



Request for Information on Revised DCC Testing Arrangements

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1. Executive Summary

1. The Data Communications Company (DCC) is Britain's digital energy spine, supporting the transformation of the energy system. Communication Hubs (CHs) allow for smart meters installed in homes and businesses to be connect to the DCC's secure network, facilitating the transmission of energy consumption data and other smart services.

1.1. Overview of Testing Services

2. The provision of Testing Services, as defined in Section H14 of the Smart Energy Code (SEC), enables any eligible Testing Participants to undertake testing as set out in Section H14.1, to assure themselves that system and/or device changes can be introduced safely and effectively.
3. DCC delivers these services in accordance with the requirements of the SEC, supporting activities including User Entry Process Testing (UEPT), Device and User System Testing (DUST), system assurance, device assurance and industry change implementation.
4. The testing facilities based at Brabazon House enable DCC Users, Device Manufacturers and Service Providers to test changes to systems and devices through a combination of DCC-operated facilities, specialist service providers and supporting technology platforms.
5. As DCC approaches key contractual and property milestones, including the Brabazon House (Manchester office) lease break option in December 2028 and the expiry of the current Test Lab Operator contract in March 2029, DCC is reviewing the future provision of Testing Services to ensure that they continue to meet customer's future testing requirements and deliver value for money.

1.2. What are we asking?

6. Through this Request for Information (RFI), DCC is seeking stakeholder views on the future direction of Testing Services beyond 2028 and the requirements that should shape the next generation of Test Lab facilities: physical and virtual and associated services. In particular, DCC is seeking feedback on:
 - The need for future physical test lab facilities and the scale of capacity required
 - Testing as a service (TaaS) or "pay-as-you-go" testing activity
 - Extension of testing capabilities, emulation and virtualisation
 - Opportunities for collaboration at shared testing locations
 - Access to the user testing environments (UIT A & UIT B)
 - Potential improvements to Testing Services and the customer experience
7. This RFI is not seeking approval of a preferred option. Instead, it forms part of the evidence-gathering process that will help DCC assess available options and develop a future business case recommendation. Responses received will be considered alongside operational, technical and commercial analysis.

1.3. What happens next?

8. Following closure of the RFI, DCC will review all responses and incorporate stakeholder feedback into the next phase of business case development. This feedback will be combined with further market engagement, property assessments, technical analysis and commercial modelling to refine the available options and identify a preferred approach.

9. These findings will inform our final business case recommendation, which will be presented to customers for discussion at relevant governance forums as part of the future decision-making process for Testing Services beyond 2028. Alongside this, DCC will consider if any changes would need to be proposed to the SEC to support future Testing Services.

2. Introduction

2.1. Background

10. The DCC is Britain's digital energy spine, supporting the transformation of the energy system. DCC is licensed by the Government and regulated by the energy regulator Ofgem to connect smart meters in homes and small businesses across Great Britain to a single secure, digital network. DCC supports the roll-out and operation of second-generation Smart Metering Equipment Technical Specifications 2 (SMETS2) smart meters, as well as the operation of existing first-generation (SMETS1) meters onto our network.
11. Testing Services are an integral part of the smart metering ecosystem, providing assurance that system changes are implemented in a reliable and controlled manner. It ensures that DCC Users have access to the User Integration Testing (UIT) environments and processes required to validate their systems before live operation.

2.2. Test Lab background

12. The creation of the DCC Test Lab consolidated testing capability at Brabazon House in 2019 following Board approval of an £11 million investment. Prior to this, Testing Services was disaggregated and the responsibility of each Total System Service Provider. Services were provided at their operated facilities at a significantly higher cost, with limited support for emerging requirements, and no provision for any SMETS1 testing. The original business case identified several strategic benefits to centralising a Smart Metering facility including reducing the cost of testing, increasing test capacity, supporting new testing capabilities, improving collaboration between industry participants and creating a platform for innovation.
13. Since becoming operational, the Test Lab has successfully delivered these benefits, achieving return-on-investment within three years, compared with the previous operating model. Testing capabilities expanded considerably and currently support testing of all Communication Hub (CH) variants including dual & single band, SMETS1, SMETS2, Fylingdales and VWAN testing. Brabazon House can support UIT and System Integration Testing (SIT) accommodating access to radio frequency variations, noise testing and Faraday cages.
14. The facility currently has the capacity to support concurrent testing on just over 1,000 test bays. It is on average 80% utilised throughout a 12-month period and has become a key testing resource for Energy Suppliers, Network Operators, Device Manufacturers and Service Providers.
15. The success of the Brabazon House facility has demonstrated the value of a centralised testing facility and provides industry with a strong foundation from which to consider the future evolution of Testing Services.

2.3. Why are we asking now?

16. DCC is approaching contractual and property milestones, for the Test Lab Operator (TLO) contract which expires in March 2029 and the Brabazon House lease which expires in 2030, with a break option in December 2028. These events provide a natural opportunity to assess options associated with the current operating model to assess the best solution for industry and the evolution of Testing Services to meet future customer requirements.
17. The review is not limited to identifying a replacement building. DCC is taking the opportunity to consider broader questions about the future of Testing Services, including future capacity requirements, location, specialist testing capabilities, opportunities for increased collaboration, the role of remote testing and how customer experience could be improved through future technology investments.

18. As part of the development of the business case, DCC is assessing a range of options and undertaking further market, commercial and operational analysis. Customer feedback is an essential part of this process and will be used alongside this analysis to inform the final recommendation.

2.4. Engagement undertaken

19. Prior to launching this RFI, DCC has undertaken an initial round of stakeholder engagement to better understand current and future testing requirements. This engagement has included discussions with various Testing Participants, Device Manufacturers, internal DCC stakeholders, Service Providers and subject matter experts e.g. The Alt HAN Company. This early engagement has highlighted recurring themes, including:
- The ongoing importance of maintaining dedicated testing facilities
 - The value customers place on collaborative testing and rapid issue resolution
 - Continuation of remote access to testing capabilities
 - Future capabilities either through TaaS or SEC provision
 - Opportunities to enhance customer experience through automation and self-service
 - The importance of ensuring continuity of service throughout any future transition.
20. The feedback received to date has directly influenced the scope and structure of this RFI and helped identify the key questions that DCC wishes to explore with a wider audience.
21. On the 25th August 2026, DCC engaged the SEC Panel to outline plans for industry engagement on the future of its Test Lab, including; retaining or extending existing services and improving the laboratory operator service.
22. On the 29th August 2026, DCC presented a high-level overview of its planned industry-wide engagement on the future of Testing services beyond 2028, including:
- Whether the physical capabilities currently provided by the Test Lab should be retained or enhanced;
 - Exploring opportunities to provide wider smart metering and interoperability testing capability;
 - Consider the services available to Service Users, Device Manufacturers and other industry participants; and
 - Seek views on service levels for device installation, responses, test support, triage and Testing Issue management.

2.5. What information are we asking for?

23. Through this RFI, DCC is seeking stakeholder views on the future provision of Testing Services beyond 2028.
24. In particular, DCC is seeking feedback on:
- The future need for a DCC-operated Test Lab and the scale of capacity that should be provided
 - Future specialist testing including Radio Frequency, Noise and interference testing capabilities
 - Opportunities for customers, Device Manufacturers and innovators to share facilities and collaborate

- Future UIT environment requirements, including views on the current UIT-A and UIT-B model
 - Potential Testing Service improvements that should be considered as part of future procurement activity.
25. The responses received will form a key input into the future DCC Test Lab & Services business case and help DCC identify the option that best supports customer requirements, service continuity and long-term value for money.
26. This request for information seeks SEC Parties views and closes at 17:00 on 16th October 2026, and responses should be sent to consultations@smartdcc.co.uk.

3. RFI Questions

27. DCC is seeking views from SEC Parties on the following topics.

- **Section A – Size & Scale of the Test Lab**
- **Section B – Testing as a Service**
- **Section C – Future Testing Capability**
- **Section D – Interoperability & Innovation**
- **Section E – Use of the User Integration Test (UIT) Environment**
- **Section F – Testing Service Improvements**

3.1. Section A – Size & scale of the Test Lab

28. The current DCC Test Lab at Brabazon House supports approximately 1000 test bays across a range of testing activities, for UIT or SIT. As DCC considers future options for Testing Services beyond 2028, it is important to understand whether current capacity remains appropriate and how industry demand may evolve over the coming years. Customer feedback will help inform the scale and type of facility that may be required in the future.
29. The current Test Lab operates from Brabazon House in Manchester and supports both physical and remote access to test bays. Future options may involve relocating the facility, retaining a centralised location, increasing remote access capabilities, several smaller satellite locations, or adopting a combination of approaches. DCC is seeking views on the factors that are most important when considering future locations.

Question 1

Do you believe DCC should continue to provide a centralised physical Test Lab facility for industry testing activities?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please provide supporting rationale.

30. DCC provides just over 1000 test bays to meet current demand from customers. Test bays are on average 80% utilised across the year (See Chart 1: Test Bay Utilisation). Demand is likely to increase by c.50 test bays for DCC to carry out SIT testing on behalf of our Service Providers. DCC would like to understand the demand from customers on utilising DCC's test bays and whether you believe that this should change. We would like you to consider your current model and whether DCC could offer any efficiencies or carrying more testing on behalf of testing participants.

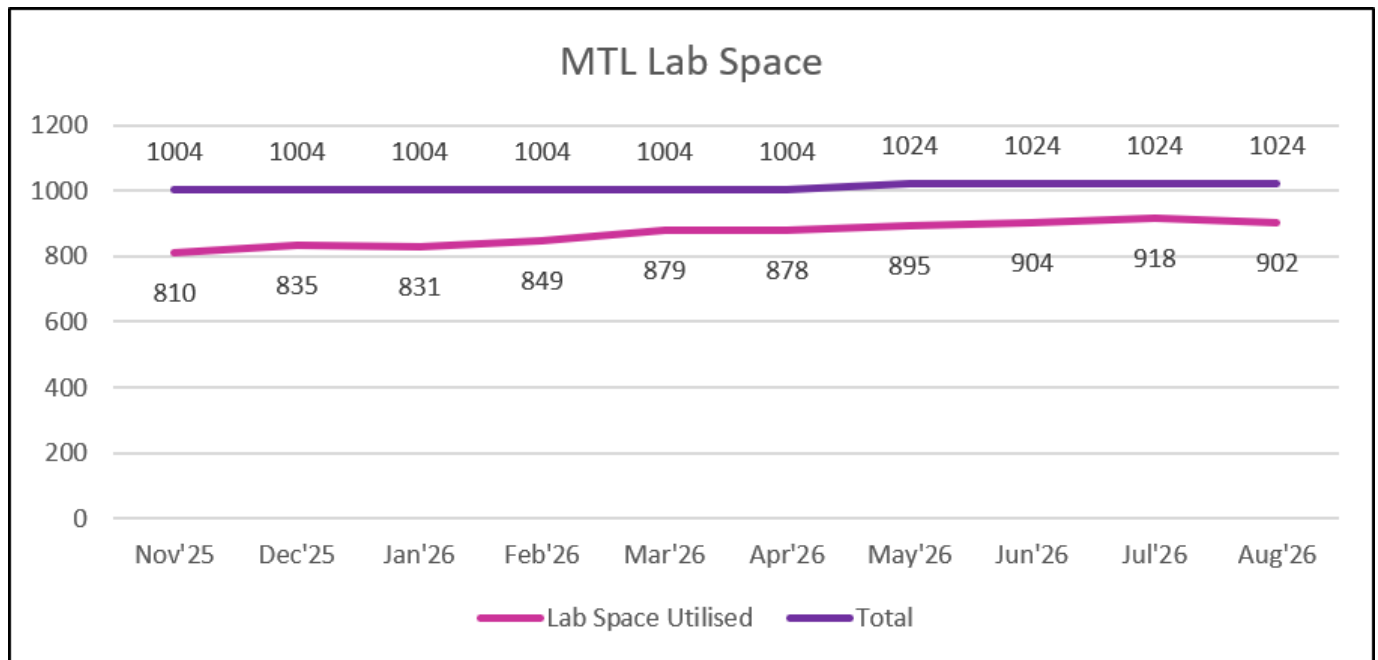


Chart 1: Test Bay Utilisation

Question 2

What level of future capacity do you believe should be provided?

- Less than 500 test bays
- 500–750 test bays
- 750–1,000 test bays
- 1,000–1,250 test bays
- Greater than 1,250 test bays
- Don't Know

Please explain your response and any known future demand requirements.

Question 3

Would you ever consider using DCC Test Lab facilities to carry out testing currently run out of other test lab premises?

Please provide details of future intent that might impact the scale of the DCC test lab facility and any additional requirements that you would need to make this a viable option.

3.2. Section B – Testing as a service

31. DCC offers Testing Services to other parties to support the testing of any capabilities as described in the SEC Section H. Services are offered as a pass-through cost from our Test Lab Operator, who provide device readiness and test execution with access to de-bug devices and logging capability.

There is an option to receive consultancy support from our System Integration team to help triage and defect resolution.

32. DCC is keen to simplify access to these Testing Services and enhance uptake across other industry bodies to maximise interoperability and collaboration.

Question 4

DCC is considering offering Testing Services as a pay-as-you-go catalogue item, that would provide transparency of costs by test capability that could be ordered from a self-service platform (or equivalent).

Please indicate whether this would be something which you would be interested in accessing?

If possible, please indicate which services you would be interested in and an average frequency/volume you would seek support for?

DCC is particularly seeking information around services such as Device Assurance testing, WAN and HAN persistence (SOAK) testing and Alternative Manufacturer Testing (access to different Manufacturer's Devices for testing). These services could include DCC providing testing capability, or simply the required infrastructure for customers to test.

33. DCC is considering creating a set of accredited emulated test tools for all features in the production environment. Accreditation of these tools would be achieved through equivalence testing in a regulated environment. These emulators would be accessed by our Service Provider to support Pre-Integration Testing.

Question 5

Please indicate whether you would support the investment in the development of and access to any of the following emulated tools:

- DSP
- CSP
- ECoS,
- VWAN
- Centralised Switching Service
- Advanced Device emulators, for example allowing software-based control of consumption patterns and alert behaviour

Please include any other features that are not included on this list.

3.3. Section C – Future testing capability

34. Since opening in 2019, the Test Lab has expanded beyond its original remit to supports a broad range of testing activities across various Communications Hubs and meters. Customers are able to access Faraday cages and more recently introduce fluctuations in radio frequency to support interference testing to support 4G/VWAN testing. As industry requirements continue to evolve, DCC would like to understand which capabilities remain important, which additional facilities may be required and where future investment should be prioritised.

Question 6

Which of the following capabilities do you believe should be available within a new test lab facility?

Please indicate:

- Essential
- Desirable
- Not Required

For each of:

- Radio Frequency testing
- Noise testing
- Faraday cage facilities
- RF interference testing
- 4G/VWAN testing
- Fylingdales CHs
- Joint collaboration space
- Robotics
- Firmware testing in SIT & UIT (any device type)
- SIT testing
- Alt HAN
- Device Assurance testing (any device type)
- Access to SMETS1 ESME & GSME devices
- Phantom load capability for all ESME Variants
 - Any setups not currently covered?
 - Static consumption vs variable?

Please include any other capabilities not on this list

Question 7

Are there any additional virtual capabilities not currently available that DCC should consider that would support testing at scale?

Please provide details.

3.4. Section D – Interoperability & innovation

35. One of the benefits from a centralised Test Lab has been the ability to offer collaboration between DCC, Device Manufacturers, DCC Service Providers, customers and potential innovators. Recent testing activities have demonstrated the value that can be achieved through co-location, rapid issue resolution and shared expertise. DCC would like to explore whether there are opportunities to increase collaboration in the future and whether customers would support shared facilities and innovation spaces.

Question 8

DCC currently host quarterly interop events, how many of these events have you attended over the last 3 years and how frequently should DCC offer interop events in the future?

- Annually
- Bi-Annually
- Quarterly
- Monthly
- On Demand

Should DCC seek to invite any innovators or themes that could enhance the values of these events?

3.5. Section E – Use of User Integration Testing (UIT) environments

36. DCC currently provide access to two UIT environments, UIT-A and UIT-B, enabling customers to undertake testing activities while supporting release management and service continuity. As part of the future Testing Services strategy, DCC would like to understand how customers currently use these environments, the benefits they provide, access to the routing gateway and any enhancements to the existing environments that would better serve future industry needs.

Question 9

What can DCC do to make the use of the UIT A and B environments easier for Test Participants? Do you currently have access to both?

Please explain your response considering the following points:

- Testing flexibility.
- Release planning.

- Defect resolution.
- Business risk.
- User onboarding.
- User Testing Gateway

3.6. Section F – Testing Services improvements

37. The forthcoming re-procurement of the Test Lab Operator service provides an opportunity to consider how customer experience could be improved. This may include greater automation, enhanced self-service capabilities, improved diagnostics, more efficient defect triage and new ways of interacting with the Test Lab. DCC is interested in understanding which improvements would deliver the greatest value to customers and where current services could be enhanced.

Question 10

What improvements would you most like to see as part of any new **Test Lab Operation** procurement?

Examples may include:

- Self-service booking
- Additional Testing as a Service Options
- Improved diagnostics
- Triage support
- Enhanced reporting
- More collaboration opportunities
- Any other improvements. Please provide details.

Question 11

Are there any current pain points with **Testing Services** that DCC should prioritise addressing?

Please provide details.

Question 12

Are there any further observations, recommendations or concerns that DCC should consider when developing the future DCC Test Lab & Services business case?

Question 13

Do you have any other comments?

4. Next Steps

38. These RFI forms part of the evidence-gathering process for the future DCC Test Lab & Services business case . In addition to the specific topics covered earlier within the document, DCC welcomes broader observations regarding the future direction of Testing Services, emerging industry trends, strategic risks and opportunities, and any factors that should be considered before a preferred option is identified. Responses will help inform the final recommendation and future investment decisions.
39. Following closure of this RFI, DCC will analyse all responses received, undertake further technical and commercial assessment and further refine the DCC Test Lab & Services business case to support a robust future strategy and options assessment. Customer engagement will remain an important part of the process and DCC will consider the best approach to this engagement.
40. DCC strongly encourages all Testing Participants, Device Manufacturers, Service Providers and other stakeholders to participate. The RFI findings will form a key input into the final recommendation and help shape the future of Testing Services beyond 2028.

5. How to Respond

41. Please provide responses by 17:00 on 16th October 2026 to DCC at consultations@smartdcc.co.uk.
42. RFI responses may be published on our website www.smartdcc.co.uk. Please state clearly in writing whether you want all or any part, of your response to be treated as confidential. It would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. Please note that responses in their entirety (including any text marked confidential) may be made available to The Department and the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority (the Authority). Information provided to The Department or the Authority, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information legislation (primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004). If The Department or the Authority receive a request for disclosure of the information we/they will take full account of your explanation (to the extent provided to them), but we/they cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded by us as a confidentiality request.
43. If you have any questions about the RFI documents, please contact DCC via consultations@smartdcc.co.uk.