

Call for Expressions of Interest: Regional Energy Planning and Heat Decarbonisation

Overview

The [UK Energy Research Centre](#) (UKERC) is inviting **Expressions of Interest** (Eols) to conduct research on **regional energy planning and heat decarbonisation**. Eols should be submitted by **17:00 on Friday 19 September 2025**.

The authors of the successful Eol will be invited to co-create, along with UKERC's Director and research theme leaders, the details of a research proposal that would form part of UKERC's research programme on [Affordability, Justice and Economic Impacts](#), and will work closely with programmes focused on [Delivering Energy Infrastructure](#) and [Operating a Highly Renewable and Largely Electrified Energy System](#)

The co-created research, led by the authors of the selected Eol and conducted by their teams, should start no later than 30 March 2026, and should conclude by 30 June 2028. The maximum budget available for the research is **£312,500 at 100% Full Economic Cost (FEC)**, i.e. £250,000 at 80% FEC.

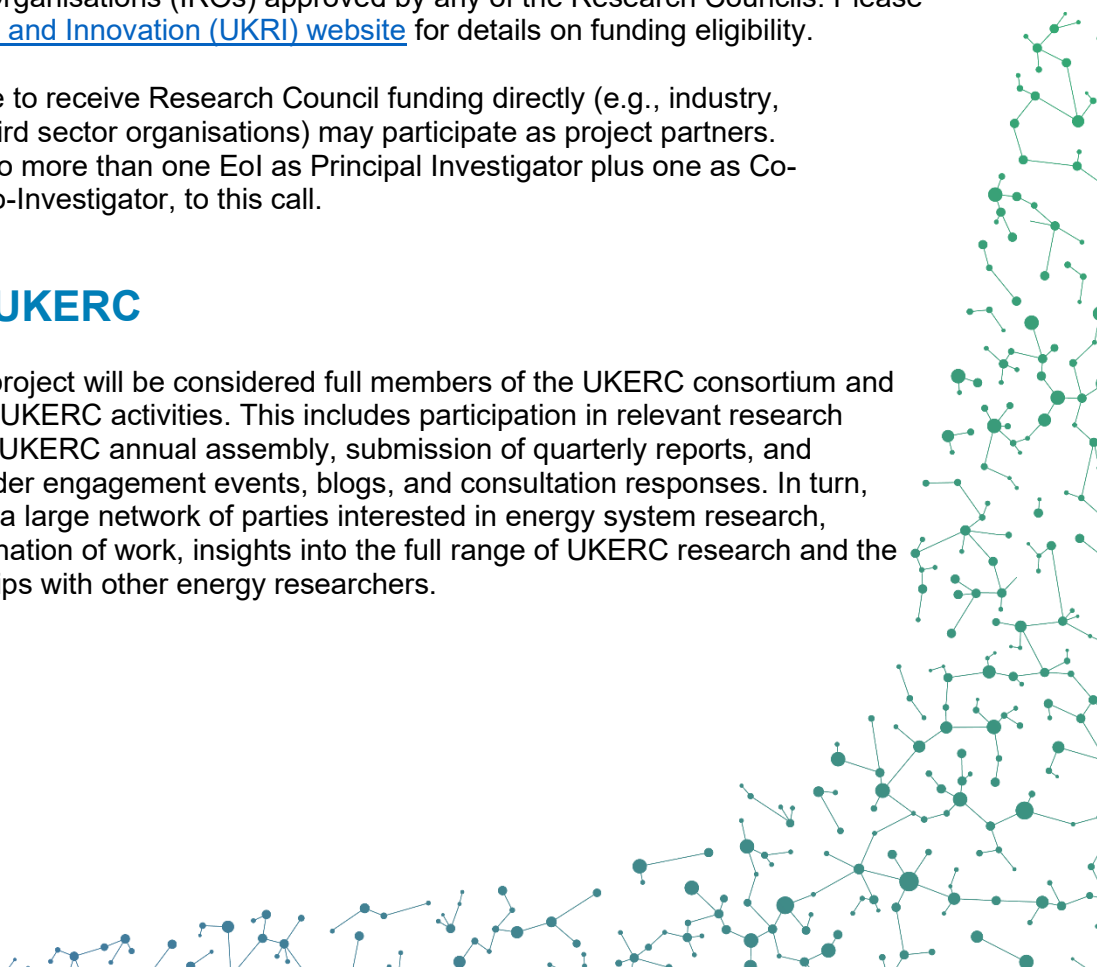
Eligibility

Expressions of Interest (Eols) are invited from eligible UK researchers, i.e., applicants based in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Research Council Institutes and Centres, and Independent Research Organisations (IROs) approved by any of the Research Councils. Please refer to the [UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\) website](#) for details on funding eligibility.

Organisations not eligible to receive Research Council funding directly (e.g., industry, government agencies, third sector organisations) may participate as project partners. Individuals may submit no more than one Eol as Principal Investigator plus one as Co-investigator, or two as Co-Investigator, to this call.

Membership of UKERC

Contributors to the new project will be considered full members of the UKERC consortium and should contribute fully to UKERC activities. This includes participation in relevant research theme meetings and the UKERC annual assembly, submission of quarterly reports, and contributions to stakeholder engagement events, blogs, and consultation responses. In turn, UKERC offers access to a large network of parties interested in energy system research, opportunities for dissemination of work, insights into the full range of UKERC research and the forging of new relationships with other energy researchers.



Context and scope

The Governments of the UK, Wales and Scotland have adopted a more strategic approach to energy infrastructure planning to accelerate decarbonisation. This includes development of a Centralised Strategic Network Plan (CSNP), a Strategic Spatial Energy Plan (SSEP), and development of Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESPs) which will act as a 'blueprint' for regional energy requirements, setting out how energy needs will change, what this means for infrastructure, and indicating critical areas for strategic investment. RESPs will take a whole-system approach across electricity, gas, and hydrogen networks, and could play an important role in shaping the decarbonisation of heat across domestic, commercial and industrial uses.

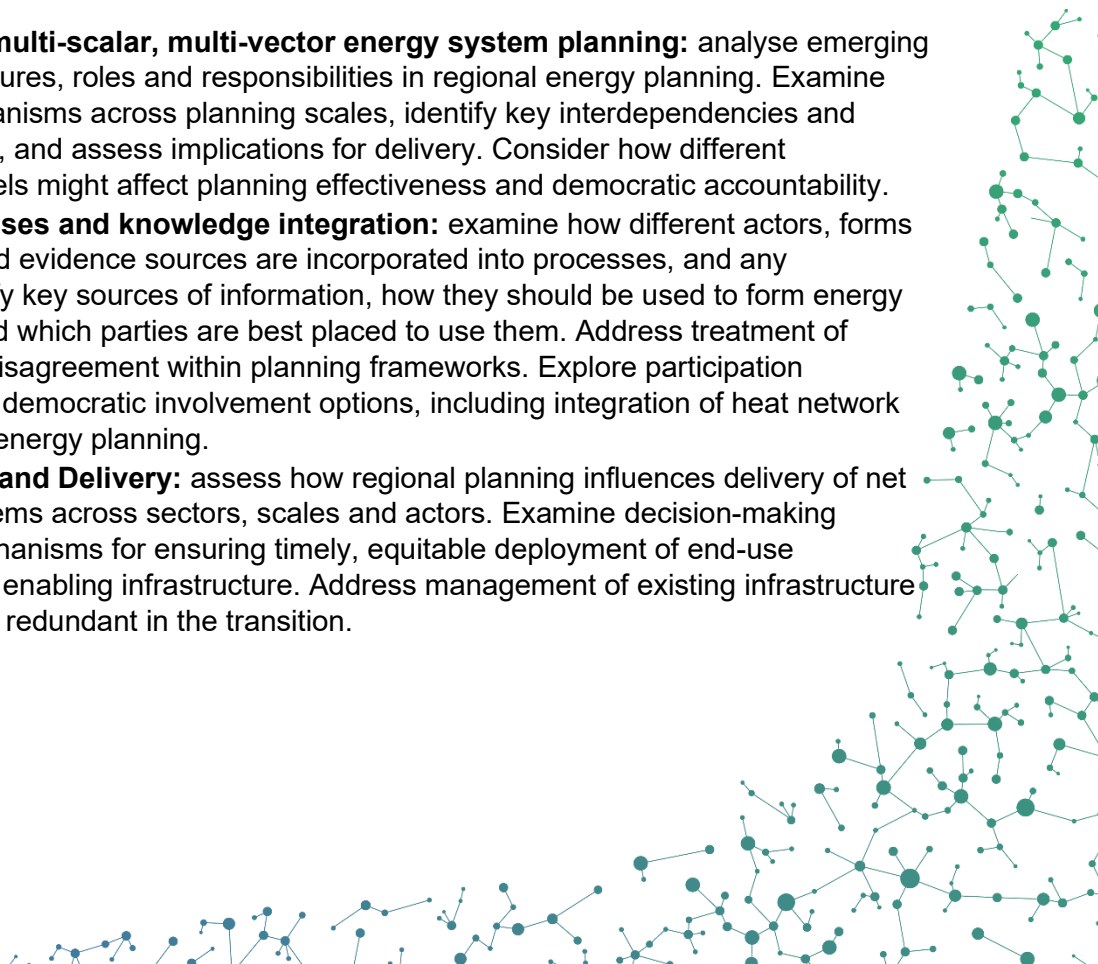
These developments raise questions about multi-level governance, the technical and policy challenges of cross-sector planning, and the social, political and economic implications of processes. We are seeking research proposals that engage with whether, and in what ways, the activities of NESO, local and regional governments, electricity distribution companies, gas distribution companies, heat network operators and industry can be integrated to inform regional decision-making on cost-effective and socially acceptable decarbonisation of heat.

Proposals should demonstrate awareness of ongoing policy developments and engage with relevant stakeholders throughout the research process. Key regulatory timescales include the development of RESPs and the transitional RESPs, CSNP (including SSEP), as well as energy network price control periods across gas and electricity, distribution and transmission. Research should be cognisant of these timescales and provide insights relevant to current planning cycles.

Where we want to build new understanding and evidence

The successful project should develop new understanding of how emerging Regional Energy Strategic Planning processes engage with heat decarbonisation. Applicants should specify which aspects of multi-scalar energy planning their proposal addresses and provide clear justification for their focus. We anticipate research proposals will explore some or all of the following:

- **Governance of multi-scalar, multi-vector energy system planning:** analyse emerging institutional structures, roles and responsibilities in regional energy planning. Examine integration mechanisms across planning scales, identify key interdependencies and governance gaps, and assess implications for delivery. Consider how different governance models might affect planning effectiveness and democratic accountability.
- **Planning processes and knowledge integration:** examine how different actors, forms of knowledge, and evidence sources are incorporated into processes, and any omissions. Identify key sources of information, how they should be used to form energy system plans, and which parties are best placed to use them. Address treatment of uncertainty and disagreement within planning frameworks. Explore participation mechanisms and democratic involvement options, including integration of heat network zoning and local energy planning.
- **Implementation and Delivery:** assess how regional planning influences delivery of net zero energy systems across sectors, scales and actors. Examine decision-making impacts and mechanisms for ensuring timely, equitable deployment of end-use technologies and enabling infrastructure. Address management of existing infrastructure that may become redundant in the transition.



Questions for the expression of interest

- Principal Investigator (PI) details.
- List of co-investigators, their email addresses and their organisations
- List of project partners – individuals, their email addresses and their organisations. (A project partner is a contributor to the project that does not receive UKRI funding via the award for this project)
- What questions you will address on the subject of whole-system regional energy planning, the methods you will use to address them, team roles and key outputs. Please make clear how your approach will build on and extend existing literature and research. *(1000 words max)*
- Please summarise your experience of researching whole-system energy planning and engaging with local, regional and national stakeholders. *(500 words max)*
- Please describe the types of impact your proposed research is expected to achieve and how you intend to realise them. This could include contributions to policy, practice, community engagement, or energy planning. Outline key mechanisms, partnerships, or engagement strategies you will use to maximise the impact. *(300 words max)*
- Please outline what you will bring to UKERC's research community if you are asked to lead the invited research and become part of UKERC. *(300 words max)*
- Please outline how you have employed principles of equality, diversity, inclusion and intersectionality in the proposed research/team setup and any specific objectives planned with respect to EDI. *(300 words max)*
- Budget details. Including travel and accommodation costs to attend a minimum of two UKERC meetings per year.

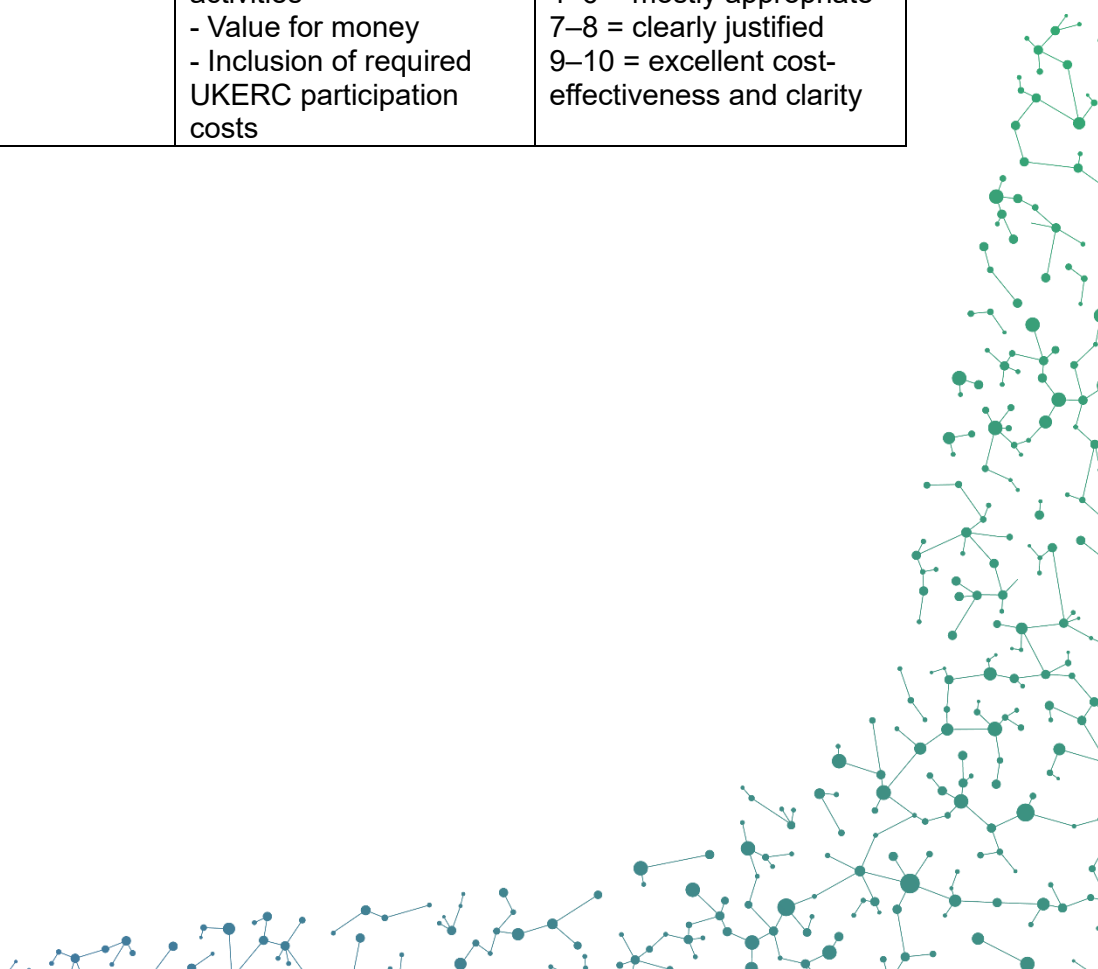
Evaluation procedure

Eols will be evaluated by a review panel convened by UKERC, which will make a recommendation as to which Eol should proceed to the co-creation and submission of a full proposal.

Please see below the scoring matrix against which Eols will be assessed:

Section	Criteria	Aspects for evaluation	Score guidance (0–10)
Research questions, methods, team roles, and outputs (1000 words)	Quality and coherence of proposed research	- Clarity and relevance of research questions - Appropriateness of methods - Clear team roles - Extent to which proposal builds on and extends literature and UKERC research	0–3 = vague or off-topic 4–6 = coherent and feasible but not innovative 7–8 = strong with sound rationale and fit 9–10 = outstanding innovation, excellent fit with UKERC goals
Experience researching whole-system energy planning and heat decarbonisation (500 words)	Team's relevant experience	- Evidence of prior research on, and engagement with, regional energy planning and heat decarbonisation - Relevance to the current topic - Demonstrated	0–3 = minimal or unrelated experience 4–6 = some relevant examples 7–8 = clearly relevant experience, good depth 9–10 = strong, directly aligned track record

		competence in stakeholder engagement	
Pathways to impact (300 words)	Clarity and feasibility of impact strategy	- Relevance and ambition of expected impact - Clear and realistic mechanisms to deliver impact - Stakeholder or policy engagement plans - Letters of support - Alignment with UKERC's impact goals	0–3 = vague or generic; lacks mechanisms 4–6 = plausible but limited detail 7–8 = well-articulated strategy with good alignment and strong letters of support 9–10 = compelling, strategic, and targeted approach
Contribution to the UKERC community (300 words)	Added value to UKERC	- Willingness and ability to engage across UKERC's wider activities - Evidence of collaboration, leadership, or capacity building - Complementarity to existing UKERC members	0–3 = minimal contribution beyond own project 4–6 = some potential for engagement 7–8 = clear added value 9–10 = strong UKERC ambassadorial potential
Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) (300 words)	Integration of EDI and intersectionality	- Attention to EDI in team composition and recruitment - Inclusive and ethical research design - Specific objectives or actions on EDI	0–3 = generic statements or absent 4–6 = basic awareness, some actions 7–8 = thoughtful and embedded approach 9–10 = model example of inclusive design
Budget and justification (Form Section 3)	Appropriateness of budget	- Budget is realistic and aligned with project activities - Value for money - Inclusion of required UKERC participation costs	0–3 = incomplete or unjustified 4–6 = mostly appropriate 7–8 = clearly justified 9–10 = excellent cost-effectiveness and clarity



Timeline

- Eol opens: week commencing 4 August 2025
- Submission of Eols: by 17:00 on 19 September 2025
- Assessment of Eols completed: 17 October 2025
- Development/Co-creation of full proposal: until 12 December 2025
- Decision on award of funding: 19 December 2025
- Start of project: no later than 30 March 2026

Submission

Please submit your Eol to ukerc@imperial.ac.uk no later than 17:00 on Friday 19 September.

Please submit your Eol as a PDF using the naming convention: 'Regional Planning Call' followed by the name of your project. In the submission email please also specify the call that you are applying to.

