National Federated Compute Services
NetworkPlus

UK RI

Flexible Funding Projects 2nd Call

1. Call headline details

Total funding for the call	£490,000
Maximum award	£120,000
Funding level	80% of FEC
Call opens	01/08/25
Closing date for final submissions	05/10/25
Notification of outcomes	24/10/25
Anticipated earliest project start date	01/12/25
Project completion deadline	31/07/26
Maximum duration of projects	9 months

2. About the National Federated Compute Services NetworkPlus

Federation of national, regional, and institutional large-scale computing resources has the potential to realise significant benefits for users, resource and service providers, and funders.

This was recognised in the Government Office for Science report on Large-scale computing which provided a number of recommendations that point towards improved national coordination for large-scale computing, to provide improved efficiency, and reduced barriers to entry.

Large-scale computing is a fundamental and necessary part of modern research across all disciplines. With large investments being made into large-scale computing, both at the exascale, and for AI, it is particularly timely to deliver on a national federated computing service.

This NetworkPlus aims to identify the pathway to deliver federation benefits through the building of a broad and diverse community around joined-up large-scale computing and leveraging this to develop strategic roadmaps to achieve a national federated compute service that encompasses both computation and data federation.

3. About this Flexible Funding Call

This 2nd Flexible Funding Call is designed to support projects that:

a) collect relevant evidence and documentation to contribute to the development of the federation roadmaps

b) contribute to building the community around NFCS.

The flexible nature of the Call will enable the selection of projects on various scales that span the three pillars of the NetworkPlus: Community, Technology, and Governance. The selection of projects will seek to achieve a balance across these pillars and between large and small projects. The Flexible Funding call is the principal mechanism through which the community can contribute to developing the insights needed for the roadmaps, and the project selection will look to ensure that a range of communities of different sizes and maturities with respect to large-scale computing and data services are engaged.

The 1st Flexible Funding Call produced 13 funded projects working on areas across the three pillars. Please review the list of projects in progress before preparing your proposal in order to avoid duplication: nfcs-networkplus.ac.uk

4. Scope

Proposals will be expected to identify which of the three pillars of the NetworkPlus they will address. While the scope for this call remains essentially the same as the first call we will prioritise projects that are clearly distinct and address gaps in the coverage of those projects funded by the first round.

These priorities align with the following themes:

- cybersecurity in relation to federation
- integration with extant and emergent international and transnational federated DRIs
- business case/s for smaller systems funded and run by research organisations to participate in federation
- management of sensitive data in federation
- access, allocation and resource management, modelling and policy

We also encourage proposals which include partnerships within the disciplinary spheres of the

- BBSRC
- MRC/NIHR
- ESRC

to complement the existing programme funded in the 1st Call.

Applicants are strongly recommended to engage with the NetworkPlus lead team, as early as possible, prior to final submission for feedback to ensure good alignment with the scope of the call.

We are running our 2nd National event in Edinburgh on 22–23 September and have included a Mini-Sandpit for 2nd Call project proposers to present, discuss and refine their ideas with the Programme Technical Coordinators and meet potential project partners.

The following sections describe areas within these pillars that have been identified as being of broad interest. However, this is not intended to be an exhaustive list; proposals addressing other areas of relevance to the pillars are welcomed.

4.1 Community

For the Community pillar, areas of interest include:

- identifying existing and emerging user stories;
- establishing common nomenclature and standards;
- defining KPIs, community specific and generic;
- engaging with industrial partners;
- investigating skills gaps and training opportunities;
- feedback and co-development of roadmaps via workshops and roadshows.

4.2 Technology

For the Technology pillar, areas of interest include:

- identity and access management (IAM) technologies, standards and protocols
- secure, standard Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) for accessing HPC, HTC, data and AI services
- security, data protection and privacy compliance policies and implementation examples and use cases
- federated resource management, allocation, and accounting solutions across communities
- distributed workflows across HPC, HTC, data and AI, focussing on federation as an enabler for these workflows
- data transfer and sharing platforms and technologies

- community applications, portals and interfaces for federated services
- architecture and software stacks enabling federation of services
- federated training and outreach platforms

4.3 Governance

The flexible funding call will support projects that contribute insights that enable the identification of appropriate governance models for adoption by the NFCS. Areas of interest for the Governance pillar cover but are not limited to:

- technical governance that sets conditions for participation in the federation
- organisational governance that oversees the management of the federation across the participating organisations
- business models for sustainable operation

There are many existing examples of each of these governance aspects in the UK, across Europe, and internationally. Studies that survey existing practice, and provide insight into its relevance to, and potential application within, the NFCS will be an important contribution to developing the roadmaps. Studies that consider mechanisms for engaging non-UKRI communities in federation governance and policy with a view to enabling their participation in the federation will also be important to ensure an inclusive approach.

4.4 Project activities

We anticipate that project activity will comprise one or more of:

- surveys of existing practice
- assessment of gaps in existing provision – which can be hardware, software, training, services
- assessment of barriers to entry and on-boarding of new user-communities or providers
- technical evaluation of existing or prototype solutions
- community building activities that establish new communities as relevant for the DRI

Other activities that support development of the roadmaps or community building may be included. However, research into, or development of, new technical solutions is not within the scope of activities within the call. Projects that foster community collaboration are particularly encouraged.

The call evaluation will seek to ensure that a broad range of activities are supported.

4.5 Project scale

We anticipate that projects will be categorised by scale:

Category	Financial value (100% FEC)	Examples
Small	<£10k	Events aimed at building communities Surveying for existing practices
Medium	£10k to <£60k	More detailed surveying and analysis Modest technical evaluations
Large	£60k to £120k	Technology evaluations requiring significant staff time to setup and execute Surveys of larger communities where multiple events and significant staff time may be needed to collate and process outputs

The call evaluation will seek to ensure a balance across the scale categories.

For large-scale projects, the Panel will consider applications above £120k if the proposal is considered to add exceptional value to the Programme deliverables.

5. Eligibility

The Flexible Funding Call is open to all higher education institutions, research council institutes and independent research organisations in the UK that are normally eligible for UKRI funding ukri.org/publications/organisation-eligibility/research-organisations-eligible-for-ukri-funding

6. Expected project outcomes

All projects awarded under the Flexible Funding call are expected to result in outcomes that contribute to the development of the federation roadmaps, and/or contribute to the community building aspect of the NetworkPlus. Proposals should also embed EDI and skills development in the proposed activities.

Project teams will be expected to disseminate their findings at an NFCS Network Plus event.

7. Eligible costs

The project budget will support:

- running and supporting events to generate new communities of practice
- running and supporting events to gather evidence of existing practice
- work to survey and compile information on existing practice
- work to collate, analyse and document evidence for submission to the roadmap development
- limited hardware and software costs for technical evaluation studies
- work to set up, complete, and document technical evaluation studies

Eligible costs will include:

- staff time
- facilities hire and catering
- travel and subsistence to support participation in community building events for project team members. Travel bursaries for participants can be considered on a needs basis
- design and production of educational, training or promotional material

Eligible costs will not include:

- dissemination of research outcomes at international conferences

Queries about eligibility of other costs should be referred to the Technical Programme Manager.

8. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

The NetworkPlus team is committed to EDI, and we encourage engagement from under-represented groups across the community. This includes inviting applications from researchers at all career stages. Successful proposals will consider and support EDI and skills development as part of their proposed project activity.

9. Submission process

Proposals should be submitted on the application form, together with any letters of support from project partners.

Applications should be submitted by email to the Technical Programme Manager, John Masih, j.masih@qmul.ac.uk by 24:00 BST on **Sunday 5 October 2025**. Receipt of applications will be acknowledged. Any applications received after this date and time will not be considered.

10. Evaluation process

All proposals will be subject to an initial sift against the eligibility criteria and the call scope. Proposals will be categorized based on their scale and the identified pillar/s that they are addressing.

Assessment and selection of projects will be carried out for each theme to ensure consistency, diversity, and balanced coverage of the programme. Panels will be selected to ensure an appropriate level of experience, expertise and balance.

Successful proposals will clearly:

- identify which of the three pillars of the NetworkPlus: Community, Technology, and Governance, that they address
- demonstrate how they will support the NetworkPlus in achieving one or more of its three deliverables: federation roadmap, data roadmap, and community building
- indicate the project outcomes supported by a fully costed workplan
- demonstrate how they will engage with the relevant community to achieve their outcomes
- demonstrate the experience and qualifications of the team to deliver project outcomes
- indicate the project risks and how they are mitigated
- commit to provide regular reporting to the Programme Manager and Technical Coordinator

These factors described in your plan will be considered using the following evaluation criteria:

- relevance to federation/data roadmaps or community building
- impact on balance of NFCS portfolio
- degree of collaboration or community engagement
- suitability of team to deliver
- project management
- value for money
- EDI and skills development

Applicants will be notified of evaluation outcomes by 24 October at the latest. Unsuccessful projects will be provided with feedback from the assessment panel.

Point of contact for queries

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us by emailing: j.masih@qmul.ac.uk or j.hays@qmul.ac.uk