# Restoration Services Voluntary Request for Information (RFI)

June 2026

NESO
National Energy System Operator

# Contents

# Legal Disclaimer

## Copyright



# Version Control

| Version Number | Date | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| **1.0** | 17 June 2026 | Initial publication |

# Executive Summary

Restoration (formerly known as Black Start) is the process used to restore power in the event of a total or partial shutdown of the national electricity transmission system.

A total or partial shutdown of the National Electricity Transmission System (NETS) is an unlikely event. However, if it happens, we are obliged to make sure there are contingency arrangements in place to ensure electricity supplies can be restored in a timely and orderly way. We use restoration services to recover from such a shutdown.

During a shutdown, the service requires the provider to restart, carry out initial energisation of sections of the NETS and distribution network, and restore sufficient demand to create and manage a stable 'power island'.

National Energy System Operator (NESO) has typically procured restoration services on a regional basis for assets at both a transmission and distribution network level. Procurement of this service has been from a range of Power Generating Modules (PGM) or HVDC systems that have the capability to re-start from shutdown without reliance on external supplies. Top-up services to supplement the technical requirements in any given region have also been procured alongside these full-service (anchor / primary) provisions. These restoration tenders also invited Distributed Energy Resources (DER) service providers for a bottom-up approach to restoration from distribution to transmission level. This was based on incorporating learnings from the Distributed ReStart project, which has cumulated in some regions now having designated Distributed ReStart Zones in development.

NESO (National Grid Electricity System Operator (ESO) at the time of initial launch) have recently concluded the South-West and Midlands regional restoration tender. Due to the confidential nature of the service, results for this tender and other regional tenders are not published. Further information on Restoration procurement activities can be found in the Assurance Framework 2025 / 2026.

In addition to this regional tender approach for restoration services, as part of NESO's commitment to supporting the investment of new capability within the market, restoration services have also been included as part of the currently live Network Services Long-Term 2029 tender. NESO's current ambition is to retain this concept of procuring new restoration capability through Long-Term tenders going forward. Whether this will be alongside other Network Services will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

NESO has been reviewing its approach to the procurement of Electricity System Restoration (ESR) services, drawing on lessons learnt from previous tender rounds and engagement with the market. As part of this process, NESO will use this RFI as an opportunity to gather valuable feedback from the restoration services market that have previously participated or would like to potentially participate in the future.

In addition to feedback from existing and prospective restoration service providers, NESO is seeking input from organisations that support the delivery of Electricity System Restoration, including but not limited to OEMs, Transmission Owners (TOs) and Distribution Network Operators

(DNOs). Recent experience has highlighted the increasingly important role these stakeholders play in enabling assured restoration outcomes, particularly as restoration capability becomes more distributed and reliant on assets connected at distribution level.

## Purpose of RFI

This is a voluntary Request for Information (RFI) only, while it is not part of a formal tender process, it is a commercial process to gain insight from industry participants. NESO will use the received information to refine NESO's understanding of the market for restoration services and to support the design of a redefined restoration market.

All information provided in this document is indicative and subject to change prior to the launch of any restoration market and any formal tender process. No guarantee is made that the information set out here will be applied in any subsequent tender process or contract agreements.

A contract will not be awarded as a result of a response to this RFI. However, parties are strongly encouraged to respond to this RFI if they are interested in taking part in future restoration services tenders.

## Indicative Market Design – Emergent Thinking

### Context

The Electricity System Restoration (ESR) Assurance Framework sets out NESO's approach to ensuring that restoration services are secure, effective, and compliant as the electricity system transitions towards Net Zero. The framework defines how NESO will implement the Electricity System Restoration Standard (ESRS), including the associated assurance, monitoring, and reporting arrangements required to maintain system resilience and security of supply.

The transformation of the generation mix and the increasing prevalence of distribution-connected, low-carbon technologies is materially changing how restoration services can be delivered. Traditional sources of dependable primary and secondary generation are being displaced, while new restoration capable technologies such as battery energy storage and other non-traditional assets are emerging across both the transmission and distribution networks. This creates new opportunities, but also new assurance and operability challenges that must be addressed through robust procurement and market design.

To date, NESO has primarily procured restoration capability through regional tenders, targeted at specific system needs. While these procurements have successfully secured capability to meet requirements, lessons learned have highlighted limitations in an ad-hoc approach. As a result, NESO has initiated a review of its restoration procurement and commercial strategy, drawing on recent tender experience and assurance priorities.

In parallel, Restoration services have been incorporated for the first time into the Network Services Long-Term 2029 tender, bringing restoration alongside Stability and Voltage services within a more integrated procurement model. This reflects NESO's ambition to move toward a more structured, market-based approach to restoration, while maintaining alignment with the assurance principles set out in the Electricity System Restoration Assurance Framework.

The launch of this voluntary Request for Information (RFI) represents a further step in this evolution. The RFI is intended to support NESO's assurance-led approach by improving our understanding of the capabilities, readiness, and constraints of current and prospective Restoration providers. Insights gathered will inform how future restoration procurement can deliver assured capability efficiently, support system operability, and provide value to consumers, while remaining consistent with the ESRS delivery timeline and NESO's wider assurance obligations for 2025/26 and beyond.

NESO encourages all participants in previous tenders and those considering participation in any potential new tenders to provide their feedback in this RFI.

NESO also welcomes feedback from industry participants that support the delivery of ESR such as OEMs, DNOs, TOs and OFTOs.

## System Needs

- At this time, we are developing this market on the basis it will be focused on the procurement of Restoration services at both transmission and distribution level.
- Our requirement could be for either Anchor/Primary services, Top-up services or both. This could be for both transmission and distribution (Distributed ReStart) connected assets.
- The market is intended to be open to both new and existing restoration capabilities, with all eligible providers able to participate in market pre-qualification and any subsequent call-off processes, subject to meeting the relevant requirements.
- NESO intends to operate a blended approach to procurement, comprising:
    - Long-Term tenders as a route to market for providers seeking to develop and deliver new or additional restoration capability in required regions; and
    - A market based on a dynamic style mechanism to meet medium-term requirements, enabling NESO to procure services flexibly from pre-qualified providers as system needs evolve
- The intention is that any technical specification would be on a technology agnostic basis.
- When designing this market, we are conscious of related similar services. As such, we are considering the possibility of bundling procurement with other services such as stability services. If market participants have any views on this concept, please provide them through the RFI proforma (see below for more details).

## TO / DNO Involvement

The delivery of Electricity System Restoration (ESR) is increasingly dependent on effective coordination across the transmission and distribution interfaces. Recent restoration procurements and operational learning have highlighted the critical role of Transmission Owners (TOs) and, in particular, Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) in enabling timely, safe, and assured restoration outcomes.

As restoration capability becomes more distributed and reliant on distribution-connected assets, NESO expects DNO involvement to become increasingly important in areas such as network energisation, configuration, operability, and coordination between distribution and transmission restoration activities. TOs will continue to play a central role in restoring the NETS and integrating restored islands back onto the transmission system.

- NESO is therefore considering how TO and DNO roles, interfaces, and coordination arrangements should be more explicitly reflected in future restoration market design, technical requirements, and contractual frameworks.

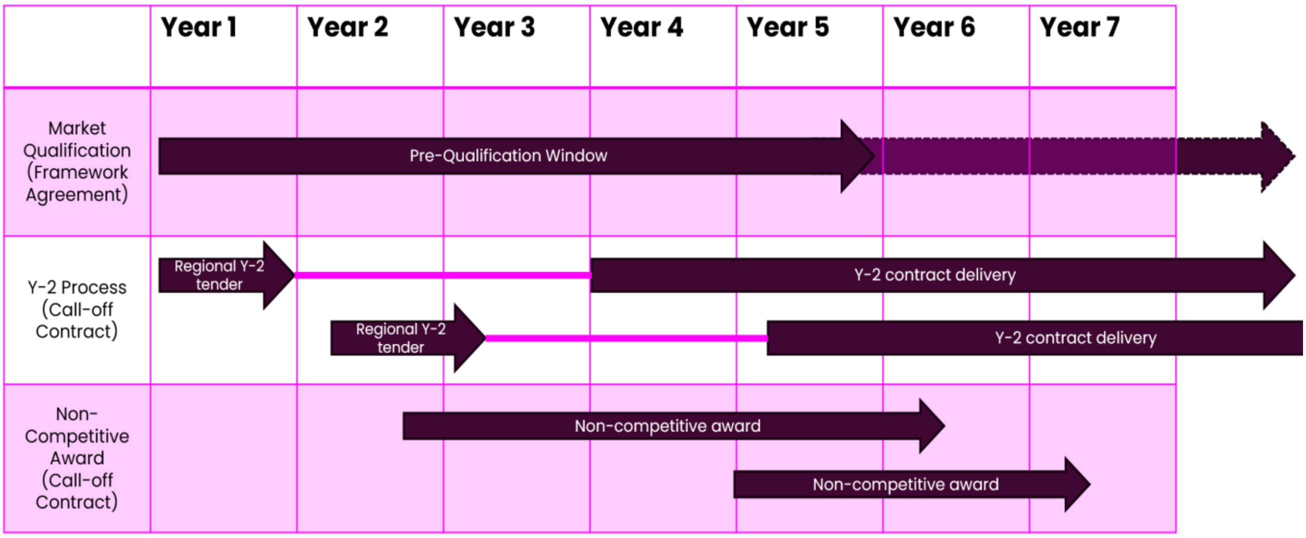
**NESO welcomes feedback on the appropriate level of TO/DNO involvement, how coordination could be best enabled, and any barriers to effective delivery of restoration services. Please provide them through the RFI proforma (see below for more details)**

## Tender Procedure

NESO are considering a dynamic market style design for the restoration services market, to establish a pool of pre-qualified providers (Mid-term Reactive Power Market, CMIS, Frequency Response use similar market concepts)

A dynamic market style design would mean that:

- To take part in tender events in this market, market participants would first have to pre-qualify to become a qualified market provider.
- The pre-qualification window to join the market would always be open for market participants to apply to for the duration of the market, up to any end date should NESO stipulate a duration for the market.
- After receipt of an application, NESO would assess the participant's application against a set of qualification criteria (these are yet to be determined).
- If the application is successful, the market participant is deemed to be a qualified market participant.
- Achieving qualified provider status allows the market participant to then take part in and be considered for tender processes for restoration requirements under the market. This could be through the tender process, or for a non-competitive award. See Table 1 and an indicative and hypothetical visual below.




- Currently there is no expected quantum per year of each process.
- The expectation is that any tenders will be focused on a specific regional requirement with a specified delivery period. To be contracted for a specific requirement and delivery period, qualified market participants would need to take part in the tender process for that requirement and delivery period.
- The intention is that bidders will only need to pre-qualify once, and then simply compete based on the relevant tender criteria for each process (e.g., regional requirement, price)

- Success in one tender process would not guarantee success in a subsequent tender process.
- It is expected that the Restoration market would classify as 'non-regulated' with regards to procurement regulation such as Procurement Act 2023.

**If market participants have any views on this concept, please provide them through the RFI proforma (see below for more details)**

## Process Logistics

The tender process for this dynamic style market would be primarily conducted using a competitive tender process. The expectation is that this would be a shorter tender process than would has been done previously, with certain elements of the process already being completed as part of Market Qualification. NESO would continue to retain the option to make 'non-competitive awards' with a set of clear established criteria. Some of this criteria is set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1

| **Process** | **Option** | **Explanation** |
|---|---|---|
| Tender Process | 2 year-ahead (Y-2) process | Competitive tender process with contracts awarded 2-years prior to service delivery (Y-2).<br>• The contract term for service delivery would be for at least 5 years<br>• NESO are considering allowing the flexibility to set longer contract durations subject to NESO system requirements.<br>• This process would be run subject to there being a relevant requirement and this being the most appropriate route to market |
| Non-Competitive Award | Non-Competitive Award | The contractual terms that underpin this Restoration market could also allow NESO the ability to "non competitively award" to a qualified market provider, subject to some defined criteria (please note at the time of this RFI, these are yet to be defined). Proposed contract length would be subject to NESO discretion subject to our system requirements.<br><br>As an indicative example, the criteria to permit this non-competitve award route could be based on the following:<br>• there is minimal lead time before requirement materialises;<br>• the requirement is very short in duration;<br>• the requirement is very locational and there are very few qualified providers who can meet the need. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • non-competitive award is the last resort after exhausting competitive options<br><br>This process would also allow NESO to non-competitively award within a region with assets that were unsuccessful in the most recent regional tender, but due to our requirements changing this asset could now be utilised. This could be because of an asset with an existing contract is unexpectedly available for a significant period / or non-longer available. Also, this may be a result of changes to the ESRS that determine NESO require additional assets to meet our requirements.<br><br>It is expected that the contract duration for service delivery could be any duration up to the period where the contracts for that specific region end.<br><br>This process would be run on a case-by-case basis, subject to there being a relevant requirement and this being the most appropriate route to market. |

**If market participants have any views on these concepts, please provide them through the RFI proforma (see below for more details)**

## Contract Format

We are considering that pre-qualified market providers would enter a Framework Agreement with NESO. This means that:

- Upon successful pre-qualification, the qualified provider would enter the Framework Agreement with NESO, which would agree Standard Terms and Conditions. All providers who qualify would agree to the same Standard Terms and Conditions.
- If a provider is successful in a subsequent tender process or non-competitive award for a requirement, NESO would "call-off"[1] the Framework Agreement and document any specific contractual details for the delivery years in a "call-off" style contract form.
- A "call off" contract form would be used each time a provider is successful in a subsequent tender process or non-competitive award.

[1] A call-off is another way of referring to a contract between a buyer and a qualified framework supplier that has been placed through a framework or similar contracting arrangement. You may also hear the phrase 'call-off contract', which means the same thing. It is normal to see multiple call-off contracts under one framework.

- This approach provides process efficiency benefits, as the overarching terms and conditions would only need to be agreed once.

- NESO are still exploring whether the Framework Agreement would be timebound or if they would be evergreen with the ability to terminate should market structures change in the future.
- It is expected that the Restoration Framework Agreements would be entered into on a per solution basis rather than a per-company basis.

**If market participants have any views on this concept, please provide them through the RFI proforma (see below for more details)**

## Payment Mechanism

### Structure

NESO intend to follow a pay-as-bid approach. Bidders would be requested to submit prices based on the following payment structure:

- An availability fee e.g., £/Settlement Period.
- Following a tender process or direct award, successful bidders will receive their availability fee for each settlement period in which they are available
- Removal of CapEx / Feasibility Studies
    - While capital expenditure contributions and feasibility study payments have been used in previous restoration procurement exercises to support market development, NESO does not intend to include such payments with the establishment of this market. This results in a different approach being adopted whereby bidders are expected to fully incorporate all development, capital, and financing costs within their availability fee submissions. This is intended to support a cleaner, more transparent pay-as-bid market and place an appropriate level of delivery and investment risk with providers.

**If market participants have any views on these concepts, please provide them through the RFI proforma (see below for more details)**

### Indexation

With regards to indexation, NESO are exploring the following:

- Whether contract prices would be fixed rates (with no indexation) for the duration of any call offs
- Whether to index to CPI
    - Including at what point CPI would kick in – i.e. contract award or service go live date.

**If market participants have any views on this concept, please provide them through the RFI proforma (see below for more details)**

## Liquidated Damages vs Incentive Mechanism

NESO are exploring the following approaches to the Service Terms:

- Retaining the concept of liquidated damages, or,
- Providing an incentive mechanism for early, or, on time delivery linked to the Scheduled Commercial Operations Date.

**If market participants have any views on this concept, please provide them through the RFI proforma (see below for more details)**

## Availability

As outlined above, NESO intend to follow a pay-as-bid approach where an availability fee (£/Settlement Period) is paid to the provider.

The current expectation is that bidders are expected to achieve ≥ 80% service availability regardless of service provision (Primary/Anchor/Full Service/Top-up).

However, NESO are keen to understand if there is any appetite in the market for providers to potentially be compensated further by being able to provide higher levels of availability.

- Providers are expected to have a high restoration service availability so that they can be relied upon in the instance of a total or partial shutdown, which could happen at any time.

**If market participants have any views on this concept, please provide them through the RFI proforma (see below for more details)**

## Call-off Contract Term

NESO are exploring the following contract lengths for the "Call-off" contracts. We are considering the following lengths:

- 5 years
- 7 years
- 10 years

These would either be set contract lengths or could be made up of an original term with extension option provisions.

**If market participants have any views on this concept, please provide them through the RFI proforma (see below for more details)**

## Eligibility Criteria

- Solutions must have an existing connection agreement (whether already connected or due to connect) – evidence of this would need to be provided at the point of market qualification
- Solutions must be directly connected to the either the transmission system or at distribution network level. Your voltage connection level will determine what services you would be eligible to tender for should you successfully pre-qualify for the market.

  Transmission Connected assets

  - 275kV and above for England and Wales, 132kV and above for Scotland

  Distribution Connected assets

  - 132kV and below for England and Wales, 66kV and below for Scotland
- Qualified market participants would then be eligible to participate in regional tenders. The expectation is that they would be able to bid for one of the following services, depending on their eligibility. The services that are available to bid for would be declared on a tender-by-tender basis.
  - (Transmission) Anchor Generator/Primary/Full Service
  - (Transmission) Top Up Service
  - (Distributed ReStart) Anchor Generator only
  - (Distributed ReStart) Top Up Services only

**If market participants have any views on these criteria, please provide them through the RFI proforma (see below for more details)**

## RFI Questions

Please refer to the Restoration Services RFI Pro-Forma to view and respond to the questions NESO are asking through this RFI.

## RFI Submission Information

The submission deadline for responses to this RFI is Friday 7 August 2026. Please ensure your response, supporting documents and communications relating to this RFI are provided in English.

Please provide answers to all the questions using the Restoration Services RFI Pro-Forma. If additional space is required or you wish to provide further information in separate documents, please clearly state the question number in the file name of these additional documents, using the following naming convention: **Q(number)-(document name)-(company name).**

Submissions must be received by the submission deadline. Submissions should be sent to the following address: Box.Restoration@neso.energy

All communications and queries arising from this RFI should be conducted by email using the email address detailed above.

Please ensure all emails in relation to this RFI include the following in the subject box: Restoration Services RFI 2026.

Any queries must be submitted no later than ten calendar days prior to the submission deadline for this RFI (Tuesday 28 July 2026). Following receipt of RFI responses NESO may organise follow up meetings with market participants to discuss the information received in more detail.

## RFI Expenses

NESO shall not be responsible for or pay for any costs or expenses that may be incurred by the supplier in the preparation and submission of a response to this RFI.

## Confidentiality

All details of this RFI and associated documents must be treated as private and confidential and shall not be disclosed to any other party, except where this is necessary for you to prepare and submit a response. You must ensure that you have an adequate confidentiality agreement in place with any subcontractors, consultants or agents before issuing them with any information concerning the requirements of this RFI.

Details of your response to this RFI shall not be disclosed to any third party unless such disclosure is required by OFGEM, DESNZ, and/or law or court order.

Following the conclusion of the RFI, NESO reserve the right to publish an anonymised summary of responses.