Frequently Asked Questions – Feasibility Studies

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1. What is the DICE Network+?

Leveraging the power of the digital revolution, our objective is to drive a circular economy across sectors and value chains. Led by our expert academic team, we are creating an inclusive, connected community harnessing interdisciplinary collaboration and research to guide industries, policy makers, and communities towards a digitally enabled sustainable and circular economy.

The DICE Network+ is focused on two key challenge areas:

- **EMBED: Embedding sustainability and circularity within the design and development of digital and communication technologies.**
- **ENABLE: Realising the potential of the digital revolution to enable a circular economy across sectors.**

Recognising the wealth of ongoing activity, we take a network of networks approach, working to share understanding and build capability to enable our members to prioritise investment and circular economy adoption. We welcome engagement from commercial organisations, academics, policy makers and interested individuals from the wider community – join us!

2. What are the call details?

We are seeking studies that are innovative, evidence based, applied and appreciate the need for a whole system approach. The feasibility study should result in increased confidence in the proof of concept developed, which then has potential to attract further prioritisation and investment in the area. Applications should include or be led by an early career academic and should involve at least one industrial or government partner to ensure real world application and impact.

The DICE Network+ is simultaneously addressing two interrelated challenge areas. Applications are welcomed that align to these, with areas of interest having been identified as below:

Embed: Embedding sustainability and circularity within the design of digital and communication technologies. Example projects could include, but are not limited to:

- How to embed circular innovation within UK semi-conductor component manufacturing, aligning to the National Semiconductor Strategy (2023).
- Circular design and development of digital and communication technologies, incorporating sustainable materials, modular architectures, and strategies for product life extension and end-of-life recovery.
- The application of circular approaches to digital infrastructure, such as safer energy storage systems, retrofitting for the ICT sector and the potential role of robotics and automation.
- Circular system design to address the environmental footprint of AI, exploring the concept of data as a manufactured product.

Enable: Realising the potential of the digital revolution, including advances in digital processes, to enable a circular economy. Example projects could include, but are not limited to:

- Utilising digital advances to support the delivery of nature-based solutions, addressing regeneration and biodiversity challenges.
- Applying advances in AI and Machine Learning to accelerate the adoption of circular innovation within one or more industrial sectors.
- The application of digital technology to accelerate the widescale adoption of Product as a Service (PaaS) models, including Digital Product Passports.
- Exploring the socio-technical aspect of new circular digital system adoption.
- Addressing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the circular digital revolution, ensuring a socially beneficial transition to an inclusive future model.

3. What is the deadline for the current call?

Midday, 8 September 2025.

4. How much funding can I apply for?

The total funding available for this Feasibility Study call is £300,000. Feasibility Studies will be awarded at 80% full Economic Cost (fEC) to a maximum award value of £50,000 per project with total project value not exceeding £62,500.

5. Which organsiations can be funded?

Eligible organisations include all UK Higher Education Institutions that receive grant funding from one of the UK higher education funding bodies, along with research institutes for which the Research Councils have established a long-term involvement as a major funder. Other independent research organisations (IROs) may also be eligible, and a list of such organisations is available here. Industry cannot be directly funded.

6. What can the funding be used for?

The budget outline for the proposed feasibility studies can include investigator/ researcher time, travel and subsistence appropriate to delivery of the project, and consumables. As the grant holder, the University of Exeter is responsible for allocating funding to successful proposals and will reimburse subcontracting organisations at 80%fEC. The lead institution must be willing to provide the remaining 20% fEC. Applications where a portion of the project costs are met by industry funding are also welcomed. Lead institutions will be required to itemise bills based on 100% fEC and then invoice at 80% fEC.

For subcontractors, we would expect assigned funds to be no more than 40% of the total budget and for this element to be justified in the application.

7. How long should a study take to complete?

Projects can be between 6 - 9 months in length and must be completed before the end of October 2026. Therefore, we do not expect future pay awards in the salary costings or indexation will be added to grant at the time the award is made.

8. Who are the reviewers?

The reviewers are members of the DICE Network+ and the DICE N+ Advisory Group from academic and industrial backgrounds who have extensive knowledge of circular economy and digital innovation. Each proposal will be reviewed by 2 independent reviewers against set criteria, before shortlisting to be invited to a Panel Pitch Day.

9. Can Early Career Researchers apply for funding?

Yes – we actively encourage ECRs to apply for funding and take the role of Principal Investigator. Applicants are responsible for seeking approval from their own institution before submission as there are often local eligibility criteria which need to be met.

To clarify eligibility as an Early Career Researcher, applicants are expected to hold a doctorate by the start date of the funding being awarded or to be able to demonstrate equivalent research/innovation experience and/or training.

Taking a lead from UKRI, we recognise an ECR as someone who identifies their role as such. We use a guide of being within 8 years of a PhD or equivalent professional development, but recognise the impact of career breaks. Applications are welcome from those returning to research from a career break or following time in other roles; there are no time limits in respect of time spent outside a research or innovation environment.

Applicants must be employed in an eligible UK institution with their existing contract of employment extending beyond the potential end date of the feasibility study.

10. I am not an ECR. Can I still apply?

You can still apply for our Flexible Funding opportunities, but please note that your application must include an ECR who is actively and meaningfully involved in the research project. This is a key requirement for eligibility and reflects our commitment to supporting the next generation of circular economy and digital innovation leaders.

11. What are the key dates?

Date	Action
20 May 2025	Call goes live: Public Announcement
1.30pm 10 July 2025	Webinar for interested parties
Midday 8 September 2025	Deadline for submissions
30 September 2025	Invitations to Panel Pitch Day issued. Unsuccessful proposals are advised of the final decisions
14 October 2025	Panel Pitch Day
21 October 2025	Applicants notified of Panel Pitch outcomes
22 October – 20 December 2025	Completion of contracting process
5 January 2026	Feasibility Studies start
(TBC) January 2026	Feasibility Study kick off meeting
30 October 2026	Feasibility Study last date for completion
20 November 2026	Last date for submission of final reporting
30 November 2026	Last date for submission of final invoicing

12. Do I need to provide letters of support / evidence of funding from Industry or other partners?

Letters of support are not required but you can provide a statement of support within your proposal. Applications where a portion of the £50,000 costs is met by industry funding are welcomed. The DICE Network+ can help you if you need support to identify an industry partner. Please contact please contact the Network Manager, Georgie Hopkins email: dice-network@exeter.ac.uk

13. How many applications can I make per call?

You are welcome to submit multiple applications, however, are keen to ensure a diverse range of projects covering diverse disciplines.

14. What happens next if I am successful and awarded a feasibility study?

A contract process will be initiated by the University of Exeter with your institution to formally agree the contract for the funding. A period of time for contracting has been allowed in the schedule from point of award to proposed project start date on 5 Jan 2026. Successful applicants will be expected to participate in DICE events and will be required to present project updates. From experience, one of the most valuable outcomes of feasibility studies is the informal network of researchers that emerges, and we expect our feasibility study teams to form a core part of the DICE Network+. Each project will be expected to provide key updates throughout the project lifecycle with a final report required by 20 November 2026.

15. How can industrial partners benefit?

Industry can support a feasibility study either as a project partner or as a subcontractor.

As a rule, project partners are expected to provide contributions to the delivery of the project and should not therefore be seeking to claim funds from UKRI.

A subcontractor is a third-party individual who is not employed by the lead institution, who is subcontracted by the host organisation to deliver a specific piece of work, subject to the procurement rules of the host organisation. For subcontractors, we would expect assigned funds to be no more than 40% of the total budget and this should be justified in the application.

16. Does the industry partner need to be based in the UK?

We can accept a named partner from a non-UK based industry partner however the lead institution must be UK based and eligible for UKRI funding.

17. Can charities partner with academics for this funding call?

Yes, partnerships with charities and NGOs will be accepted.

18. I am an academic, do I need to partner with another academic institution?

No, you do not need to include an additional academic institution in your project. Although you will need to partner with at least one industry or policy partner. If you would like support to find a collaborator, please contact dice-network@exeter.ac.uk or refer to our website for details.

19. Any other questions?

We're here to help and are keen to support applications as needed. You can find valuable additional information in our Feasibility Study Funding overview. We welcome applications from diverse and underrepresented groups and encourage applicants to discuss any specific requirements that will enable participation, please contact DICE-Network@exeter.ac.uk.