



Strategic Assets Programme

The Sovereign AI Fund backs the UK's most promising AI founders to build globally significant companies from here. We do this through an integrated offer — equity investment alongside compute access, talent visas, government procurement, regulatory support and R&D grants.

The Strategic Assets Programme is the R&D grants arm of that offer. It supports the Fund's core objective: strengthening the UK's comparative strategic advantage in AI by improving the growth prospects of high-potential UK AI firms. It does this by funding the creation of shared assets — things like curated datasets and autonomous lab infrastructure — that are critical inputs for these firms. These assets generate spillover benefits across the ecosystem. A high-quality dataset or a shared autonomous lab doesn't just help one company — it raises the floor for dozens.

The grants are open to AI startups, but also to research organisations, universities and other types of organisations that may be best placed to create the asset. Consortia are welcome too. What matters is that the asset gets built, that it's accessible to the firms that need it, and that it strengthens the UK's position in strategically important parts of the AI value chain.

£9m is available for the initial programme. Grant awards must be at least £1m and no more than £9m per project.

Subject to approvals, a larger programme is expected to follow this initial programme, with total spending over the four-year period rising to up to £160 million.

Submit an Expression of Interest on the Sovereign AI Fund website: <https://www.sovereignai.gov.uk/>

Questions about the scheme? Contact us at sovereignai@dsit.gov.uk

At a Glance

What we fund The creation of shared strategic AI assets — currently high-value AI datasets and autonomous/automated lab infrastructure — that benefit multiple organisations and wouldn't get built at the right scale, quality or openness without public support. New asset classes may be added in future and will be clearly communicated.

Who should apply UK-registered companies, research organisations, universities or consortia with a credible plan to build a strategic AI asset aligned with one or more of our focus areas. This includes AI startups building an asset themselves, as well as other organisations best placed to create it. Consortia with non-UK partners are welcome — the lead applicant must be UK-registered.

How much Up to £9 million is available for grant awards in this initial round. The minimum grant award is £1 million, and the maximum grant award is £9 million per project. Non-commercial projects with broad open access can be funded at up to 100% of eligible costs. Commercial projects can ordinarily be funded at up to 50%, or up to 70% in exceptional cases where there is a clear funding gap and strong wider public benefit.



What's next This is an initial round. Subject to approvals, a larger programme is expected to follow this initial programme, with total spending over the four-year period rising to up to £160 million. New asset classes may be introduced as part of that programme.

What We Fund

Two Priority Asset Classes

For this initial round, we're focused on two asset types. New asset classes may be added in future — these will be clearly communicated.

High-Value AI Datasets

AI-ready data assets whose primary value lies in the quality, structure and usability of the data for AI development and deployment. We are looking for datasets that go beyond raw data collection to include curation, provenance, documentation, quality assurance, standards and appropriate access arrangements.

The strongest proposals will provide data that is genuinely usable for training, validating or testing AI systems at scale — for example through clear metadata and context, robust quality controls, interoperability, and, where relevant, multimodal, longitudinal or process-aware data.

This could include large-scale curated and annotated datasets in priority areas, harmonised datasets built from existing sources, infrastructure that makes high-value data AI-ready, or benchmark and evaluation datasets for model performance.

Autonomous & Automated Lab Infrastructure

AI-enabled experimental platforms that combine robotics, instrumentation, software and computational systems to run workflows with a high degree of automation and feedback. We are looking for infrastructure whose primary value lies in enabling faster, more reproducible or more scalable experimentation, testing or development through closed-loop or semi-autonomous operation.

The strongest proposals will integrate experimental hardware with orchestration, data capture, real-time analytics, and AI-driven decision-making or optimisation.

This could include robotic experimental platforms, autonomous or semi-autonomous lab environments, orchestration and control layers that enable closed-loop operation across existing facilities, or shared infrastructure that accelerates innovation and may also generate high-quality data as an output.

Focus Areas

Your proposal should align with one or more Sovereign AI focus areas below. These focus areas may evolve over time.



Compute Efficiency & Sovereign Architecture Novel chip design, photonics, neuromorphic and analog accelerators, compilers, hardware-software co-design, compute orchestration, scheduling, serving, inference optimisation, model routing, compute security, energy efficiency. Covers both novel hardware and the software that makes compute usable, efficient and secure.

Next-Generation AI Labs Novel model architectures, new training paradigms, foundational AI research translated into commercial applications, efficient training approaches, frontier-adjacent research companies. Covers companies pursuing genuinely new approaches to how AI models are built and trained.

Health & Life Sciences Drug discovery, clinical trials AI, NHS operational AI, health and social care, health data platforms. Covers AI applied across the discovery, development, validation and deployment of health interventions and the systems that support them.

AI for Scientific Discovery Materials design, protein engineering, de novo synthesis, physics simulation, lab-in-the-loop tooling, scientific process platforms, scientific data curation. Covers AI applied to the practice of science — the tools, platforms and data infrastructure that accelerate how discoveries are made and commercialised.

AI Trust, Integrity & Assurance Evaluations, red-teaming, adversarial robustness, monitoring, audit, compliance, governance tooling, privacy-preserving deployment. Covers the tools and infrastructure needed to test, monitor and assure AI systems deployed at scale.

Defence & National Security Intelligence analysis, autonomous systems, cyber-defence, command and control, dual-use AI.

Your proposal doesn't need to fit neatly into one area — if it spans several, tell us how. However, a proposal that covers more than one will not automatically score more highly just because it is broader. What matters is whether the proposal makes a strong, credible and strategically relevant case.

Funding Tracks

Two routes, depending on your approach.

Non-Commercial Track — Up to 100% funding

For projects where the creator won't commercially exploit the outputs and the asset will be made available on broad, open, non-discriminatory terms. Matched funding is welcome but not required.

Commercial Track — Up to 50% funding (up to 70% in exceptional cases)

For projects where the applicant will derive commercial benefit. We'll ordinarily fund up to 50% of eligible costs. Up to 70% may be considered where the project genuinely wouldn't happen at a lower rate, the funding requested is the minimum needed to close the gap, and the asset delivers significant wider benefit with broad enforceable access. All matched funding on this track must come from private sources.



You'll be asked at full application stage which track you think applies, and we'll make the final determination.

How to Apply

Three stages. Designed to be fast at the front end and rigorous where it matters.

Stage 1 — Expression of Interest (EOI)

A short submission to check eligibility, scope and strategic fit. We'll aim to assess your EOI and complete due diligence screening within 3 working days. EOIs are accepted on a rolling basis until the published closing date. EOIs should be submitted on the Sovereign AI Fund website.

What we're looking at:

- Whether the lead applicant is eligible and the project would be delivered in the UK
- Whether the proposal fits the current scope and asset classes for this round
- Whether the proposal is for eligible activity and expenditure, and whether the funding request is within the scheme limits
- Whether there is a credible case that the asset would benefit UK AI firms and the wider ecosystem
- Whether the proposal aligns with one or more Sovereign AI focus areas
- Whether anything comes up through due diligence on the lead applicant or any partners that would affect whether the proposal can proceed

As part of this stage, if your application passes the initial eligibility assessment, we will carry out proportionate due diligence on the lead applicant and, where relevant, consortium partners. If you are invited to submit a full application, we may identify further information during the later stages of assessment or due diligence which affects whether the application can proceed or be funded.

This stage is deliberately lightweight — we don't want you investing weeks before we've confirmed there's a fit.

Stage 2 — Full Application

If your EOI is successful and you pass due diligence screening, you'll be invited into the next published full application batch. Before submitting a full application, a meeting to discuss the process will be available to applicants.

How full applications are assessed

Full applications are assessed in two stages.

Stage 2 is the detailed assessment stage. At this stage, applications are assessed against the published scored criteria set out below.

Technical Assessment Panel — technical assessors testing whether the proposal is technically sound, realistically deliverable and likely to generate meaningful impact. Scored on:



- **Technical feasibility and deliverability** — is the approach credible, the team capable, the plan realistic, and have key technical, operational, regulatory, security and privacy risks been identified and can they be managed?
- **Impact** — does the project make a novel and meaningful contribution, unlock important downstream applications or capabilities, and create benefits beyond a single organisation, team or use case?

Sovereign AI / grants-team assessment — the grants team assessing the broader governance and funding case. Scored on:

- **Governance and operating model** — is the asset designed as a durable, shared resource with credible management, stewardship, access arrangements, clear ownership / rights / responsibilities, and appropriate safety, security and privacy arrangements where relevant?
- **Cost and value for money** — is there a clear case for public funding, is the grant the minimum necessary, are costs eligible, justified and proportionate, and, where relevant, is the proposed intervention rate consistent with the scheme parameters and the access / exploitation model?

Each of these four Stage 2 criteria is scored out of 5. To progress to Stage 3, an application must score at least 4 out of 5 on every Stage 2 criterion.

Each Stage 2 criterion will be scored using the following scale:

- **1 – Very weak:** does not meet the criterion; major gaps, weaknesses or risks.
- **2 – Weak:** addresses some aspects of the criterion, but substantial gaps, weaknesses or risks remain.
- **3 – Below threshold:** shows some merit but does not meet the standard required to progress.
- **4 – Strong:** meets the standard required to progress; credible, well-evidenced and deliverable, with manageable risks.
- **5 – Excellent:** exceeds the standard required to progress; highly credible, well-evidenced and compelling, with very limited weaknesses or risks.

Where needed, we may hold a short clarification discussion to test specific aspects of your application. This isn't a separate scored stage and won't be an opportunity to rewrite your proposal.

Stage 3 — Final Decision

Proposals that meet the Stage 2 assessment thresholds will move to the final decision stage. Stage 3 is not a further technical or financial scoring stage. Instead, it is the stage at which the Investment Committee reviews the Stage 2 assessment results, scores the Strategic fit criterion, and makes the final funding decision.

The Investment Committee will receive:

- the Technical Assessment Panel's moderated scores and written summary;
- the Sovereign AI / grants-team assessment summary;



- the outcome of the due diligence screening;
- the consolidated recommendation from the Sovereign AI Unit; and
- any proposed conditions, key issues or portfolio considerations relevant to the decision.

Where helpful, a technical assessor may attend the Investment Committee in an advisory capacity to explain the panel's findings and answer questions. Final decision-making responsibility, however, sits with the Investment Committee.

Strategic fit at Stage 3

At Stage 3, the Investment Committee will score the proposal against the Strategic fit criterion, using the same 1–5 scoring methodology set out for the Stage 2 assessment. In doing so, it will draw on the information in the application and the assessment information provided to it, including the Sovereign AI / grants-team assessment summary.

In making that assessment, the Investment Committee will consider the extent to which the proposal:

- would benefit the UK AI firms and wider ecosystem the programme is designed to support;
- aligns with one or more Sovereign AI focus areas;
- strengthens UK capability at important points in the AI value chain; and
- adds complementary value to the wider portfolio.

To be approved for funding, a proposal must first meet the Stage 2 thresholds and must then score at least 4 out of 5 on the Stage 3 Strategic fit criterion.

The Committee may:

- Approve the award;
- Approve with conditions (which may include scope or cost adjustments); or
- Decide not to award.

Final decisions will also take account of wider scheme-level considerations, including:

- the available budget and commitment headroom;
- financial year profiling;
- the need to maintain a balanced portfolio across different strategic assets and focus areas; and
- the need to avoid unnecessary duplication or over-concentration in a single asset class or focus area.

You can expect to hear the outcome of your full application around one month after the relevant full application deadline (see dates below). Stage 2 scores are part of the internal assessment and moderation process and will not be issued separately in advance. Applicants will receive a single formal outcome communication once the Investment Committee has made its final decision.



What Happens After a Grant is Awarded?

You will enter into a grant agreement with DSIT. Projects will be expected to start as soon as reasonably practicable after grant award, with payments made in arrears against evidence of milestone delivery and eligible expenditure. At a minimum, the grant funding agreement is expected to cover:

- the grant amount and duration
- eligible activities and expenditure
- milestones, claims and payment
- reporting, monitoring and evaluation requirements
- access terms, governance and documentation requirements
- data handling and information governance requirements
- safety, security and confidentiality requirements
- intellectual property
- subsidy control obligations where relevant
- events of default, clawback and termination rights
- change control arrangements for material changes to scope, budget, timing or governance

Projects' grant-funded activity and claims must be completed within the current Spending Review period (financial years 2026–27 to 2029–30).

Each project will have a monitoring lead. Material changes to scope, budget, timeline, access terms or governance will go through a formal change process and may require re-approval.

Applicants invited to submit a full application will receive the full grant terms and conditions in advance of that stage.

What Strong Proposals Look Like

A strong application will typically:

- **Show clear UK benefit** — explain how the asset will strengthen the UK's comparative strategic advantage in AI and improve the growth prospects of UK AI firms
- **Identify a real gap** — the asset doesn't exist, or doesn't exist at the quality, scale or openness the ecosystem needs
- **Be specific** — a concrete asset that gets built, documented and used, not a vague concept
- **Show who benefits and how** — which firms, researchers or organisations will use it, and what opportunities it unlocks.
- **Connect to our focus areas** — explain which areas the proposal supports and why the asset matters



- **Make the access model clear** — how will people access it, on what terms, and who decides?
- **Make the case for public funding** — if the market would build this anyway, we don't need to fund it
- **Demonstrate deliverability** — right team, right timeline, right approach, with risks identified and mitigated
- **Think beyond the grant** — how does the asset sustain itself after funding ends, and how is it stewarded?

Key Dates

Applications open on 16 April 2026.

EOIs can be submitted at any time on a rolling basis, and we aim to assess them within 3 working days of receipt.

If you want to be considered in a particular full application window, you should submit your EOI at least three working days before that full application deadline. However, we encourage applicants to submit an EOI as early as possible. This gives enough time for us to assess it and, if successful, for you to prepare and submit a full application by the relevant deadline. Submitting close to the full application deadlines will leave limited time to prepare and submit a full application for that window.

Full application deadlines:

- 7 May 2026, midday
- 5 June 2026, midday

If you want to be considered in a particular full application window, you should submit your EOI at least three working days before that full application deadline. If your EOI is successful, you'll then need to submit your full application by the relevant deadline in order to be considered in that window. If you miss that deadline, you'll need to wait for the next available full application window.

You can expect to hear the outcome of your full application around one month after the relevant full application deadline.

The initial competition will close after the June window, so EOIs must be submitted in time for successful applicants to submit a full application by 5 June 2026.

These dates relate to the competition and assessment process for this initial programme. Successful projects' grant-funded activity and claims must be completed by 31 March 2030 at the very latest.

Eligible Costs

What we will fund:



- Equipment, infrastructure and other capital expenditure needed to create and commission the asset
- Intangible asset development directly contributing to the creation of the strategic asset
- Limited initial operating or commissioning costs necessary to establish, test and commission the asset for first use

What we won't fund:

- Ongoing business-as-usual operating costs
- Routine commercial activity after initial commissioning
- Activity that doesn't directly contribute to creating the asset
- Retrospective costs incurred before the grant agreement is signed by both parties

Eligibility

To be eligible for this programme:

- The lead applicant must be a UK-registered company or organisation
- The proposal must fall within the scheme's scope and one of the current asset classes
- The project must be located in the UK
- The grant request must be between £1m and £9m.
- The proposal must seek funding only for eligible activities and expenditure
- The project activity and claims must be completed by 31 March 2030 at the very latest.

Consortia: There must be a UK-registered lead applicant who would sign the grant agreement. Non-UK organisations can participate as partners. All partners will be subject to due diligence checks. DSIT may require consortium members to enter into a collaboration agreement before grant agreement signature.

FAQs

We may update these FAQs during the competition.

Who can apply? UK-registered companies, research organisations, universities and consortia. This includes AI startups that want to build an asset themselves, and other types of organisations — research institutions, data providers, infrastructure operators — that may be best placed to create it. What matters is that the asset is high-quality, accessible and strategically valuable.

Is this only for startups? No. The programme exists to benefit AI startups and companies in our focus areas, but the grants are open to any eligible UK-registered organisation that can make a strong case for building a shared strategic asset. The key test is whether the asset will genuinely benefit the AI firms the programme is designed to support.

Can a consortium apply? Yes. There must be a UK-registered lead applicant who would sign the grant agreement with DSIT. Non-UK organisations can participate as partners.



Can non-UK organisations take part? Yes, as consortium partners. The lead applicant must be UK-registered.

What if my proposal doesn't fit neatly into datasets or autonomous labs? For this initial round, proposals must fall within one of the two published asset classes. We may add more asset classes in future competitions — these will be clearly communicated. If you're unsure whether your proposal fits, submit an EOI and we'll let you know quickly.

Can I submit more than one application, or reapply if I'm unsuccessful? Yes — you can submit more than one application within the programme, as long as each proposal is genuinely distinct. If your application is unsuccessful, you cannot reapply with the same proposal in the same programme. If your proposal passed the EOI stage, you may resubmit it to the planned future larger programme (subject to approvals for that programme). If your EOI itself was unsuccessful, you may submit a new EOI within the same programme only if it is materially different or clearly addresses the feedback. Applicants may not seek to circumvent these rules by changing the nominal lead organisation where the underlying proposal is substantially the same. Resubmissions of substantially the same proposal may be rejected without full reassessment.

Can I apply if I've received Sovereign AI equity investment? Yes. But investee status won't give you any advantage in the competition. Assessment is based on published criteria.

Will there be more funding after this programme? Subject to approvals, a larger programme is expected to follow this initial programme, with total spending over the four-year period rising to up to £160 million.

How will you avoid funding things that duplicate each other? The programme is portfolio-managed. Proposals first go through detailed assessment against the published criteria. Final decisions are then taken by the Investment Committee at Stage 3, taking account of the wider portfolio, available budget, financial year profiling, and the need to avoid unnecessary duplication or over-concentration.

Do projects need to finish during the initial competition period? No. The initial competition period covers the application, assessment and award process. Projects will be expected to start as soon as reasonably practicable after grant award, and successful projects may deliver over a longer timetable set out in the grant agreement. Payments are made in arrears against evidence of milestone delivery and eligible expenditure. Grant-funded activity and claims must be completed by 31 March 2030.

Conditions

DSIT will treat information provided by applicants as confidential except where disclosure is necessary for assessment, due diligence, approval, grant administration, audit, monitoring or related government functions, or where required by law. Full applications may be reviewed by relevant internal staff and external assessors, all subject to appropriate confidentiality and conflict of interest requirements.



We may need to disclose information in accordance with legal obligations, including under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. However, information that is genuinely commercially sensitive or confidential for another reason will be treated as confidential and will not be disclosed except where required by law. If parts of your application are commercially sensitive or confidential for another reason, you should clearly identify those parts and explain why.

Reasons for decisions on applications will be recorded at all stages to support good administration and ensure a clear audit trail.

If an application is successful, DSIT may publish the name of the applicant organisation, the project name and the amount of funding awarded, in line with standard transparency requirements.

DSIT will process personal data provided in connection with this application in accordance with UK data protection legislation. Personal data will be used for the purposes of assessing applications, conducting due diligence, administering grants, and for audit, monitoring and evaluation purposes. It may be shared with external assessors, other government departments and relevant public bodies where necessary for these purposes. Application data may be retained after the competition closes in accordance with DSIT's data retention policies.

DSIT may amend, clarify or withdraw the competition at any time, and may extend deadlines where appropriate. DSIT may reject non-compliant applications, disqualify applicants where material risks or conflicts cannot be appropriately managed, or decide not to make any award. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that no actual or potential conflicts of interest exist that would materially affect their participation, and for declaring any such issues in their application.

DSIT will not be liable for any costs, expenditure or effort incurred by applicants in connection with this scheme or the application process, including where the process is amended or terminated. Submitting an Expression of Interest or a full application does not constitute an entitlement to funding or create any contractual obligation on the part of DSIT.

Some organisations may choose to apply separately to this scheme and to other public funding programmes with partially overlapping areas of interest, such as ARIA's RFP for Activation Partners. To help avoid unnecessary duplication and support sensible coordination across public funding, DSIT may share relevant application or assessment information with those organisations where appropriate and lawful.

This does not mean one application can be used across multiple schemes. If you want to be considered for another scheme, you will need to apply to that scheme separately.

Any such coordination will not change how this programme works. Applications to this programme will still be assessed only against this scheme's own published criteria, process and priorities, and DSIT will make funding decisions independently.