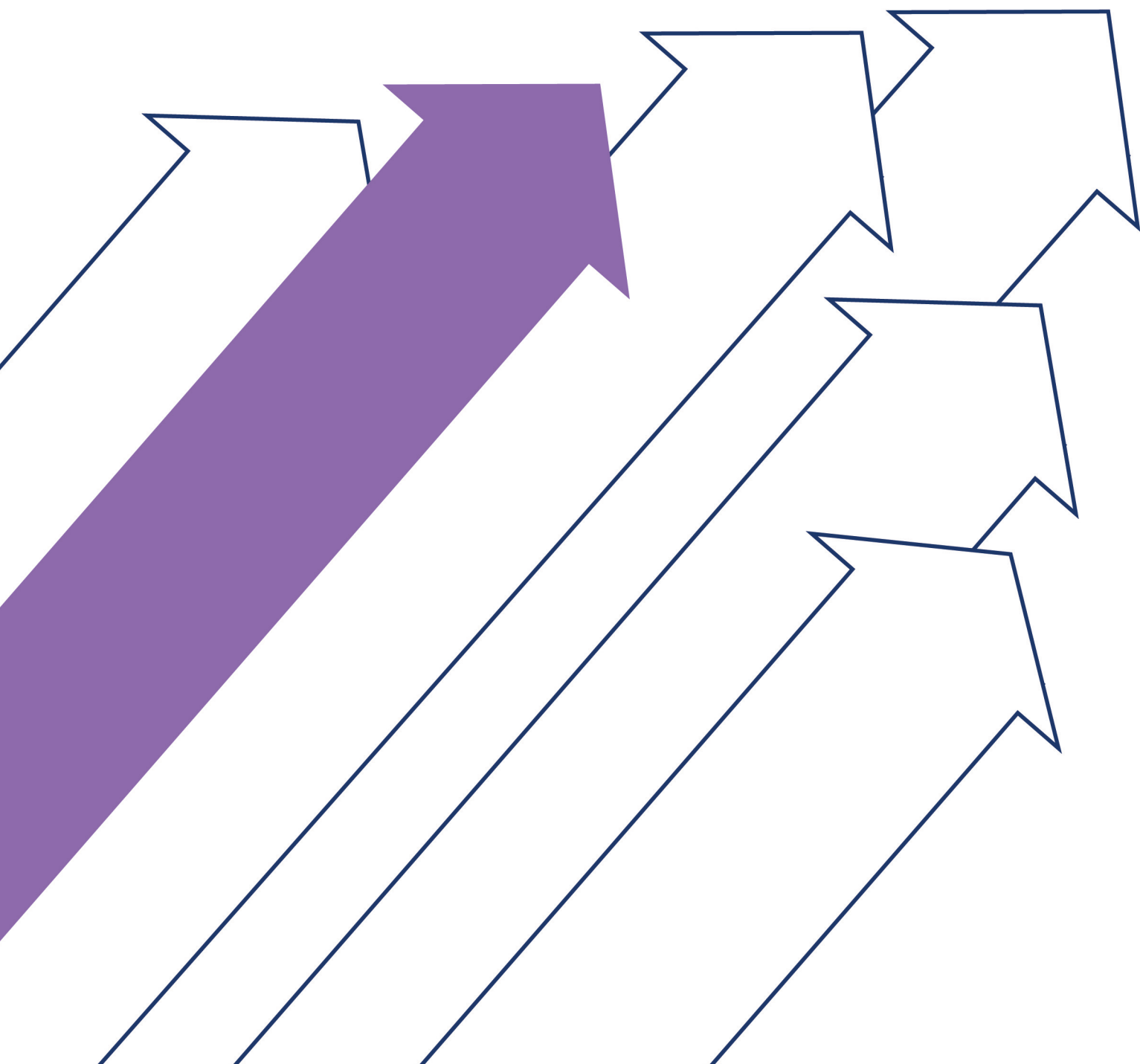


UK Futures Programme – Guidance Document: Engaging a wider range of employers



Engaging a wider range of employers

Through the UK Futures Programme, UKCES expects strong employer leadership of projects, as past investment programmes have shown this to be critical for success. This section considers the issue of widening collaboration amongst employers and enhancing the target market. The extent of employer engagement, and their resulting buy-in, affects how quickly a project can be implemented. In general, the stronger the engagement in the design and development of solutions the easier it is to galvanise involvement in the delivery. There is no “silver bullet” for employer engagement. The time and resources required cannot be underestimated, but engaging the market for the product or service you are developing is critical.

Where employer engagement has worked particularly well, what are the common factors?

Our research has shown that a number of factors exist which coincide with effective employer engagement. These include:

- a history of engagement and established mechanisms for doing so
- the sector has a culture of employer collaboration
- having a clear and convincing business case, often with tangible and quickly achieved benefits.

The UK Futures Programme, by supporting innovation, therefore affords an opportunity to bring likeminded employers together, particularly in our Innovation labs.

How can these factors be replicated or used to facilitate employer engagement?

Working with existing contacts and through informal networks is the natural starting point for employer engagement, but this can mean that ideas are often tested with a ‘warm’ audience only. Moving beyond the initial group of interested employers to reach a wider group of employers can take considerable planning and effort. It may be possible to use sector specialists and other key players to build trust and respect to engage new employers. It is important to understand the characteristics of different groups of employers and identify key ‘selling points’ that appeal to and benefit different employers. Fora provide one way to stimulate thinking on behalf of sectors or geographical groups of employers by focussing on common issues.

What methods of employer engagement have been found to be effective?

The way in which employers engage, and when, changes from project to project. Examples of effective engagement include:

- employer ‘champions’, peers and supply chains to ‘sell’ project concepts credibly to others
- individual personnel who advocate for and embed the messages and practices within their firm

- engaging employers in decision-making is most commonly achieved through project steering groups and employers' executive boards. This provides the opportunity to monitor the implementation of the project but without dealing with the day-to-day management of the project

Are there any methods that are particularly effective in helping to engage with hard to reach employers?

All markets have "hard-to-reach" areas. These may be small but they can be significant in terms of changing established standards and practice or influencing reform amongst a wider group. Small and medium sized employers are often categorised as hard to reach; their time is more precious and they typically engage less. But these stereotypes may not be helpful for your target market, as there may be other hard to reach employers that are important to your success. The list below suggests means of widening engagement to include those who may be crucial to achieving significant and lasting change:

- having representatives on a steering group – this can include rotating which employers sit on the group to minimise the burden
- engaging with clusters and other organisations where there may be groups of employers (although this may involve going through a third party)
- working through supply chains, in particular if significant organisations within the supply chain can be engaged effectively, before then spreading the message to others
- encouraging and facilitating peer-to-peer engagement through informal networks
- utilising existing forum and workshops that hard-to-reach employers already attend

How can the burden on employers be minimised?

Effective methods have included meeting at employers' own premises, and using a mix of face-to-face meetings, web briefings and telephone calls. Planning the method of communication and points for consultation around the requirements and priorities of employers can help to ensure that they do not feel over-burdened. It is important to ensure any contribution is used to best-effect. Providing employers with the opportunity to contribute to strategic direction is a critical part of the design of the projects, as well as shaping the development of new tools and approaches. Testing provides the opportunity to explore whether assumptions on employer demand were realistic and achievable. The effectiveness of this testing is a crucial dimension to developing employer 'buy in' to support the future of the proposed solution.

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This guidance document is 1 of 6 relating to the UK Futures Programme. The guidance documents and all further information about the UK Futures Programme can be found on the following website - www.gov.uk/government/collections/ukces-futures-programme-overview.