



**INVITATION TO
TENDERER GUIDANCE**

Network Test Hardware

Project Reference: 660

June 2022

Closing date: 24th June 2022



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GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

A detailed description of the requirement, together with formal definitions of the most important terms and phrases, are given in the rest of the document. For Tenderers convenience however, the following key terms, which are used throughout this document, are defined as follows:

Agreement	means the legally binding arrangement between parties as to a course of action.
Contract	means this contract let by the Customer under 660–Network Testers Equipment.
Customer	means Aston University “Aston”.
Goods	means Goods provided by the Supplier in performance of the agreement.
Invitation to Tender	means this document, inviting Tenderers to submit a Tender under this tender opportunity.
Supplier	means the Supplier appointed by Aston University as a result of this Invitation to Tender.
Services	means the requirements of Aston for the Services/Goods/Works as detailed in the specification.
Tender	means the Tender submitted by the Tenderer to the Customer.
Tenderer	means an organisation that submits a completed Tender in response to this Invitation to Tender.

ABOUT ASTON UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION TO ASTON UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1895 and a University since 1966, Aston is a long established research-led university known for its world-class teaching quality and strong links to business and the professions.

Aston University was announced as the Guardian's University of the Year 2020 and winner of the Times Higher Education's (THE) 2020 Outstanding Entrepreneurial University, in recognition of our support for student entrepreneurship, small businesses, and the West Midlands region. Also, our new Students' Union building was named as winner of the Guardian's award for 'Buildings that Inspire'.

Aston University has three Academic Colleges comprising 11 specialist Schools:

- College of Business and Social Sciences (Aston Business School; Aston Law School and the School of Social Sciences and Humanities)
- College of Engineering and Physical Sciences (School of Engineering and Technology; School of Informatics and Digital Engineering; School of Infrastructure and Sustainable Engineering)
- College of Health and Life Sciences (Aston Medical School; Aston School of Pharmacy; School of Biosciences; School of Optometry and School of Psychology)

Outstanding graduate employability

Aston is a leading university for graduate employment success. 81.3% of our graduates are in professional level employment or further study within 15 months of graduating, placing Aston in the top 30 in the UK for this measure (Times/Sunday Times Good University Guide, 2021). Aston is in the top 20 UK universities for graduate earnings, with a median graduate income of £30,700 three years after graduating. This is £8,600 more than the sector average (Longitudinal Education Outcomes, 2021).

Work placement experiences

Placements are integrated into the majority of our degree programmes meaning students develop essential work skills, build industry connections and a professional profile.

Graduates with placement or other work experience typically achieve a higher degree outcome and higher

levels of graduate employability. We have strong relationships with national and international graduate employers, as well as smaller and local employers. These relationships are extremely important and make a real contribution to graduate employability.

Links with industry

Many of our programmes have professional accreditations and awards from the relevant professional body or association, ensuring that students benefit from membership.

Career focused programmes

Aston's close and established links with business, the public sector and the professions

ensure that our career focused degree programmes are inspiring, challenging and constantly updated to equip students with essential work-related skills and experiences.

Excellence in teaching and research

We are committed to high quality teaching and academic excellence, ensuring we provide the highest standard of education to our students. Hands-on teaching is specialist, relevant and practical with access to professional and technical equipment in the relevant subject areas. Aston has an excellent reputation for research which shapes and improves lives. We're proud of the quality of our research and the real-world applications developed as a result - it makes a substantial and beneficial difference to people, organisations and society.

University Research Institutes

The Aston Institute for Photonic Technologies (AIPT) is one of the largest photonics research centres in the UK, with over 90 members of staff and current grant funding amounting to £25.5m in 60 projects.

The Aston Institute of Health & Neurodevelopment (AIHN) conducts interdisciplinary research for the study of developing brains, conducting fundamental research which impacts upon the wellbeing and success of people and society.

The Aston Institute for Forensic Linguistics (AIFL) improves the delivery of justice through the analysis of language.

The Energy and Bioproducts Research Institute (EBRI) conducts world-class research into all aspects of bioenergy including energy-from-waste and the development of new bioproducts and services, all of which contribute to improving the UK's carbon footprint and the security of energy supplies.

International

Aston University is a popular choice for international students. We recognise and welcome the important academic contribution and cultural diversity international students bring to our university environment. Students from over 120 countries choose to study at Aston University each year.

Students

With over 18,000 students from more than 120 countries, Aston University is a safe and friendly campus enjoyed by a global, multicultural community. Aston's diverse student population comprises the largest proportion of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students in the UK (2021 Times/Sunday Times Good University Guide Social Inclusion Rankings).

Birmingham - one of Europe's liveliest cities

Birmingham has a rich history which makes the city a unique and inspiring place to visit. It is recognised as a leader in leisure, entertainment, shopping and sport and is an international centre for business, commerce and industry. Birmingham is home to world class companies, innovative entrepreneurs and has one of the youngest populations in Europe. It is a dynamic, business-focused region that is well connected and centrally located in the UK.

Centrally located, green and sustainable campus

The Aston University 40-acre campus is one of the 'greenest' universities in the UK, the academic campus houses all the social and accommodation facilities for our students and is within walking distance to the city.

For more information visit our website at: www.aston.ac.uk

1 INTRODUCTION

The project is involved in designing and implementing research in Optical Communications on the basis that correct equipment is purchased. This involves purchasing Network Testers and associated test systems for operation above the threshold of 200Gbit or above in order to enable pre-FEC and post-FEC BER measurements of advanced 200 Gbit/s and 400 Gbit/s long haul DCO transponders such as;

- 200G/100G CFP4-ACO Analog Coherent Optical Transceiver
- 100G/200G Tunable CFP2-DCO Coherent Transceiver, up to 1000km
- CFP2-DCO 100/200/300/400G Flex Coherent Transceiver
- 400G CFP2-DCO Digital Coherent Optics Transceiver
- 400G Digital Coherent Optics QSFP-DD ZRplus
- QSFP-DD-400G-DCO-ZR
- Coherent QSFP56-DD 400G

A potential route to upgrade to future 800Gbit/s standards would be appreciated. The equipment will be used to enable performance testing of optical communication subsystems, such as optical amplifiers, fibre links, and advanced all-optical signal processing devices such as optical phase conjugators. Bids are welcome for two potential configurations:

1. Optical network tester enabling direct insertion of CFP2-DCO, QSFP-DD-DCO, and QSFP56-DD modules operating at system data rates of at least 200G, and preferably 400G. At least one module to be operational.
2. Optical test system comprising:
 - a. Optical network tester with 200 and 400G ports enabling insertion of coherent or direct detection modules,
 - b. Optical switch interfacing on the client side with the optical network tester and on the line, side accepting CFP2-DCO, QSFP-DD-DCO, and QSFP56-DD modules operating at system data rates of at least 200G, and preferably 400G. Optical switch may aggregate multiple client-side inputs for each 200/400G DCO line side interface. Switch capable of supporting multiple modules.

An example test configuration using this approach was recently reported in the Optical Fibre Communication's '2022 post deadline session, paper Th4.A3

Bids will be welcomed addressing option 1, option 2, option 2a and option 2b. Where bids for option 2a and 2b are received these will be combined with complimentary bids and stressed against any single supplier solutions. Bids should include all necessary software, licences, and accessories (including at least the minimum number of pluggable transceivers) to enable "out of the box" operation and should be supported with options for a 5-year calibration and maintenance warranty.

Objectives

- Acquisition of complete test system enabling use of transceivers outlined above for the testing of novel optical subsystems and network configurations.
- Provision of high networking speeds using state of the art technology,
- Improvement of existing equipment.
- Income Generation from the purchase and implementation of the new equipment from external partners and successful grant applications.
- To improve Student Experience - PhD students are required to use this equipment as part of their ongoing research and studies. Undergraduate and post graduate students will benefit the usage.

Tender Process

Aston is conducting this procurement under an Aston Formal Tender process.

Section 2 of this document contains the instructions to Tenderers and the Procurement timetable.

Duration

The contract will be established for an initial period of 12 months, inclusive of a warranty period, but a contract period up to 5 years may be established dependent on any extended warranty period.

Any subsequent extension to the contract will be agreed between Aston and the Supplier. It is likely that Aston will seek the Supplier to demonstrate improvements and/or price reductions before considering an extension. For any extension(s) to the contract, discussions with the Supplier shall be conducted sufficiently far in advance of the contract expiry date to arrive at an agreed position.

Contract Management

The contract will be managed by Professor Andrew Ellis – Aston Institute of Photonics and Technology, with review meetings being held as and when necessary. The review meetings will enable Aston and the Supplier to review performance of the contract, discussing matters which may include but not be limited to;

- *Feedback from key stakeholders;*
- *Discussion regarding any complaints of poor performance and agreement of actions to address;*
- *Consideration of any improvements or developments;*
- *Any changes in key personnel, processes, or delivery; and*
- *Project progress and deliverables*

The Supplier will be expected to field the appropriate personnel to a review meeting accordingly.

2 GENERAL CONDITIONS

Source of Funding and Specific Conditions of Tender and Any Contract Awarded

The procurement of the Goods (equipment) that are (is) the subject matter of this invitation to tender process is being funded and it is a condition precedent that the funds allocated to the procurement of the Goods (equipment) are both the Goods (equipment) are delivered to Aston onsite and that the successful supplier delivers the invoice in the full value of the price, are received by Aston no later than 30th August 2022.

Bidders accept that the issue of this invitation to tender does not bind Aston to accept any Tender nor to award a contract as an outcome of this invitation to tender process. Aston shall not be liable for any costs or expenses of any kind incurred by any bidder, directly or indirectly as a result of any bidder's participation in or cancellation of the tender process.

Instructions

All required responses must be submitted in accordance with the following instructions. We may reject applications not complying with these instructions.

These instructions are designed to ensure that all Tenderers are given equal and fair consideration. It is important that you provide all the information requested in the format and order specified. Please contact the Procurement Team if you have any doubt as to what is required or that you will have difficulty in providing the information requested.

- Your completed response will be treated as part of your expression of interest. In order for your tender to be considered, you must ensure that you have read all instructions provided via ProContract and return all required documents by the due date and time as indicated by ProContract.
- For technical support in relation to ProContract please contact the help desk on support@due-north.com or <http://ProContract.kayako.com/suppliernetwork/Core/Default/Index>.
- Do not alter the original file format of any documentation sent out as part of this procurement exercise.
- Ensure you answer the questions within the portal unless directed otherwise. Responses which are detailed in an attachment without being instructed to do so, will be considered as non-compliant.
- All attachments if required should be cross referenced; noting the question number the attachment relates too i.e. *[ref no/ Supplier's name/question number]* (limit of 30 characters including spaces) and must be in a Microsoft Office or PDF format as we are unable to open other formats. Anything that is submitted in a non-supported format may not be considered.
- The evaluation team reserves the right to seek further information to support the information in the form of clarification questions which will be issued via ProContract.
- Please note that this will be an electronic evaluation and adjudication based on the responses provided, it is imperative that you complete all of the sections as fully and in as concise a manner as possible. If you do not complete all sections, or do not

provide appropriate supporting evidence and information, your application may be disqualified or your overall rating following adjudication may be adversely affected.

- It is in your interest to ensure that adequate, appropriate responses are made to each section of the questionnaire, and that adequate and appropriate supporting evidence is provided.
- Do not leave any questions unanswered; otherwise, they will be given a zero mark and may result in your application being excluded from the process.
- Any questions answered incompletely because the information is 'not available' or is 'confidential' may be given a zero mark and may result in your submission being excluded from the process.
- A fail score on one or more criterion may result in the disqualification of the tender.
- Please ensure all documents requested are enclosed with your response otherwise you will be given a zero mark that may result in your submission being excluded from the process.
- Please answer the questions specifically for your organisation only and NOT for any group (given you are part of a group of companies). Where you are submitting details covering a consortium bid, you should make clear where and how your submission relates to individual consortium members.
- All documentation will be issued, and the responses received using our e-tender web portal (ProContract): <https://Procontract.due-north.com/SupplierPreLoginHome>.
- Responses are to be received via ProContract web portal. If you are unable to submit your response, please contact Aston via the messaging function of ProContract portal or contact the ProContract support desk, immediately. We are unable to accept late responses once we have opened tender responses.
- All details within your response and any further documentation supplied as a result of applying for a project must be treated as private and confidential and thus shall not be disclosed to any party, whether your application is successful or not.
- It is a Tenderers responsibility to ensure that you download and review all of the documents available for the project on ProContract. Please inform Procurement if you are unable to access any documentation via the messaging function of ProContract.
- All communication relating to the requirements must be forwarded in writing, to the Procurement Team through the messaging function of ProContract.
- You should make yourself aware of the specific requirements of the procurement exercise and of the goods, works or services to be provided. All enquiries relating to this project must be made to the Procurement Team not less than 5 days prior to the specified date for the return of application. If the answer to a question raised alters or supplements the basis for the proposals, then the relevant document will be revised and issued to all companies. Aston reserves the right to amend the enclosed documentation at any time prior to the deadline for receipt of tenders. Any such amendments will be issued to all Tenderers. Where amendments are significant Aston may, at its discretion extend the deadline for receipt.

- Returns submitted must be in strict accordance with the Project Documentation. The applicant may not alter the documents in anyway including re-formatting. Responses should not be annotated in an attachment unless directed to do so. Should you discover any discrepancies therein or be in any doubt as to the meaning thereof, you should notify the Procurement Team through the messaging function of ProContract.
- No response or any part of a return shall be deemed to have been accepted unless such acceptance shall have been notified to the Tenderer by notice in writing by Aston.
- An anonymised copy of all questions and answers raised will be maintained and distributed periodically to all recipients of the invitation to tender. If the tenderer expresses that the question is confidential and Aston agree that it is, then the response will be sent only to the tenderer raising the question.
- The Supplier must on no account contact or communicate with any other person involved in work concerning this project before the closing date unless Aston redirects the enquiry to an authorised person for response.
- Where Aston discovers any errors or omissions in your return, this will be pointed out and you will be given the opportunity to confirm the information. Your decision and any subsequent correction must be confirmed in writing and submitted through the messaging function within ProContract. Aston reserves the right to disqualify incomplete returns.
- The Tenderer warrants that the prices in the return have been arrived at independently, without any consultation, communication, agreement or understanding, either for the purpose of restricting competition or on any matter relating to such prices, with any other Tenderer / Supplier or with any competitor and prices are fully inclusive to meet the requirements of the project. To this effect, please complete and return the pricing details as detailed within with your submission.
- Gathering all necessary information for the preparation of the response will be the Tenderers own responsibility and must be done at their own expense. Any information provided is supplied only for general guidance in the preparation of the response. Tenderers must satisfy themselves by their own investigations about the sufficiency of information and no responsibility is accepted by Aston for any loss, damage or expense of whatever kind arising from the use by Tenderers of such information.
- Aston does not bind itself to accept the lowest or any tender, and unless a tenderer expressly states that a partial award will not be acceptable, then the right is reserved to accept a tender in part.
- Offers made subject to additional or alternative conditions may be rejected on the grounds of such conditions alone.
- Your response must be uploaded to the Aston e-tendering portal no later than 12.00p.m, 24th June 2022. ProContract will allow bid submissions after the time and date stipulated on the timescales, however your response will be recorded and flagged as being late and a decision will be taken whether or not to accept the bid.
- Please note that uploading your tender return will take time and Tenderers should ensure they allow sufficient time before the tender is due to close to upload their documents.
- Aston University will not accept liability for any tenders that are not uploaded by the due time and date.
- Your response must be in the English language.

Tender Stages

- This tender exercise will be conducted as a one stage procurement process.

Stage 1 Invitation to Tender – Tenderers must meet the selection and qualification criteria.

Please be aware that the project may be part funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

Procurement Timetable

Timings provided are approximate and may be subject to amendment, notification of any changes to timing will be provide via the ProContract Portal.

Procurement Process	Date
Invitation to Apply	8 th June 2022
Final Date for Clarifications	20 th June 2022
Closing date for Returns	24 th June 2022
Evaluation Period	24 th June 2022 – 30 th June 2022
Recommendation Approval	30 th June 2022
Suppliers notified of Outcome	4 th July 2022
Contract Start Date	18 th July 2022
Delivery Date & Invoice Date	30 th August 2022

2 TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- Aston intend to contract using Aston's Terms and Conditions
- Tenderers will be required to review and agree to Aston Terms and Conditions. Tenderers may suggest amendments or detail their level of non-compliance; however, all amendments will be scored and the Aston reserves the right to nullify all other scores and exclude a tenderer if in its view the level of non-compliance with the Terms and Conditions is considered too high or is unacceptable to the University.

3 EVALUTION OF TENDERS

All completed tenders received will be evaluated by officers of Aston (as appropriate) or appointed representatives of Aston as required.

In order to be transparent, and in order that Tenderers fully understand how their tender submission will be evaluated, full details of the evaluation process are described below. Should any tenderer not understand any element, they should in first instance make contact with Aston via the ProContract portal.

The following price and quality weightings will be used to determine the most economically advantageous tender:

The methodology for evaluating tender submissions against these criteria is as follows:

Quality

- Non-price accounts for **70%** of the total tender score. Tenderers will be asked to provide a response to the qualitative section in ProContract.
- All qualitative question weighting are stated in the questionnaire on the ProContract portal.
- When completing the tender questions Tenderers must make sure that they answer what is being asked. Anything that is not directly relevant to the particular question should not be included, but wherever possible Tenderers should demonstrate how they will go further than what is being asked for, to add value.
- Tenderers should also make sure that their answers inform not just what they will do, but how they will do it, and what their proposed timescales are (as relevant). It is useful to give examples or provide evidence to support your responses. The purpose should be to include as much relevant detail as required, so that the evaluation panel gets the fullest possible picture.

Evaluation Criteria

All method statement responses and qualitative scoring areas will be assessed on a scale of 0 to 10 points, as detailed in the table below:

Score	Performance
10	Excellent - Response is completely relevant and excellent overall. The response is comprehensive, unambiguous and demonstrates a thorough understanding of the requirement and provides details of how the requirement will be met in full.
8	Good - Response is relevant and good. The response is sufficiently detailed to demonstrate a good understanding and provides details on how the requirements will be fulfilled.
6	Acceptable - Response is relevant and acceptable. The response addresses a broad understanding of the requirement but lacks details on how the requirement will be fulfilled.
4	Poor - Response is relevant and poor. The response addresses some understanding of the requirement but contains limited detail and limited explanation to demonstrate how the requirement will be fulfilled.
2	Doubtful : Response is partially relevant. The response demonstrates some understanding of the requirement but contains insufficient or no explanation to demonstrate how the requirement will be fulfilled.
0	Unacceptable - Nil or inadequate response. Fails to demonstrate an ability to meet the requirement

- Any tender responses which receive a score of 2 or lower may result in the submission being deemed non-compliant.
- A "fail" score on one criterion could result in disqualification of the tender.
- Aston does not bind itself to accept the lowest or any tender for the goods, services or works. Aston will have no obligation to Tenderers arising from this process unless and

until it enters into a formal contract with the chosen Supplier(s) for the provision of the goods/services/works that are subject to this process.

- Aston will award the contract on the basis of the return that is most economically advantageous to Aston. Account will be taken of any factors which impact on the Tenderers suitability that emerge from the process and relate to information previously provided by the Tenderer. Aston reserves the right to award to one or more of the Tenderers if required.
- Aston reserves the right not to award a project to the winning tenderer if it has concerns as to that tenderers overall workload with Aston and its ability to resource and deliver the project.
- Aston reserves the right not to award to the winning tenderer where it fails a final financial assessment prior to award using information gathered from Creditsafe and our financial calculator.
- Aston cannot guarantee the amount of goods/services/works that it purchases via this agreement. Aston retain the right to use alternative Suppliers if required.

Price

- Tenderers will be asked to provide a response to the price section in ProContract Aston will calculate the costs based on the basket of goods/services identified in the 'Pricing Schedule'. Tenderers are requested to use the pricing schedule provided.
- Price scores will be calculated based on the lowest total cost submitted by Tenderers for the basket of goods/ schedule of services receiving the maximum percentage score.
- The tenderer with the lowest total cost will be awarded the full amount of points available; with the remaining Tenderers gaining pro-rated scores in relation to how much higher their total cost is when compared to the lowest total cost.
- A score of **30%** of total available marks will be awarded for the 'price' element of the evaluation:

Worked Example:

Tenderer	Total Cost	Formula = (Lowest total cost / Tenderers total cost) x financial weighting	Price Score
A	£40,000	= £40,000 / £40,000 x 30	30%
B	£80,000	= £40,000 / £80,000 x 30	15%
C	£100,000	= £40,000 / £100,000 x 30	12%

- Any tender that is found to be too low to be credible will be excluded from further consideration. In this instance, Aston will initially clarify with the Tenderer whether the pricing is correct and has been interpreted correctly. As part of the clarification, evidence will be required to demonstrate that the charges are accurate, achievable and sustainable. If following the clarification, any charge is found to be abnormally low, then that tender will be rejected in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015 regardless of how many points it scores in all other aspects.

- Following the evaluation of the written tenders, Tenderers will be asked to demonstrate their proposed products. The project team will contact you to arrange this.

Pricing

- **Tender Offer** - Unless otherwise stated by the tenderer, tenders shall remain valid for ninety (90) days from the closing date for receipt of tenders. A tender valid for a shorter period may be rejected by Aston.
- **Price Review** - All tender prices should remain fixed for the duration of the contract.
- **Value Added Tax** - The prices contained herein shall exclude Value Added Tax, which shall be chargeable, where appropriate, in accordance with Government legislation.
- Tenderers must include a percentage breakdown of the 3 largest elements of costs related to the tender.
- Aston payment terms are 30days from date of an accurate invoice, all invoices must include an Aston purchase order number.

5 AGREEMENT

- Any Agreement which may result from this process will be based upon the detailed functional service specification and further information, your response, the proposed form of agreement and any changes which may be agreed in writing following post-tender clarification which, taken as a whole, shall comprise “the Agreement”.
- Please be aware that the project may be part funded by the European Regional Development Fund.
- Unsuccessful Companies will be given written feedback via the ProContract portal.

6 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

- This invitation to tender is made available on condition that its contents (including the fact that the tenderer has received this invitation to tender) is kept confidential by the tenderer and is not copied, reproduced, distributed or passed to any other person at any time, except for the purpose of enabling the tenderer to submit a tender.
- Aston has a legal obligation to comply with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“FoIA”) and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (the “EIRs”). Accordingly, all information submitted to a public authority may need to be disclosed by the public authority in response to a request under the Act. Aston may also decide to include certain information in any publication scheme that Aston is required to maintain under the FoIA and the EIRs.
- If a Supplier considers that any of the information included in its tender response is commercially sensitive, it should identify it and explain (in broad terms) what harm may result from disclosure if a request is received, and the time period applicable to that sensitivity.
- Suppliers should be aware that, even where it has indicated that information is commercially sensitive, Aston might be required to disclose it under the FoIA or the EIRs if a request is received. Should that be the case Aston will contact yourselves in the first instance.

- Suppliers should be aware that, in compliance with its transparency obligations, Aston is required to publish details of its contract(s), including the contract values and the identities of its service providers on its website and on Central Government websites.

7 DOCUMENTS

The following documents are included in the tender pack available via the Proactis portal.

- 660 – Network Testers Equipment Hardware - Supplier Guidance
- 629 – Network Testers Equipment – Pricing Schedule
- 629 – Network Testers Equipment – Purchase of Goods Agreement
- 629 – Network Testers Equipment – Non-Compliance Form

USEFUL LINKS

Aston University Home Page

www.aston.ac.uk

Aston University Overview and History:

<http://www1.aston.ac.uk/about/>

Aston Strategy:

<https://www2.aston.ac.uk/about/documents/Aston%20University%20Strategy%202018.pdf>

Equality & Diversity:

<https://www2.aston.ac.uk/staff-public/hr/policies/equality>

Safety and Security

<http://www1.aston.ac.uk/about/security/>

[Vehicles accessing pedestrian & Parking Areas](#)



POLICY ON THE
CONTROL OF VEHIC

Environment and Sustainability:

<https://www2.aston.ac.uk/environment>

Freedom of Information Act

<https://www2.aston.ac.uk/about/management-structure/policies-and-regulations/freedom-of-information-foi>

ProContract.

<https://procontract.due-north.com/Register>