

## CLOSED-LOOP NEURAL INTERFACE TECHNOLOGIES (CLOSENIT) NETWORK PLUS GUIDANCE NOTES 2023

PLEASE READ THE WHOLE GUIDANCE DOCUMENT CAREFULLY BEFORE APPLYING

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The closeNIT Network will fund collaborative projects performing proof of concept studies that demonstrate technological solutions, scientific principles and clinical applications for closed-loop neural interfaces. Proposed projects are expected to cost no more than £100k at 100% fEC, to be awarded at 80% fEC. It is anticipated that these studies will be distributed evenly across the closeNIT workstreams (WS1 Sensing and stimulation, WS2 Computation and control, WS3 The brain in the loop, WS4 Real-time systems, WS5 Transforming therapies, WS6 Closed-loop horizons) but applicants will be expected also to address the cross-cutting themes (CC1 Responsible research, CC2 User involvement, CC3 Public engagement, CC4 Diversity, inclusivity and openness) wherever appropriate. Funds will support investigators wishing to pursue blue-skies, high-risk high-reward ideas that will form the foundations for future collaborative grant proposals. We expect these awards to support collaborative activities involving multiple closeNIT members, and the value added by the collaboration should be clearly articulated.

The closeNIT Network will also fund smaller awards of up to £10k at 100% fEC, also to be awarded at 80% fEC. These flexible awards are aimed at early career researchers, and may be used to support career enhancement, for example through travel to initiate collaborations or conduct pilot experiments for grants.

### 2. ELIGIBILITY, SCOPE AND FUNDING LIMITS

**Eligibility:** Applications for collaborative funding are accepted from UK teams of researchers, academics (including NHS staff with honorary University contracts), basic scientists, engineers, ethicists and clinician scientists. International and industry partners can be included in applications, but funding must be distributed in accordance with UKRI rules.

Applications for ECR grants are accepted from UK-based early career researchers. If the project lead is ineligible for UKRI funding, a senior PI may additionally be named on the grant.

**Scope:** Applications relevant to any of the closeNIT workstreams (WS1 Sensing and stimulation, WS2 Computation and control, WS3 The brain in the loop, WS4 Real-time systems, WS5 Transforming therapies, WS6 Closed-loop horizons) will be considered. Applicants will be expected also to address the cross-cutting themes (CC1 Responsible research, CC2 User involvement, CC3 Public engagement, CC4 Diversity, inclusivity and openness) where appropriate. Priority will be given to projects that have the greatest potential to forward the translation of closed-loop neural interfaces to transformative therapies for neurological injuries and disease.

The award **will not** fund:

- Admin costs
- Industrial partner costs
- PhD studentships
- Continuation of normal research grants
- Costs related to the protection of IP
- Staff exchange into a spin-out company

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Whilst the scheme encourages collaboration with industry, applications should not seek to undertake research prescribed by/on behalf of the company.

**Duration:** Projects should be no more than 12 months in duration and must **finish by July 2025** (extensions beyond this date will **not** be permitted).

**Value:** Up to £100k at 100% FEC (awarded at 80% FEC) for collaborative projects  
Up to £10k at 100% FEC (awarded at 80% FEC) for ECR grants.

### **3. APPLICATION AND ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

Applications should be submitted via the closeNIT application form (version 2) to [closeNIT@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:closeNIT@newcastle.ac.uk) **by 5 PM on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023**.

The closeNIT steering group will form the application review panel. The members of the steering group are Professor Andrew Jackson (Chair), Professor Tamar Makin, Dr Alex Casson, Professor Andrew Sharott, Dr Nir Grossman, Dr Yujiang Wang, Professor Huiling Tan and Dr Mark Baker. Full applications will be reviewed by the panel members, with external invited input where necessary. Panel members will ensure that the contents of closeNIT applications are considered in confidence.

The table on the following page provides details which must be included in applications:

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<b>Content</b>	
<b>Project summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Summarise the proposed project in no more than 200 words</li> </ul>
<b>Case for support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>For collaborative projects (up to £100k):</b> A two A4 page project outline to include background, aims, objectives and project plan.</li> <li><b>For ECR projects (up to £10k):</b> A one-page project outline.</li> <li>Diagrams and figures can be included but must stay within the page limit.</li> <li>Font must be Arial, 11pt and the document must have 2cm margins</li> </ul>
<b>Justification for collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>For collaborative projects (up to £100k):</b> State whether this is an existing or new collaboration. Explain how the collaboration adds value to the project, for example by combining multiple disciplines to address the challenge (up to 200 words).</li> </ul>
<b>closeNIT workstreams and/ or cross-cutting themes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relevance to the closeNIT workstreams and/ or cross-cutting themes (explaining how the proposed project will address these). The word limit is 200 words for each of these sections.</li> </ul>
<b>Ethical, animal and GM review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ethical, animal and genetically modified review requirements and status. Where ethical approvals are required, funds will not be released until these approvals are in place. The word limit is up to 400 words.</li> </ul>
<b>CV of project lead</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A 1-page CV for the project lead</li> </ul>
<b>Costing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Applicants must complete their institution's standard costing form (for Newcastle University applicants this is the <b>Project Initiation Form</b> <a href="https://www.cognitofirms.com/NewcastleUniversity1/NewcastleUniversityNuTHProjectInitiationFormV2">https://www.cognitofirms.com/NewcastleUniversity1/NewcastleUniversityNuTHProjectInitiationFormV2</a>) This will determine the level of costing required for the project proposal. Costs must be provided at 100% fEC but will be awarded at 80% fEC.</li> <li>An <b>estimated</b> cost breakdown should be provided for directly incurred costs, all of which must be explained and justified. Budget lines without a reasonable justification will not be approved and successful applicants may be asked to adjust the budget after the full application panel meeting. Other costs can be outlined, plus any financial contribution from the applicant's institute and/or collaborative partner(s).</li> <li>Word limit for justification is up to 400 words.</li> </ul>

The deadline for applications is the **31<sup>st</sup> October 2023**. To apply please email the completed application form, together with the case for support and a CV for the project lead, to [closeNIT@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:closeNIT@newcastle.ac.uk). **Applications received after the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023 will not be considered.** Outcomes will be notified via email by the end of November 2023.

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### 4. POST-AWARD MANAGEMENT AND REVIEW

Following confirmation of a project's funding award, a project set-up meeting will be arranged to review the finances of the project, ensure any ethical approvals are in place and discuss reporting details. The meeting will be attended by the investigative team, at least one panel member, a closeNIT project manager, and others as deemed necessary.

All required approvals must be in place before funded projects can start.

Project funding may be withheld, or projects terminated, if awardees do not engage in this process

### 5. EVALUATION/REPORTING

Project teams will be required to provide information at specific points during the project and for several years after its completion (as required by EPSRC and MRC who fund the closeNIT award). Reporting requirements include:

- Quarterly financial reporting.
- A project completion report and presentation of findings to the closeNIT Network.
- Annual updates on outputs, follow-on funding applications (submitted/awarded), publications, patents (applications/published), impact activities, industrial collaborations, and spin-out companies that are directly related to the project. N.B This information is required by EPSRC and MRC to be included in the closeNIT award's annual Researchfish submission as well as for the annual funding renewal application).
- Written case studies (as requested internally and/or by the EPSRC and MRC).

If awardees do not contribute to the reporting requirements, they will not be eligible to apply for closeNIT funding in future award years.

### 6. ENQUIRIES

If you have any questions about the scheme, please direct these in the first instance to the closeNIT project team: [closeNIT@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:closeNIT@newcastle.ac.uk).

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**7. FLOWCHART**

