

Innovation-led value creation and professionalising innovation:

Lessons from a decade of the IKE Institute

The UK has no shortage of ideas, research excellence and ambitious industrial strategies. The harder, more persistent challenge is conversion: turning invention into diffusion, diffusion into productivity, and productivity into better jobs, resilient public services and sustainable growth. That conversion problem is, at its heart, an innovation management problem.

Over the past decade, the Institute of Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (IKE Institute) has contributed to addressing this problem, by treating innovation not as a lucky outcome of “creative genius”, but as a recognised, professional discipline with standards, competencies, assurance mechanisms and career pathways. The Institute is the UK’s only professional body for innovators, established in 2011 with a Government mandate to ensure innovation is professionalised and seen as an established discipline requiring skills and competency development.

This article reflects on what “Innovation-Led Value Creation” looks like in practice, and what can be learned from the IKE Institute’s programmes, interventions and support to business, education and government over the last decade.

Value creation: from novelty to outcomes

Innovation-led value creation shifts emphasis away from novelty alone and towards repeatable delivery of outcomes that matter – commercially, socially and strategically. It depends upon having the capability to define the right problems, assess readiness, run balanced portfolios, measure impact, and learn fast enough to adapt in uncertain times or in regulated environments.

Professionalising innovation: why standards and assurance matter

The IKE Institute’s core premise is explicit: innovation is a discipline that can be

learned, embedded and measured. In practice, this responds to two realities: organisations face continuous disruption (making ad hoc innovation insufficient), and innovation standards are increasingly being used as reference points for governance and capability building. The Institute has been active in the Standards communities including the British Standards Institution (BSI) and the International Standards (ISO), ensuring clarity and application of innovation standards.

The practical implication is straightforward. If innovation is central to competitiveness and public value, it should be treated as a capability that can be assured – much like safety, cybersecurity or financial governance.

Innovations Standard: benchmarking capability, not just activity

A flagship IKE Institute intervention has been its Investor in Innovations Standard (I3), recently aligned to the new ISO Innovation Management Standards. The I3 positions innovation as a strategic driver of growth and provides a structured way for organisations to assess, benchmark and validate innovation capability. In essence, I3 uses its six-category framework from Strategy and Alignment and Organisational Readiness through to Customer Focus and Impact and Value, to produce an independently validated profile and a practical Innovation improvement plan.

Since 2011, the I3 Standard has been applied in companies, educational



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institutions and government bodies, providing a shared structure for improvement discussions in very different contexts and sectors.

Two features are especially relevant to innovation-led value creation. Firstly, a holistic-system lens: the framework helps prevent over-focus on ideation whilst neglecting governance, capability development or impact measurement. Secondly, actionability: outputs are designed to guide further improvement, not simply confer recognition.

Case study: innovation assurance in national security

Innovation assurance can sound abstract until it is applied in a high-stakes settings. A notable example discussed in a previous Science in Parliament edition, is the Defence and Security Accelerator’s (DASA) journey to achieve I3 Standard Accreditation.

From 2019, DASA undertook a multi-year assessment and was validated as “Best Practice” in all six categories in June 2023. The case highlighted growth in supported projects and a strong emphasis on “impact and value”, including DASA’s role in supporting small and medium-sized enterprises. An independent government note also records DASA’s recognition as an “Investor in Innovations” organisation.

For Policy Makers, this matters because it shows innovation management can be audited longitudinally (not merely celebrated retrospectively) and connects

innovation discipline directly to national outcomes – security capability and economic prosperity.

Digital maturity assured: connecting innovation to transformation

Innovation is now inseparable from digital transformation. The IKE Institute's Digital Maturity Assured (DMA) framework provides a structured assessment of digital readiness and balance, either as a stand-alone or as an extension to I3 Standard. The Institute has also applied this approach through its digital transformation work with NATO's Allied Command Transformation, translating data-centric principles into practical capability development and education for leaders.

Through Assessing Digital Maturity in Colleges (ADMIC), a pan-European project IKE Institute contributed, institutions in the UK and across Europe can assess and benchmark their Digital Maturity, identify gaps and follow actions guided by an online learning programme and guides.

Building professional capability: people, ethics and continuing development

Professionalisation is not only about organisational assurance; it is also about people. The IKE Institute operates professional membership grades – including Member (MIKE) and Fellow (FIKE). It sets expectations around Continuing Professional Development, typically encouraging at least 20 hours a year, and references a Code of Ethics as part of its professional norms.

Accredited learning pathways: certifying programmes as well as people

The Institute extends this approach into education and workforce development. Its Certified Innovation Programme IKE Assured Accreditation is positioned as a way to align organisational training in innovation with recognised standards; with routes to professional recognition. Alongside of this, the Institute provides executive education and certified training – such as the Certificate of

Professionalism in Innovation Practice at Practitioner and Leader levels – covering practical methods spanning strategy, culture, governance, ecosystem, experimentation and measurement.

Place-based professionalisation: innovation embedded in regional institutions

A particularly important feature of the last decade has been the Institute's place-based model: embedding professional innovation capability through its regional branches and anchor institutions. IKE Branches hosted within further and higher education institutions such as City of Glasgow College, Birmingham City University and South West College in Northern Ireland, help connect business support, skills development and knowledge exchange, taking professional standards into local ecosystems where diffusion and adoption often lag.

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Scotland provides a useful illustration. City of Glasgow College's hosting of the Scottish Institute of Innovation and Knowledge Exchange is described as an effort to "democratise innovation" by making it accessible, structured and professionally recognised. Since the Scottish IKE launch in 2017, the partnership reports applied innovation projects, multi-million-pound revenue and project funding, and professionally accredited innovation programmes delivered to hundreds of industry participants. The broader point is that real value is created when innovation becomes a repeatable capability, built through training, diagnostics, standards and delivery infrastructure, not just one-off competitions or short-term pilots.

Strengthening education-to-economy pipelines: STEM assured and Skills

Innovation capability ultimately depends on skills, particularly in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. The IKE Institute's wider ecosystem includes the STEM Foundation, which uses accreditation

as a lever for improving STEM provision. STEM Assured is positioned as an industry-backed benchmark of excellence, and updates describe its use across more than 130 institutions with reported impact on over 700,000 STEM learners.

Knowledge exchange as a practical discipline

Innovation does not happen in isolation; it relies on knowledge exchange – the structured sharing of experience, evidence and insight across organisational boundaries. This is reflected in the Institute's research and its platforms such as the brite Innovation Review, and in its applied initiatives such as Creative Engine and the impACT online tool for improving innovation in Construction.

Lessons learned from a decade of professionalising innovation

Three lessons stand out:

1. **Treat innovation capability as assurance-worthy.** Where innovation is central to mission delivery, it should be benchmarked and continuously improved, using recognised standards and disciplined assessment.
2. **Invest in professional pathways, not only projects.** Funding individual innovation projects without building skills, governance and learning systems creates fragile gains. Professional recognition, continued development and accredited learning help build durable capability.
3. **Use anchor institutions to diffuse innovation skills.** Regional branches embedded in colleges and universities connect education, business and public services, supporting regional adoption as well as invention.

Across the last decade, IKE Institute's central contribution has been to shift the question from "How do we get more innovation?" to "How do we make innovation repeatable, so it consistently creates value?" In a period defined by accelerating disruption, that shift may be one of the most practical routes to improving productivity, resilience and public outcomes.