

DICE
NETWORK+

DIGITAL
INNOVATION
& CIRCULAR
ECONOMY

DICE N+
DIGITAL INNOVATION &
CIRCULAR ECONOMY NETWORK+

PROGRESS REPORT MARCH 2026

UKRI EPSRC FUNDED NETWORK+
JAN 2025 – DEC 2027

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1. Executive Summary

The Digital Innovation and Circular Economy ([DICE](#)) Network+ is a three-year EPSRC-funded programme accelerating the UK's transition to a digitally enabled circular economy. Through a network-of-networks model, DICE Network+ brings together academic, industry, policy and third-sector partners to build capability, strengthen national research capacity, and catalyse innovation across sectors.

Bringing together 11 [academic partners](#) from 9 UK universities, the programme focuses on two key challenge areas: EMBED – embedding sustainability and circularity in digital and communication technologies; and ENABLE – using digital innovation to support circular economy adoption across value chains.

Between January 2025 and March 2026, DICE delivered significant progress. The DICE Network+ [Launch](#) event in May 2025 at the Science Museum in London saw over 80 industry, research and policy partners convene to understand the landscape and steer initial network direction. The [Data Centre Deep Dive](#) has progressed over 8 months, delivering roundtables, workshops, a [panel](#) at Data Centre World, and a [policy brief](#) to the APPG for Data Centres. Telecoms Deep Dive preparations are underway for launch June 2026. The [Flexible Funding Programme](#) expanded, with over £170,000 of funds awarded with three [Feasibility Studies](#) active, a new round open including a parallel Demonstrator call, and six Knowledge Exchange Placements funded. The [ECR Community](#) grew to over 40 members, with regular meetings and opportunities such as the [ECR Access Fund](#) and attendance at national events.

[EDI principles](#) have been embedded across funding processes, events, and community activities, with a mid-term EDI review scheduled for July 2026. The [Case Study Programme](#) is accelerating, with two complete and one in draft and upcoming webinars. Engagement activity has expanded, reaching over 330 stakeholders, 721 digital followers on [LinkedIn](#), and a strong presence across national events. The annual Transformation Pathways Event will take place on 1 July 2026 at the Science Museum, London.



A table of researchers and industry partners at the DICE Network+ Launch, May 2025

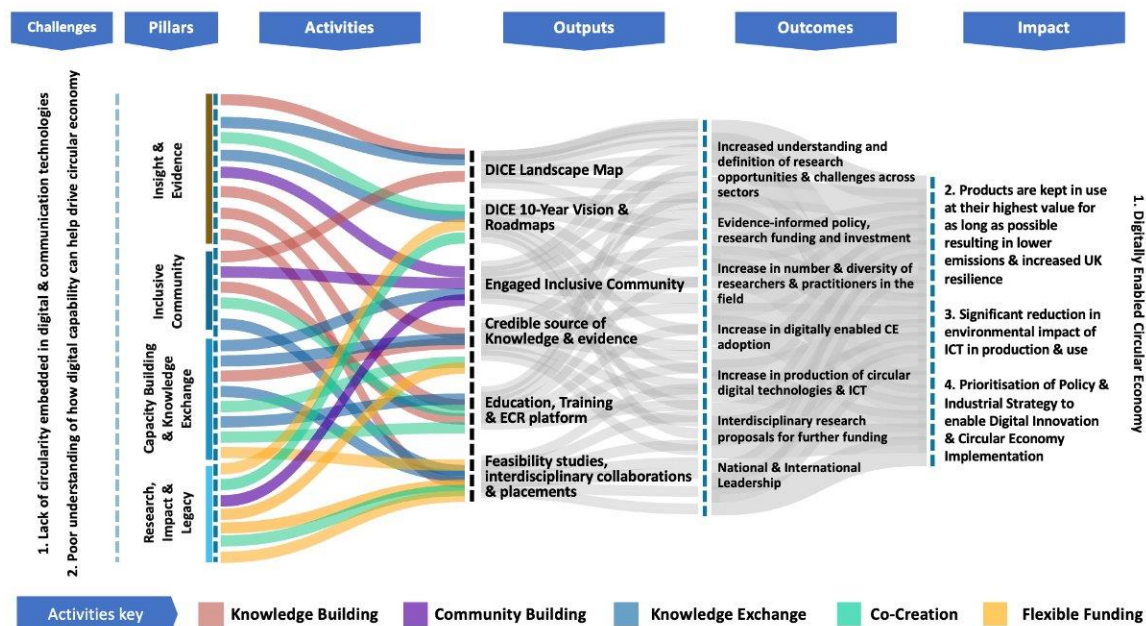
2. Project Overview

The DICE Network+ aims to leverage the digital revolution to accelerate the transition to a sustainable and circular economy. By connecting experts from across sectors, the DICE Network+ creates a cohesive

national community focused on embedding circularity into digital technologies and enabling circular systems using digital tools.

The DICE Network+ uses a network-of-networks approach, working across nine partner universities and numerous industry and policy organisations. This structure broadens reach, enhances interdisciplinarity, and elevates the programme’s ability to coordinate emerging research and innovation across the UK.

A comprehensive Theory of Change underpins programme design, guiding activities across four pillars: Insight & Evidence; Capacity Building & Knowledge Exchange; Research Impact & Legacy; and Inclusive Community. It informs decisions on sector focus, funding allocation, community engagement, and impact tracking.



3. Progress and Outputs

The following section summarises progress across key areas of delivery between January 2025 and March 2026. This reflects the most up-to-date position across deep dives, funding mechanisms, community building, and thematic workstreams.

3.1 Deep Dives

The DICE Network’s deep dive model enables focused, evidence-led exploration of priority sectors where digital and circular economy challenges intersect. Each deep dive aims to identify system barriers, surface actionable insights, and convene cross-sector expertise.

Data Centres (Continuing)

Over an eight-month period, the [Data Centre Deep Dive](#) progressed through research synthesis, a sector-wide roundtable, a targeted workshop exploring secondary markets, and a [high-profile panel discussion](#) at Data Centre World in March 2026. A [policy brief](#) was submitted to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Data Centres, outlining strategic challenges and opportunities relating to circularity in data centre hardware and infrastructure.

[Insights from the deep dive](#) have been published through the DICE Network+ [Insights Hub](#), with further work ongoing to convene the Data Centre Collaborative in April 2026 to determine future research and practice needs.

The Blueprint: Three Strategic Levers to Unlock Circular Value

Lever 1: Design for Value Retention

Building circularity into hardware and infrastructure from the start to maximise its lifespan and potential reuse.



Lever 2: Operate for Maximum Recovery

Transforming end-of-life processes and integrating Circular Business Models to capture the full value of physical assets, including components, servers, and waste heat.

Lever 3: Collaborate for Systemic Change

Creating the Market conditions, policies, and cross-sector partnerships required for a circular ecosystem to thrive.

Telecoms (Launching)

Preparations for the Telecoms Deep Dive are underway, with network-building activities progressing across industry partners, researchers, and policy groups. The deep dive will formally launch in June 2026 and run through to December 2026. Early scoping has identified opportunities relating to lifecycle extension, modularity, and circular procurement across telecoms infrastructure.

Further engagement with sector bodies, including [eFutures Network+](#), telecom operators, and government partners, is ongoing to shape the focus and methods for this deep dive.

3.2 Flexible Funding Programme

The Flexible Funding Programme remains a core mechanism through which the DICE Network+ catalyses innovation and supports the UK's digitally enabled circular economy research agenda. As at March 2026, [three Feasibility Studies are active](#) through Round A funding (41 applications, 9 shortlisted, 3 awarded), a new funding round (Round B) is open, which also incorporates the Demonstrator call.

Six Knowledge Exchange Placements have been funded through 2 rounds, supporting interdisciplinary collaboration between academia, industry, public sector organisations, and third sector partners. Round C has recently closed with 3 shortlisted placements pending award acceptance, bringing the total funded to 9 with an expected 3 further placements to be awarded.

Application processes and review procedures continue to integrate EDI principles, and applicant support has been enhanced through workshops and targeted guidance.

Engagement and capacity-building delivered include:

- Launch webinars for each funding call to support understanding and accessibility (92 attendees, July 2025 and 63 attendees, Jan 2026)
- [Collaboration platform](#) to connect researchers and external partners.
- Skills Building Workshop for unsuccessful Round A applicants (12 attendees).
- Round B "[Addressing Real-World Challenges](#)" webinar (43 attendees) featuring industry and policy partners.
- Round B "[Strengthening your application](#)" workshop (18 attendees).

Fund	Total funding available (80% fEC)	Max funding per project (80% fEC)	Awarded projects to date	Awarded funds to date	Balance of funds to award	Expected number of projects to fund	Schedule
Knowledge Exchange Placements	£50,000	£5,000	6	£23,200	£26,800	6	Rounds A & B closed. Round C applications in review (3 awaiting acceptance) Round D open, deadline 8 June 2026 (expecting 3 to fund)
Feasibility Studies	£300,000	£50,000	3	£148,475	£151,525	3	Round A complete. Round B deadline 27 April 2026
Demonstrators	£100,000	£50,000	-	-	£100,000	2	Round B deadline 27 April 2026
TOTAL FUNDING	£450,000			£171,675	£278,325		

3.3 Case Studies Programme

Delivering knowledge transfer across the DICE Network+ community, the [Case Study Programme](#) has been developed to share examples of enabling digital technologies with two complete and additional case studies in development through a new micro-commissioning model. Each case study highlights practical circular economy interventions enabled by digital tools, providing real-world exemplars for the wider community.

A Spring Webinar Series is in development to showcase insights arising from the case studies and promote wider engagement across the network.

3.4 Early Career Researcher (ECR) Community

The [DICE Network+ ECR community](#) has grown to over 40 members, with monthly meetings continuing to provide a valuable platform for shared learning, research exchange and skills development. The [ECR Access Fund](#) and targeted engagement opportunities such as attendance at the [GDSA Summit](#) continue to strengthen ECR participation and leadership within the network.



Three DICE Network+ ECRs at the GDSA Summit

"I believe the connections built will have a pivotal impact on my research as I look towards enhancing digital technology in the future." Megan Clement, University of Warwick, reflecting on her day at the summit shown in the middle of this photo.

ECRs are taking a leading role in the organisation of the upcoming ECR Summer Event at Loughborough in July 2026, which will include industry tours and a challenge-led workshop aligning to the DICE Network+ areas of focus.

The appointment of two ECR representatives to the Advisory Group will ensure that early career perspectives are represented. Participation in training, cross network events, and partner introductions alongside success in securing feasibility study funding and presenting research outputs illustrates the

group's growing confidence and capability. Their collective activity is enhancing inclusivity, strengthening the pipeline of future leaders, and demonstrating the long term value of sustained ECR support.

A strong example of the ECR community impact comes from a member, Dr Sonnich Sonnichsen, who quickly became an active contributor to the network. Soon after joining, he successfully applied to serve as the ECR representative on our Advisory Group. Through the network, Sonnich was introduced to [ReLondon](#), a connection that directly enabled him to codevelop and submit a feasibility study proposal which was subsequently awarded. He also engaged fully in development opportunities, including attending the Surrey Roadshow and completing Developing Business Aware Academics training, and later presented his experience of securing funding at our 'Get Funded' workshop, passing on the skills built to other ECRs. This case illustrates how the network's support and partnerships can accelerate early career development and research activity. Sonnich's project announcement:



3.5 Embedding EDI

[Equality, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\) principles](#) underpin all DICE activities. The network has [defined EDI goals](#) with a mid-term EDI review is scheduled for July 2026 and will include reflection on EDI implications for a digitally-enabled circular economy. Dedicated EDI workshops, including use of the EDI Cards framework, have been embedded within capacity-building activities and funding support sessions.

4. Stakeholder Engagement

Engagement continues to strengthen across academia, industry, policy and third-sector organisations. As of March 2026, DICE has engaged over 350 stakeholders and continues to grow its digital reach, including 734 LinkedIn followers and over 1,300 website users.

The DICE Network+ has actively engaged through national events including the GDSA Summit, REACT Conference, Surrey and Salford Roadshows, and panel discussions across the sustainability and digital innovation landscape. These engagements contribute to strengthening the network's influence, aligning research with policy windows, and amplifying cross-sector collaboration.

4.1 Roadshows

Roadshows are a core deliverable supporting regional and sector engagement. Delivered: [Surrey](#) (Nov 2025) and Salford (Dec 2025). In development: QUB Belfast Roadshow (Telecoms Focus, October 2026) and REACT Conference Glasgow (Electronics & Semiconductors November 2026).

4.2 Advisory Group

The Advisory Group provides strategic guidance and challenge, with members representing industry, policy, standards bodies and academia. The group meet bi-annually. Full membership is included in the Appendices.



Taken at Kao Data offices at the in-person Advisory Group meeting, December 2025

5. Outcomes and Impact

This section summarises quantitative and qualitative impact evidenced across the DICE Network+ between January 2025 and March 2026.

5.1 Quantitative Impact Metrics, as at March 2026

- Over 330 stakeholders engaged with the Network across industry, policy & third sector.
- 734 LinkedIn followers and 1,300+ website users.
- Three funded Feasibility Studies from Round A, with 41 applications received and 9 shortlisted.
- Six Knowledge Exchange Placements funded to date, with a further 3 awarded.
- 40+ attendees at Real-World Challenges webinar and 18 attendees at Proposal Development & EDI workshop.

- Roadshows: Surrey (42 registered, 33 attended) and Salford.

5.2 Policy and Practice Influence

- [Policy brief](#) submitted to the APPG for Data Centres shaping terms of reference.
- GDSA Summit participation and shortlisted for Growth Award.
- Contribution to Government Buying Standards consultation.
- Industry-facing insights published through DICE Network+ [Insights Hub](#).

5.3 Research Outputs and Publications

- Multiple peer-reviewed publications across AI, CE, resource efficiency and 5G carbon impacts: [DICE Network+ Teams Publications](#)
- Positioning paper on data centres submitted to Resources, Conservation & Recycling Journal.

5.4 Capacity Building and Community Development

- ECR Community expanded to 40+ members with monthly meetings and speaker contributions.
- ECR involvement in external events including GDSA Summit and leading ECR Summer Event organisation.
- Capacity-building workshops delivered for unsuccessful Round A applicants and Round B applicants.

5.5 Stories of Change and Emerging Signals

Early signals of system influence include: improved industry-academia dialogue in data centres; stronger telecoms engagement pipeline; increased readiness among applicants to integrate EDI into research design; and evidence of enhanced understanding and collaboration within ECR community. In response to Digital Product Passports being identified as a priority across the network, a dedicated Digital Traceability Working Group has now been convened and will be coordinated by the team.

6. Project Management and Governance

This section summarises governance structures, operational delivery, team capacity, Impact in Focus sessions, finance overview, and risk management.

- Governance: The Advisory Group provides strategic oversight, while the Network Team manages day-to-day delivery and coordination.
- Operations: Regular team meetings, structured workstream planning, and event delivery cycles underpin programme execution.
- Impact in Focus: Bi-monthly sessions evaluate progress against Theory of Change indicators and surface learning for adaptation.

- Finance: Budget aligns with slower initial start; spend increasing through flexible funds, events, and commissioned activity.
- Risks: KE engagement rates, industry participation timing, and team capacity. Mitigations include adjusted comms strategies, earlier partner engagement, and clearer prioritisation of workload.

7. Looking Ahead: April 2026 – March 2027

The next 12 months represent a crucial period of acceleration across DICE workstreams. Key priorities include:

- Delivery of the Telecoms Deep Dive from June–December 2026, including workshops, roundtables, insights and policy shaping.
- Convening the Annual Transformation Pathways Event at the Science Museum on 1 July 2026.
- Advancing the Case Study Programme, expanding the repository of digitally enabled circularity exemplars.
- Completing Round B and Demonstrator funding processes, contracting projects and integrating them into community activity.
- Strengthening strategic partnerships, especially with GDSA, industry clusters, and national policy bodies.
- Conducting the mid-term EDI Review and embedding recommendations across the network.

8. Conclusions

The DICE Network+ has established strong foundations across community building, capability strengthening, sector engagement and knowledge mobilisation. The work to date demonstrates clear alignment with EPSRC Network+ expectations and positions the network strongly to deliver high-impact outcomes through 2026–27. Continued focus on deep dives, flexible funding, ECR leadership and sector shaping will ensure the network catalyses significant advances in digitally enabled circularity.

9. Appendices

Appendix A: Network Team Members

First name	Last name	Organisation	Role
Fiona	Charnley	Univ of Exeter	Lead
Kate	Frewer	Univ of Exeter	Network Coordinator
Georgie	Hopkins	Univ of Exeter	Network Manager
Diego	Bermudez	Univ of Exeter	R&I Fellow
Roger	Mauil	Univ of Exeter	COI
Andrea	Zisman	Open University	COI
Beth	McEvoy	Queens Univ Belfast	COI
Gosia	Swadzba-Kwasny	Queens Univ Belfast	COI
Oliver	Fisher	Univ of Nottingham	COI
Mandy	Parkinson	Univ of Salford	COI
Silvia	Tedesco	Univ of Salford	COI
Divya	Tiwari	Univ of Sheffield	COI
Ash	Tiwari	Univ of Sheffield	COI
Jeremy	Frey	Univ of Southampton	COI
Lirong	Liu	Univ of Surrey	COI
Paul	Meredith	Univ of Swansea	COI
Madeline	Smith	Independent	Independent

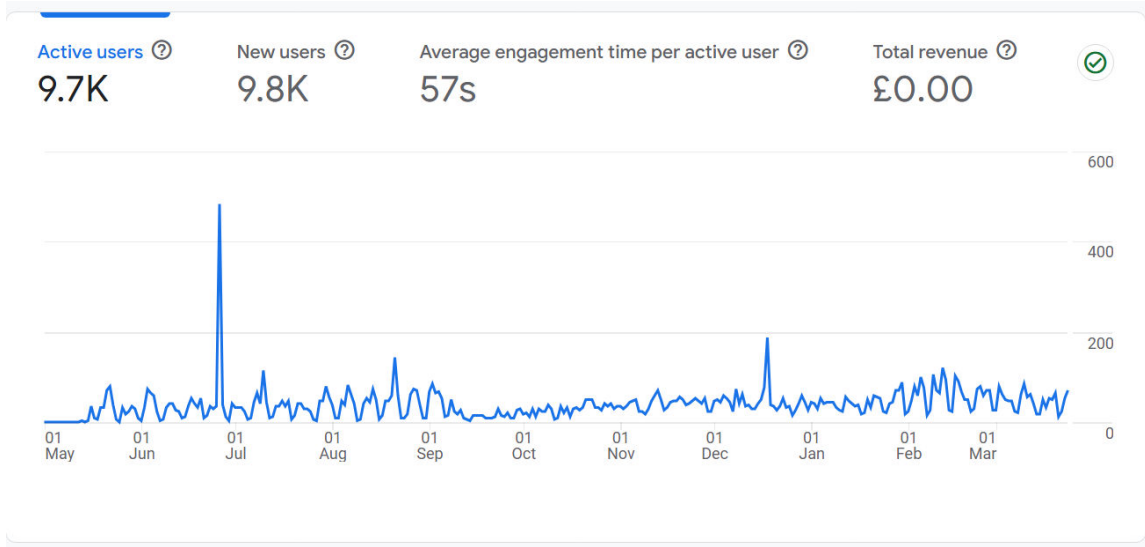
Appendix B: Advisory Group Membership

First Name	Last Name	Organisation	Position	Date of appt
Tim	Lawrence	Digital Catapult	Chair	April-2025
Gordan	Bateman	Investor Ladder	Member	April-2025
Rehemat	Bhatia	EPSRC, UKRI	Member	April-2025
Melissa	Conlon	Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre	Member	April-2025
Mike	Fraser	University of Bristol	Member	April-2025
Stefan	Larsen	Lenovo	Member	Nov-2025
Scott	Manton	Kao Data	Member	April-2025
Vinayak	Sharma	Exeter Business School	Member (ECR)	Sept-2025
Ben	Sheridan	British Standards Institute	Member	April-2025
Sonnich	Sonnichsen	Nottingham Business School	Member (ECR)	Sept-2025
Lloyd	Tinkler	Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre	Member	April-2025
Lily	Tozer	DESNZ	Member	April-2025
Darren	West	SAP UK Ltd	Member	April-2025

Appendix C: Engagement Metrics and Digital Analytics

Website data (May 2025 – March 2026):

Website users, showing over 9700 users:

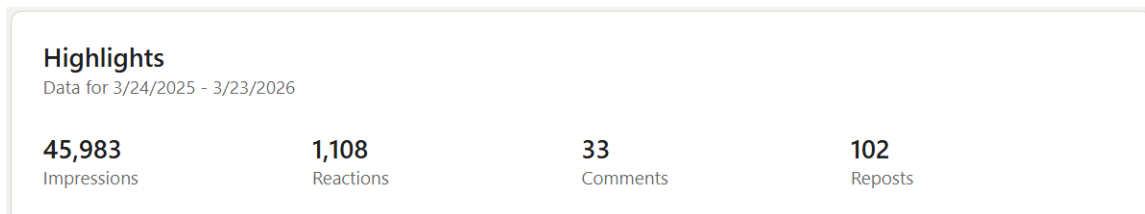


Breakdown of pages, showing the homepage as most viewed:

Views by Page title and screen class 👍

PAGE TITLE AND SCREEN ...	VIEWS
DICE Network+ - DICE Netwo...	6.1K
Feasibility Studies - DICE Ne...	5K
Get Funded - DICE Network+	4.1K
Knowledge Exchange Place...	2.1K
Get Involved - DICE Network+	1.1K
Demonstrators - DICE Netwo...	1.1K
Join our network - DICE Net...	893

[LinkedIn](#): 734 followers as of the end of March



Appendix D: Publications, Outputs and Further Reading

[DICE Network+ Teams Publications](#)

[Insights](#)

[Latest News](#)

[Events](#)