

Enriched Opportunities: The UK's New Advanced Nuclear Framework

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In February 2026, the UK's Department for Energy Security and Net Zero ("DESNZ") published the Advanced Nuclear Framework (the "**Framework**"). This is made up of two parts: first, the launch of the UK Advanced Nuclear Pipeline (the "**Pipeline**"); and second, a series of key policy, regulatory and institutional features designed to encourage private nuclear projects in the UK. This is a significant development for proponents of Small Modular Reactors ("**SMRs**"), Advanced Modular Reactors ("**AMRs**") and Micro Modular Reactors ("**MMRs**"). While the Framework as a whole sets out wider enablers and supports to be put in place by the UK government over time, the Pipeline is intended to provide a codified route for privately led advanced nuclear projects to secure government endorsement, access discussions on revenue support and risk protections and engage with a more coordinated interface with regulators and public investors.

What Is the Advanced Nuclear Framework?

The Framework is best understood as a government-managed "reality check" on project feasibility and deliverability, rather than a subsidy scheme or new licensing process. It establishes a structured policy route from concept to deployment and strengthens the wider enabling conditions such as planning, grid connection and regulation needed to make next-generation nuclear buildable at scale. While the Framework in its totality is relevant to all private developers, it is the Pipeline which will be of most interest.

Scope and Qualification Principles

To qualify for the Pipeline, projects must meet the following key criteria:

- **Technology:** Land-based, nonmobile, fission technologies—SMRs (less than 500MW), AMRs, or MMRs—fueled by Uranium-235 enriched to up to 20%.
- **Location:** Deployment on mainland sites in England or Wales only.
- **Timeline:** Construction must be intended to commence within 10 years of joining the Pipeline.
- **Proposer:** The project proposer must be a registered company satisfying solvency, sanctions and security checks.

Certain technologies are explicitly excluded from the Pipeline due to distinct regulatory, safety or strategic issues: offshore or floating nuclear platforms, civil nuclear propulsion, space-based reactors and transportable nuclear solutions. DESNZ has indicated, however, that they continue to consider the position on technology out of scope and are happy to receive input on alternatives.

What Does Entry Into the Pipeline Confer?

Pipeline membership provides:

- **Statement of limited, in-principle endorsement**—a formal signal from DESNZ that the project is considered credible and potentially deliverable, though with no guarantee of success, timing or form of deployment.

- **Public listing** on the Pipeline, enhancing visibility with investors and stakeholders.
- **Structured engagement on support mechanisms**—initial discussions with DESNZ on possible revenue support (such as Contract for Difference-style mechanisms, though the final structure for such support mechanisms is not confirmed at this stage) and High-Impact Low-Probability risk protections.
- **Access to the National Wealth Fund** to explore debt, equity and hybrid financing instruments. Dedicated relationship management through DESNZ's new Advanced Nuclear Business Engagement Unit, offering a concierge-style service to help navigate the UK regulatory system.
- **Support from the UK National Nuclear Laboratory** to provide technical services and consultancy, participate in collaborative research and development and leverage its international networks to help developers find relevant facilities and programs abroad.

Crucially, while Pipeline membership creates no entitlement to future financial support, it is likely to be an essential prerequisite for meaningful negotiation of any government-backed revenue mechanism or risk-sharing package. Any government “offer” would also be subject to Value for Money analysis and full government approvals.

How to Apply: The Assessment Process

The Pipeline operates through a structured, multi-stage assessment process:

Application Requirements

Project proponents must submit to DESNZ and Great British Energy – Nuclear (“**GBE-N**”): (1) a project summary; (2) a structured, evidence-based case across five “core areas” (technology and supply chain, developer capability, finance/funding/investment, siting and operator/end-user arrangements) and (3) a declaration of eligibility.

Assessment Phases

Following preliminary eligibility and completeness checks, proposals proceed through three phases:

1. **Phase 1 – Initial Rapid Project Triage:** A high-level review to assess readiness for deeper scrutiny. Projects assessed as satisfactory or above move forward.
2. **Phase 2 – Project Deep Dive:** Intensive interrogation of each core area, testing the maturity and robustness of the underlying evidence. Projects scoring 15 or more across all five core areas proceed.
3. **Phase 3 – Pipeline Admission:** Subject to UK ministerial approval and agreement to Pipeline terms, successful projects receive a Statement of Limited, In-Principle Endorsement.

DESNZ envisages that a mature proposal may take approximately four months from submission to Pipeline entry. In a recent webinar on the subject, DESNZ expressed a keen interest in acting at pace and getting projects up and running, but acknowledged that it will take time. Relationship managers will be appointed for each project, and enquiries and questions are encouraged. Importantly, it is not a competition between applications, but more a structured due diligence and engagement process.

Key Factors in Assessment

A scoring matrix using tiered systems is to be used, with the bar to get through initial triage deliberately set high. Applications will be assessed using the “claims, arguments and evidence” structure similar to the current nuclear license applications review process. Developers must provide credible answers on a range of key issues including:

- **Fuel sourcing:** Where will fuel be sourced, and what is the plan for high-assay low-enriched uranium (“HALEU”) where required?
- **Waste, spent fuel and decommissioning:** Who will manage disposal, and what funded decommissioning plan is proposed?
- **Supply chain:** What is domestic versus international supply chain, and what are the implications for UK resilience?
- **Developer capability:** What is the EPC strategy, track record and skills assessment? What are your key milestones? What is your community engagement and legacy impact?
- **Financing:** How realistic are cost and schedule assumptions, and where does economic risk sit? What is your optimism bias?
- **Operators and end-users:** What engagement has been undertaken with potential operators? Where are your users? Who are they? How are you fitting to their needs? Do you understand the market?

Challenges

Several challenges remain for developers and investors:

- **Capacity constraints:** The effectiveness of the Pipeline depends on adequate resourcing at GBE-N and DESNZ to avoid bottlenecks.
- **Fuel cycle limitations:** Many AMR designs require HALEU, for which global supply is constrained and the UK lacks commercial-scale capability. While the UK government has committed £300 million to developing a domestic supply chain, the first production plant is not expected to be operational until the early 2030s.
- **Skills shortages:** The UK’s nuclear skills pipeline is under strain. While initiatives such as the Nuclear Skills Taskforce aim to address this, near-term resource constraints may slow deployment and complicate delivery planning.
- **Residual investor uncertainty:** The endorsement is limited in nature and carries no guarantee of financial support, which may leave some investors seeking greater certainty.
- **Residual investor concerns:** Some stakeholders question what the Framework adds where developers have already undertaken extensive preparatory work. Others point to the limited nature of the endorsement and the absence of guaranteed financial support as continuing sources of uncertainty.

Looking Ahead

The Framework will not, by itself, transform the UK nuclear sector overnight. The Pipeline in particular does, however, introduce a degree of clarity, sequencing and structure that has often been lacking for privately led modular nuclear projects.

By providing a government-backed filter for credible projects, aligning revenue and risk-sharing discussions with a clear assessment process, and signaling a sustained commitment to enabling reforms and fuel cycle investment, the Framework lays important foundations for a new phase of advanced nuclear deployment.

Those able to navigate this structured pathway, and to align their contractual and financing approaches with the Framework’s underlying risk-allocation principles, will be better placed to secure the limited in-principle endorsement now on offer and, in time, to convert that into bankable, buildable projects.