this challenge, large companies are at 40% with medium companies at 50% and small companies at 60%. If the categorisation of the subsidy approach is different, e.g an industrial development approach then these figures are likely to vary.

The rate of funding that is available for Large RAN vendors in FONRC

Applicants should take their own subsidy advice - which will impact the level of subsidy available. Sub contractors would be paid per their contract - with the customer able to

reclaim costs at the rate of subsidy intensity appropriate to the subsidy regime under which the grant is awarded.

If vendors are partners, the subsidy intensity would depend on the subsidy approach taken - this would depend on the categorisation of subsidy that was appropriate for the project.

Whether there is a limit on the amount/value of subcontracting allowed

Whilst we have not set out an absolute limit on subcontracting in this competition, it is important that the majority of activity is undertaken by grant recipients. As a guide, around 70% (or more) of costs should be for activity undertaken by grant recipients.

The requirements for consortium partners to have to provide their legal advice on the subsidy control

The lead partner can provide advice covering the entire bid.

Whether administrative costs can be claimed at 100% rather than 80%

The ability to claim will depend on the assessment of Subsidy Control approach taken by the university

Costs for the subcontracting and whether they can be recovered at 100% from DCMS rather than 80%

Subcontracting should be treated in the same way as other expenditure, in line with the subsidy control approach taken

Whether Subsidy Control applies to subcontractors and whether subcontractors are required to commit funds or invest in the project with their own capital

Subsidy Control only applies to Project Partners. Subcontractors do not need to contribute any funds to the project.

Subsidy control limits in the event that a partner is also a subcontractor

There must be an exceptional reason for a partner to be both a partner and subcontractor. Costs charged must be at cost with no profit element included. The cross charge would be 100% of costs but any claims to DCMS would be at the prevailing subsidy intensity of the partner making the claim.

An outline of further expectations regarding Subsidy Control

DCMS has not outlined a specific approach that we're expecting bidders to use. Approaches that may be appropriate include the approach outlined in the [Future RAN Competition](#) and that outlined for [UKTIN](#) . Applicants should take appropriate advice to be shared with DCMS to demonstrate the applicability of the approach chosen.

Whether sub-contract expenditure can be claimed at 100% recovery and non-Sub Contract costs at 80% recovery.

The university will take an approach that allows either an 80/100% claim from a subsidy control position - unless the university are proposing to claim less than it is entitled to on some elements - we'd expect all costs to be recovered at the same rate (for experimental development subsidy - 80%, for no subsidy - 100%) but you should take advice on this before finalising your bid.

Whether partners need to resource project mobilisation costs (i.e. between GoL and project start) themselves

DCMS will not fund costs prior to grant signature (or those associated with bidding) but your project plan and costings might include costs for setting things up.

Suggested limit for the relative level of grant funding between different types of organisations

The suggested limit for the relative level of grant funding between different types of organisations is as follows; Universities - 80%, Large Business - 40%, Medium Business - 50%, Small Business - 60% Other Research organisations - 100%. Further information regarding costs is available in the [eligible costs guidance](#).

Whether a partner can claim 100% of the subcontracting charges with no subsidy control applied

All costs are claimable at the same rate (depending on the subsidy approach). For example, if the consortium member is eligible for 50% funding, 50% would be recoverable, if 100% then 100% would be recoverable etc. The only time this would differ is if the consortium member is claiming less than they are eligible for - but for simplicity we would prefer a flat rate in terms of subsidy.

IP

IP ownership

The IP exploitation and commercialisation model is to be decided by the consortium and forms part of the collaboration agreement. We do not make prescribed requirements regarding this. Section 3.2 of the Full Guidance for Applicants details the government's vision with respect to Standards, IP and Patents in future telecoms in the UK.

Funding

Maximum amount of funding

The maximum amount of funding that can be awarded to a consortium is £12 million.

Minimum amount of funding

The minimum amount of funding that can be awarded to a consortium is £4 million.

Minimum/ Maximum amount of projects that can be funded

Given that there is up to £25 million of funding available, with between £4 - 12 million available per project, we would anticipate funding 2 - 6 projects within this challenge.

Whether there is a 30% cap on funding academics can receive from the total grant funding

There is no 30% cap on the percentage of total grant funding academics can receive as part of this challenge.

Briefing Event

Whether the slides from the briefing event will be shared, including the pitches

All slides from the briefing event (including pitches) will be available via [UK5G](#).

Whether the slides from the briefing event will be updated to include details of proposals submitted at the EOI stage

The slides from the briefing event will not be updated following the EOI, as we are unable to disclose details of any EOI submissions. Should you be looking for potential collaboration opportunities UK5G have a dedicated page on their website in order to support businesses in finding consortium partners.