

HYP_Link

UK Investment in Exascale and AI in Flux

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RECENT DEVELOPMENT

With the recent political transition in the UK, national investment priorities to stimulate the economy appear to have shifted. The new leadership, through the Department for Science, Innovation, and Technology (DSIT), recently rescinded a commitment made by the prior government to spend £1.3 billion towards advancing AI-based research, including £800 million to develop an exascale supercomputer at the Edinburgh Parallel Computer Center (EPCC) and £500 million to extend and expand the AI Research Resource (AIRR) to support computing power for AI research. This decision does not impact £300 million already distributed for the AIRR, nor DSIT's funding for its [AI Opportunities Action Plan](#).

ANALYST COMMENTARY

The UK has been home to strong private and public AI and AI-based research investment over the past several years, including advanced computing capabilities at Kao Data Center (Cambridge-1 in 2021), the University of Cambridge (Dawn in 2023), and the University of Bristol (Isambard-AI in 2024).

Investing in high-performance computing and advanced technical capabilities has historically been seen as a strong indicator of a nation's or region's global competitiveness. The EuroHPC Joint Undertaking (JU), representing the EU, and the US's Department of Energy are prime examples of public funding that have produced substantial research and scientific achievements, as well as driven commercial success not possible without such capabilities. While the current UK government likely believes redirecting this funding towards more public-works-oriented projects will provide better national economic growth opportunities, it runs the risk of falling behind in potentially higher-growth and longer-term national investment areas. The budget reduction may also be a harbinger of governments worldwide taking a more critical look at such large technology expenditures, despite the recognized competitiveness of such investments.

Moreover, the decision comes on the heels of the [UK rejoining the EuroHPC JU](#) in May 2024, having become ineligible for JU funding after Brexit in 2020. With the UK's researchers, businesses, and academics now having access to matching grants for time on the EuroHPC's growing portfolio of supercomputers, the UK government may instead be taking an opportunity to postpone, as opposed to cancelling, investment in its own future supercomputing infrastructure. EPCC continues to lobby for the reinstatement of the funding to enhance the UK's supercomputer profile as the UK's current participation in the JU does not allow a JU-funded supercomputer to be hosted in the UK.

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