UK Futures Programme – Guidance Document:

What do we mean by testing and shared learning?
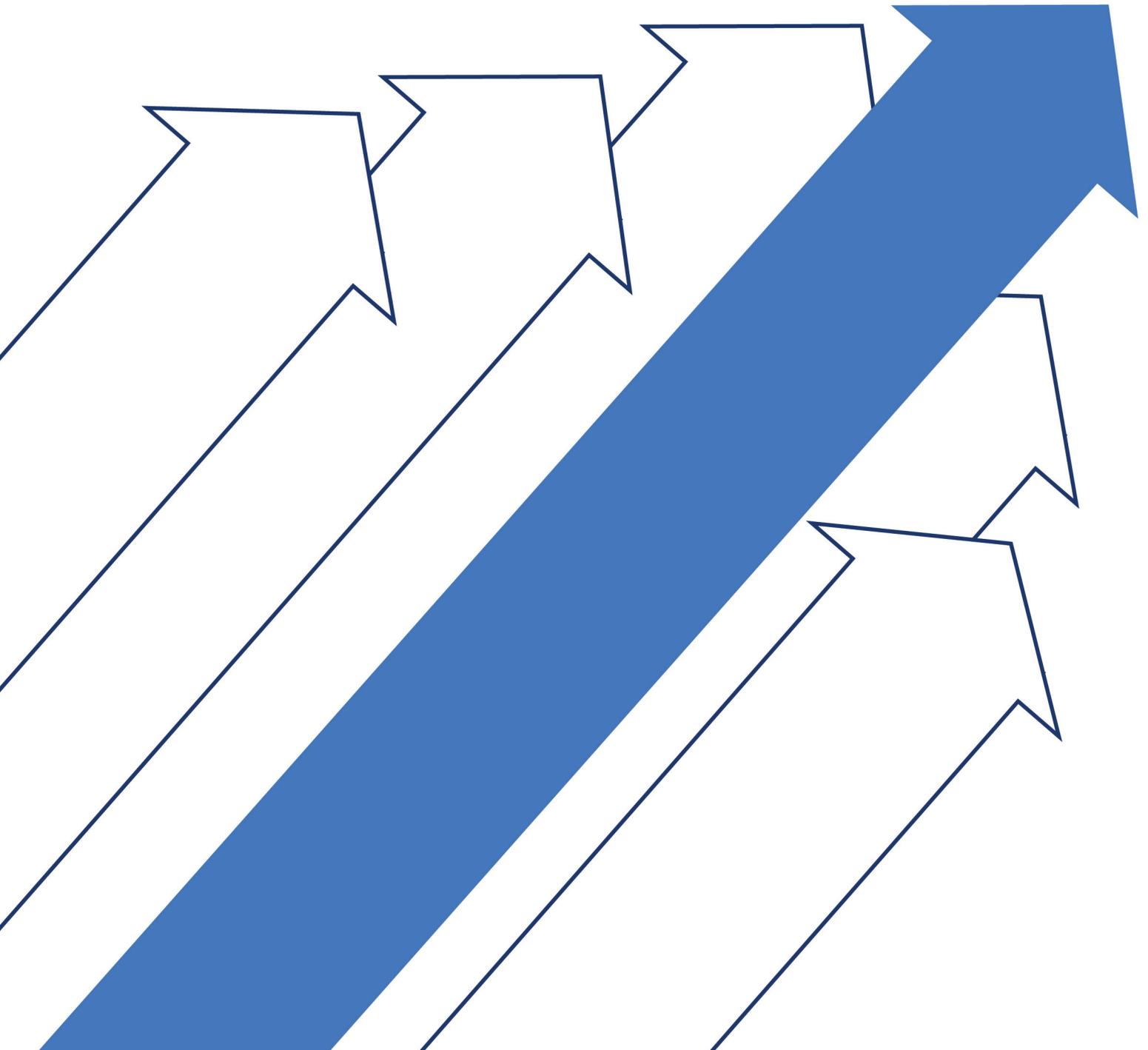
What do we mean by testing and shared learning?

The UK Futures Programme has been set up to advance our knowledge of what works in tackling persistent or emerging skills issues. This will be achieved by co-investing in the development of new ideas, piloting prototypes in new markets or scaling successful ideas in new areas. Integral to this approach is an ethos of testing, which will require projects to have methods in place to enable continuous learning. As projects develop, insights will need to be fed back to improve ongoing development and delivery, and shared with others to maximise the benefits of the learning.

In this section we outline:

- **What is expected of applicants in the UK Futures Programme in terms of testing, learning and sharing lessons**
- **The support that will be available from UKCES to help with this**

What should I test?

What is tested will be specific to each project. We expect the emphasis to be on what is new or being applied in a different way or context – the innovation. Put simply, testing is about understanding the innovative elements of the project, working out what makes a difference and what to refine, and learning what works and why. It is important to find out whether the end product / output does what was intended and addresses the problem it set out to tackle. But, it is also important to test the tools and / or approaches that you use to get to that end result. The things you refine along the way can make all the difference.

Testing applies to:

- The end product(s)
- The methods, tools and approaches that you adopt along the way
- The hypothesis about the 'theory of change' from problem > activity / solution > results

Most projects are likely to be testing all of these factors to some degree, though the emphasis may vary depending on the project. For example, some may be more focussed on ways of engaging hard-to-reach employers, others more focussed on learning modules. All should test the 'theory of change' as part of these tests, i.e. whether the product or method is actually tackling the original problem.

Clearly, what you test also relates to the type or stage of project and this will also inform the testing method.

This is illustrated in the table on the following page.

Project type	Broad Question	Methodological considerations	Testing could include, for example:
Development	What product will best address the problem we are seeking to address?	Test with core group of active employers initially before widening out to a broader cross-section	• How to engage a cross-section of employers • How to explore and understand recognition and experience of the problem by a cross-section of employers • How to actively involve them in shaping a response to the problem • How to manage and respond to diverse needs • How to identify success measures, monitor and manage them
Piloting	Does this product work in a real world setting?	Ensure product is piloted with a cross-section of the target audience	**See above, and:** • How to engage a cross-section of employers in piloting • How to minimise the barriers / respond to challenges • How to strengthen the value/benefits • How to evidence the benefits and know if it they would have occurred anyway • How to communicate the offer, innovation, benefits / risk of inaction • How to create a flexible pricing model
Scaling	Does this product work effectively when scaled up to wider delivery?	Test implications with the target audience.	**See above, and:** • How to engage employers in championing the skills solution • How to translate what works for a wider audience / to a difference context • How to ensure the components of what works can be replicated • How to ensure there is flexibility to respond to changes in demand, policy context, etc.

In addition, all projects will need to identify good indicators of progress towards a 'successful' result and how to actively manage and monitor them

When you have identified the key things you want to test and are able to refine or repeat in future, the key questions to explore are:

What works/doesn't?	**When?**	**How?**	**Where?**
What results?	**Who with?**	**Why?**	**So what?**

What UKCES is looking for:

Project teams with:

- An openness to share their ideas, discuss their challenges and learn from others
- Continuous reflection: how is it going? What could be better? How can we improve?
- A willingness to learn more about testing and implement and share the learning throughout the project

This will be assessed as part of the application process and interview. You will need to:

- Present a clear idea of what you want to test, linked to the project type or stage, your innovation and logic chain, and some initial thinking about how this will be built into the project
- Consider the components of your approach and the methods you'll use.

- Show initial thinking about how to build in the flexibility so the project can be refined as a result of the learning process

During the project you will be expected to:

- Refine key success measures
- Collect performance and monitoring data from the outset, and use this over time to plot progress/ review success measures
- Develop and deliver a testing and shared learning plan
- Make use of the portfolio of testing tools that UKCES will make available
- Update on what you have tested and the results of those tests in the End Stage Reports
- Arrange visits to your site so that UKCES and other co-creation partners can see what you're doing and offer support to the project as a critical friend
- Prepare fully for, attend and participate at a series of Innovation Lab workshops approximately quarterly throughout the life of the project. These will be attended by project teams from all the projects within a competition and other stakeholders. These will be designed to collectively discuss issues and challenges faced by projects and identify solutions to overcome them, as well as sharing the learning
- Use discussions at the Innovation Labs to reassess your project's progress, identify learning points and reshape success measures if required
- Produce output(s) that capture what was tested, how it was tested, what was learnt and the implications for the project, and wider. The report will give an evaluation of the project, measured against its success criteria, following a framework and structure agreed with UKCES

What support will be available from UKCES?

We realise that the level and type of support needed by individual projects, available as part of UKCES' co-creation offer, will vary, depending on previous experience and the nature of the project. Support and resources available include a template to help you identify monitoring data for collection; a range of tools, including questionnaires and interview outlines to reflect on your progress; and the experience and expertise of UKCES staff.

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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.**

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