

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 with applications welcomed that align with these:

Embed: Embedding sustainability and circularity within the design of digital and communication technologies.

Enable: Realising the potential of digital revolution, including advances in digital technologies and processes, to enable a circular economy.

We have identified specific areas of research focus which are detailed below, along with example projects (noting these are not exhaustive):

1. Data Centres: Material intensity & e-waste

- Developing circular design strategies for data-centre hardware to reduce material intensity, focusing on modular server components and recoverable architectures.
- Exploring digital tracking systems to monitor material flows and end-of-life pathways for data-centre equipment, improving recovery of critical raw materials (CRMs).
- Assessing opportunities for refurbishment, remanufacture and secondary-market deployment of retiring data-centre assets.

- Exploring AI-enabled optimisation of hardware utilisation to extend component lifetimes and delay e-waste generation.

2. Space: Extending use & end-of-life recovery of critical raw materials

- Exploring circular approaches to satellite component manufacturing that enable extended operational life and improved recovery of CRMs.
- Investigating digital tools for tracking material use across satellite constellations to support in-orbit servicing, repair, and reuse.
- Studying feasibility of modular spacecraft components that simplify disassembly and materials recovery post-mission.

3. Semi-conductors: Component manufacturing & substitution

- Developing digital twins for semiconductor production lines to identify waste hotspots, yield-loss drivers, and circularity interventions.
- Investigating the feasibility of reclaiming and reprocessing materials from end-of-life chips to feed back into UK supply chains.
- Studying opportunities to integrate traceability systems that track semiconductor materials from fabrication through to end-of-life recovery.

4. Telecoms: Consumer device takeback & end-of-life materials (e.g., fibre-optic cable)

- Creating digital tools or platforms that increase consumer participation in telecoms device takeback schemes, improving return rates and material recovery.
- Evaluating circular pathways for end-of-life fibre-optic cables, including improved mapping of buried infrastructure and recovery feasibility studies.
- Prototyping diagnostic or authentication technologies that support refurbishment and reuse of telecoms hardware.
- Investigating socio-technical barriers to adoption of circular telecoms systems, including user behaviours, incentives, and industry readiness.

5. Renewables: Extending use & end-of-life recovery of critical raw materials

- Designing digital identification and tracking systems to follow CRM-intensive renewable-energy components (e.g., wind turbines, solar modules) across their lifecycle.
- Investigating UK-feasible processes for recovery, separation, and reuse of CRMs from decommissioned renewable-energy infrastructure.
- Assessing digital tools that model end-of-life scenarios and optimise circular intervention points for renewable-energy technologies.

3. What is the deadline for the current call?

Midday, 27 April 2026.

4. How much funding can I apply for?

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 organisations 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 May 2027. 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+ Academic Team, Advisory Group and wider DICE Network+ partners 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
28-Jan-26	Call goes live: Public Announcement & webinar
18-Feb-26	Webinar: Real world application & impact
12-Mar-26	Workshop: Crafting the strongest application
27-Apr-26	Midday, Deadline for submissions
20-May-26	Shortlist notification & invitations to Panel Pitch Day
02-Jun-26	Feasibility Studies: Panel Pitch Day - in person
09-Jun-26	Feasibility Studies: Applicants notified of funding decision
17-Jun-26	Demonstrators: Panel Pitch Day - online
24-Jun-26	Demonstrators: Applicants notified of funding decision
31-Aug-26	Completion of contracting process
01-Sep-26	Project start & kick off meeting
07-Sep-26	Launch webinar event (date TBC)
28-May-27	Project completion (last date)
21-Jun-27	Last date for submission of final reporting & invoicing

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

Letters of support from your named partners are required as part of your application. 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 1 September 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 and a final report.

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.