



Briefing Paper: Health Innovation Wessex Innovation Ecosystem Programme Report

Version 1

Provider organisations

Executive summary

The Chief Executive of NHS England commissioned the Innovation Ecosystem Programme (IEP) with the goal of fostering improved collaboration between the NHS, industry, academia and regulators to deliver benefits to patients faster by streamlining the process for healthcare innovation adoption and rollout.

The recommendations stem from analysis of extensive engagement over 18 months – hundreds of interviews, roundtables and working group discussions – through four targeted workstreams led by the chief executives and chairs of many of the key organisations in the life sciences ecosystem.

This briefing paper from Health Innovation Wessex provides an overview of the IEP [report](#), published in November 2024. It outlines the recommendations and the opportunities for healthcare providers and how Health Innovation Wessex can support you in realising the benefits.

The IEP report recommendations have been grouped into four categories:

- A. **Setting the direction**
- B. **Structures and tools for delivery**
- C. **People, skills, and capabilities**
- D. **Acceleration**

Given that provider organisations are where both the majority of NHS staff are employed, and where care is delivered, they hold a pivotal role in creating the conditions for innovation adoption success:

- by providing a key signal that innovation and research are vital to achieving system-wide plans
- by ensuring their patients have equitable access to appropriate interventions to meet their needs
- by empowering NHS management and clinical leadership to deliver.

Provider organisations can successfully support a flourishing local innovation ecosystem by mobilising local systems, evaluating what works and sharing





learning. Health Innovation Wessex has over 10 years' experience working with providers to identify, implement and evaluate innovation, with a breadth of detailed knowledge and expertise. To support this continued engagement, Health Innovation Wessex has undertaken a mapping of the recommendations, identifying areas in which provider organisation should focus. We can support your organisation to realise the innovation ecosystem recommendations and would be happy to arrange a deep dive session to discuss further (see contact details at the end of this document).

Background

The NHS has an illustrious history of healthcare research and innovation. Innovation transforms patients' lives and brings significant benefits to the UK economy and society. Innovation is a cornerstone of the NHS.

The IEP was managed by NHS England to boost the research and innovation environment in the UK, with the aim of enabling patients and clinicians to access proven technologies faster than ever before.

The programme began in summer 2023, led by Roland Sinker, Chief Executive of Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. It focused on how the NHS can partner with wider health innovation and research organisations to better enable research and the development, adoption and spread of innovation into health and care settings. Its emphasis is on supporting prevention and early diagnosis to keep the health service at the forefront of medical advancements.

Key findings from the programme

Findings from the IEP were published in November 2024 alongside recommended actions for system partners, including provider organisations, to consider.

The key messages from the IEP are:

- all partners are to collaborate, prioritise and align to better meet the needs of patients and the public.
- innovation must be embraced as a core solution. It offers a route to enhanced capacity, streamlined processes and improved patient outcomes – providing the agility needed to address the demands of an ageing population, complex health needs and workforce shortages.





- as Lord Ara Darzi's¹ independent investigation of the NHS in England report (2024) states, "by adopting a bold, integrated approach to innovative technologies and system-wide improvements, the NHS can meet today's challenges but also future-proof itself as a resilient and sustainable healthcare system. Immediate investment in innovation is therefore not just beneficial; it is essential to fulfilling the NHS's commitment to high-quality, equitable care for all".
- There is a need to significantly increase the capacity, capability, and skills of the NHS workforce to undertake innovation work – and the skills required should be recognised as distinct and important, akin to those recognised for research and quality improvement work.
- The successful introduction of these new technologies and approaches will require a focus on system-wide transformation, not individual technological adoption; it will require better alignment of innovation and research infrastructure and new ways of working with the large and small companies from where the innovations are emerging.
- The NHS needs to make it easier to adopt innovation by reducing friction in the system with a clear, consistent, standardised and streamlined rules-based approach, and regulate how patients, industry, academia, and the voluntary and community sector can partner with the NHS.

The Innovation Ecosystem Programme recommendations

The recommendations set out the practical changes needed to evolve the ecosystem to test, adopt and scale innovation to meet the country's future healthcare needs. There are 14 recommendations identified, grouped into four categories:

A. Setting the direction: The innovation ecosystem and the NHS must be aligned to support the transformation of healthcare and the Government's health and growth missions.

1. Make innovation core to NHS business:

Integrate innovation with NHS priorities alongside education and research and do so in a way that also works for the wider ecosystem.

2. Prioritise and co-ordinate innovation around the shifts and goals for health:

Focus on healthcare shifts such as digitalisation, prevention and home care,

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-investigation-of-the-nhs-in-england>





with priorities harmonised across NHS plans. This will require choices to be taken on specific shifts, rather than attempting to do everything.

3. Establish co-ordinated oversight and aligned innovation funding:

Consolidate funding and oversight to support the innovation priorities with clearer accountability.

4. Develop incentives to support and monitor delivery:

Use key performance indicators to track and incentivise innovation adoption within NHS governance and management.

B. Structures and tools for delivery: Accountability, oversight and leadership should be in place at all levels. This must be supported by standardised tools policies and guidance for the key enablers of innovation testing and adoption, to support confident local decision-making.

5. Simplify and strengthen the structures and functions for innovation in the NHS:

Boost NHS leadership and capacity to test and adopt innovation and develop the missing expertise in collaboration with Health Innovation Network support.

6. Strengthen data access and information governance: Expand secure data access for research to prioritise testing and monitoring of innovation.

7. Align procurement to facilitate rollout of tested innovations: Standardised procurement would facilitate easy transfer of innovations across the NHS.

8. Develop commercial approaches to share value and adoption in testing innovations: Update intellectual property policies and share value through risk-managed partnerships.

C. People, skills, and capabilities: Build the skills, capabilities, capacity and culture required to prepare the NHS workforce for future ways of working and to help them collaborate confidently with patients and citizens, industry and academia.

9. Build the right skills and capabilities: Develop innovation skill frameworks and training across NHS roles, with industry and education partners supporting future workforce readiness.

10. Create time in jobs for innovation: Integrate innovation responsibilities into roles, with dedicated time for related activities. Establish joint clinical fellowships with industry.

11. Foster a positive culture and understanding: Identify the next generation of innovation leaders, promote cross-industry exchanges, celebrate





innovation achievements, and appropriately manage the different risk profiles and success rates of innovation. Speak well of each other.

D. Acceleration: Alongside action to redesign the architecture and wiring of innovation, the programme partners should work together to mobilise major geographies behind current priorities – working with centres across the UK that have shown excellence in innovation development and adoption.

12. Mobilise local systems behind work: Key localities should lead on priority innovations, collaborate with industry, and share best practice for scaling and implementation.

13. Evaluate what works: Build robust evaluation into innovation efforts to assess health, social and economic impacts.

14. Establish peer-learning networks: Create networks to connect successful innovators with policymakers and others for shared learning and support.

What do these recommendations mean for provider organisations?

Innovation only succeeds when it can be effectively adopted locally. This needs individuals who can drive through implementation in a supportive culture that embraces and creates the conditions for innovation adoption (e.g. skills, capabilities, leadership, and acceleration mechanisms).

The Integrated Care System Design Framework stipulates that the NHS must support “fostering and deploying research and innovations”.² The framework, with the recommendations, ensures patient and citizen voices are heard, and clinical leadership is empowered, to explore and deliver innovation, providing a strong signal that innovation and research are important. Alongside mobilising local systems, evaluating what works and sharing learning, this will result in a successful and flourishing local innovation ecosystem.

Providers are in a key position to deliver on the major transformations and shifts in care that need to be prioritised to ensure that innovation is at the centre of transformation to support operational delivery and strategic decision-making. They

² <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/B0642-ics-design-framework-june-2021.pdf>



will have the unique opportunity to explore how innovation responsibilities can be integrated into roles, with dedicated time for innovation activities.

Alongside upskilling of staff in embracing innovation and its adoption, the national review of current procurement processes and strengthening data access to support research, testing and monitoring of innovation will ensure that providers will be instrumental in creating the conditions for innovation adoption success, supporting the transformation of whole pathways.

In addition to these reflections, Health Innovation Wessex has undertaken a detailed mapping of all the recommendations to identify areas of provider organisation focus. We can support your organisation to realise the relevant IEP recommendations and would be happy to arrange a deep dive session to discuss further.

How can Health Innovation Wessex support you to embed the recommendations of the Innovation Ecosystem Programme?

We are the health innovation adoption experts. Health Innovation Wessex has over 10 years' experience in:

- understanding and shaping the research and innovation ecosystem
- supporting the development of innovation
- capability building e.g. delivery of innovation adoption training
- designing national, regional and local adoption programmes e.g. development of local delivery plans
- supporting local health and care systems' ability to deliver improvement and adopt innovation e.g. delivery of Attitudes Toward Innovation Survey and Rapid Insight methodologies
- supporting the adoption of innovation in relation to specific priorities, pathways, and technologies
- undertaking evaluations.

We can support your organisation to realise the innovation ecosystem recommendations and would be happy to arrange a deep dive session to discuss further. Please contact us at enquiries@hiwessex.net

