AI Adoption Roadmap

WMCA Business Clusters - Template Version
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West Midlands Combined Authority

AND

Table of Contents

1. Introduction and context

This roadmap provides a practical, phased framework for accelerating AI adoption within any industry cluster. It has been developed to help organisations navigate common barriers such as limited resources, technical uncertainty, and fragmented access to skills, data, and funding. The roadmap is informed by cross-sector insights and designed to support organisations from early-stage awareness and capability-building through to implementation, scaling, and strategic alignment with wider regional priorities.

Each phase offers specific, actionable steps that can be tailored to the needs of the cluster and its member organisations—beginning with foundational awareness, and progressing through pilot activity, skills development, and investment readiness, toward leveraging shared data assets, infrastructure, and coordinated funding strategies. The approach recognises that many organisations are resource-constrained but also acknowledges that transformation starts with small, well-supported steps. Throughout, the roadmap encourages collaboration, simplifies access to mentoring and guidance, and integrates ethical, regulatory, and strategic considerations to ensure AI adoption is not only effective but also sustainable and responsible.

This is not a one-size-fits-all model—it is a modular, flexible toolkit that clusters can tailor to their own context, member needs, and sector-specific goals. It supports organisations in moving from scattered experimentation to joined-up, impactful AI adoption at scale.

2. How to use this roadmap

It is important to acknowledge that the organisations within the Business Clusters operate at different levels of AI maturity and readiness. While some are at an early-stage and just beginning to explore what AI might offer, others may already be actively trialling solutions or integrating AI into service delivery. This variation means that a single, uniform approach to AI adoption will not be effective, and the roadmap must be applied with flexibility and sensitivity to each organisation's starting point.

The roadmap begins with a foundational discovery phase focused on conducting a cluster-wide AI maturity assessment. This initial step is not just about understanding general readiness—it helps build a clear picture of each organisation's capabilities, appetite for AI, available resources, and the practical challenges they face. With this insight, the cluster can apply the roadmap more intelligently, directing companies to the phases and actions most relevant to their current situation. Based on the outcomes of this assessment, organisations can enter the roadmap at the point that best matches their needs and ambitions. The roadmap is structured around five flexible phases, each offering practical support depending on where you are on your AI journey:

- **Phase 1**: Build foundational AI awareness and clarify initial opportunities.
- **Phase 2**: Launch practical, low-risk pilots to achieve quick AI wins.
- **Phase 3**: Strengthen internal capabilities through skills development, governance structures, and collaborative frameworks.
- **Phase 4**: Funding & sector integration.
- **Phase 5**: Fully integrate with regional infrastructure and strategic initiatives, enabling longer-term AI transformation.

Each phase is designed to stand on its own, so you can start with the one that suits you best and move between them as your needs change or your organisation develops. You don't have to follow them in order—just use what's most helpful, when it's most useful.

	PHASE 1: **AI readiness & baseline mapping**	PHASE 2: **Quick wins & practical pilots**	PHASE 3: **Skills, collaboration & governance**	PHASE 4: **Funding & sector integration**	PHASE 5: **Strategic regional alignment**
Time scales	Immediate 0-3 months	Short-term 3-9 months	Medium-term 9-18 months	Longer-term 12-24 months	Strategic 24 months+
Components	Maturity survey Initial workshops Knowledge hub	Practical pilots Off-the-shelf tools Mentorship Case studies	AI skills bootcamp Collaboration models Governance toolkits	Sector-focused AI pilots Funding portal Regulatory support	Integrate with regional AI Growth Zones Scale AI solutions
Investment required	Low cost/resource	Low-Moderate	Moderate	Moderate-High	High investment
Target audience	All SMEs	Early to Md SMEs	All SMEs	Mid to Advanced	Advanced SMEs

3. AI adoption phases

3.1 Phase 1: AI readiness & baseline mapping

Objective:
Establish a clear understanding of where cluster members are in their AI journey and lay the groundwork for coordinated support and shared learning.

Key activities:

Distribute an AI maturity assessment across the cluster

- Use a standardised survey to assess AI awareness, current usage, data readiness, and leadership support
- Helps identify common needs, segment organisations, and establish a regional baseline
- Can be repeated over time to track progress and adjust support

Host introductory AI awareness sessions or webinars

- Run beginner-friendly events to build understanding and engagement
- Focus on simple, real-world examples and non-technical language
- Include guest speakers, live demos, and opportunities for Q&A
- Delivered in-person or virtually to maximise accessibility

Segment organisations by maturity level

- Categorise into:
    - Early-stage (no or low awareness)
    - Experimental (testing or exploring use cases)
    - Scaling (actively adopting or expanding AI)
- Enables targeted support pathways across later roadmap phases

Set up a shared knowledge hub with resources and tools

- Central platform for curated AI content, templates, guides, and case studies
- Includes links to training providers, vendor directories, and funding opportunities
- Accessible to all members and updated regularly
- Option to include peer learning space or discussion forum

Resources or tools available:

- AI Maturity Survey Template
- Introductory AI toolkit (e.g. glossary, vendor checklists, AI explainer)
- Workshop content guides (topics, speaker suggestions, presentation templates)
- Curated case studies relevant to the sector
- Knowledge hub and content sharing platform

Example use case:

A regional construction supplier with no prior AI experience completes the AI Maturity Survey and attends a beginner workshop. They discover a basic computer vision application that could automate part of their quality assurance process. With guidance from the knowledge hub, they access a checklist of off-the-shelf tools and prepare to test the idea further in Phase 2.

3.2 Phase 2: Quick wins and practical pilots

Objective:
Help organisations transition from awareness to hands-on experimentation by delivering small-scale, low-risk AI pilots.

Key activities:

Identify and promote common use cases suitable for early piloting

- Curate a list of low-risk, high-impact AI applications relevant to the sector
- Focus on tasks like automation, customer insights, forecasting, or quality checks
- Provide plain-language briefs or case studies to illustrate feasibility and value
- Use this list to spark interest and guide organisations toward suitable pilots

Launch supported pilot projects within selected organisations

- Help businesses scope and plan small-scale pilots with defined outcomes
- Offer guidance on selecting tools, setting success metrics, and managing risks
- Provide light-touch coaching or technical support throughout the pilot
- Track outcomes to generate data for future scaling or funding applications

Provide access to subsidised innovation sandboxes and shared tools

- Enable hands-on experimentation in safe, low-cost environments
- Offer access to shared compute, test datasets, and basic AI tools
- Subsidise participation costs, especially for SMEs
- Encourage peer-to-peer learning within sandbox cohorts

Facilitate connections with AI suppliers, mentors, and research partners

- Match organisations with trusted AI vendors and local experts
- Build partnerships with universities, consultancies, and accelerators
- Create a directory of mentors or advisors who can offer hands-on support
- Support early relationship-building and alignment between tech and business needs

Capture and share early success stories to build cluster-wide momentum

- Use simple storytelling templates to document pilot experiences
- Highlight impact, lessons learned, and practical tips
- Share through knowledge hub, webinars, or newsletters
- Recognise and celebrate early adopters to encourage others to follow

Resources or tools available:

- Pilot design and evaluation templates
- Innovation sandbox access (subsidised/shared testing environments)
- AI supplier directory (trusted vendors and use case matchups)
- Mentorship matching framework
- Case study documentation templates

Example use case:
A creative media agency uses the AI supplier directory to identify a vendor offering generative AI tools for content creation. With support from the sandbox programme, they test the tool on a client campaign, resulting in a 30 percent time saving. They document the process and share their results with others in the cluster.

3.3 Phase 3: Skills, collaboration and governance

Objective:
Build long-term capacity through training, encourage structured collaboration, and embed responsible AI governance practices.

Key activities:

Map existing AI training provision and identify skills gaps

- Survey members to understand current workforce capabilities and future needs
- Compile a directory of regional training providers, including universities, colleges, and private sector partners
- Include apprenticeships, bootcamps, CPD courses, and leadership training
- Highlight gaps in provision by comparing available programmes with identified needs

Roll out targeted AI training programmes in partnership with providers

- Co-develop or commission sector-relevant training with education partners
- Focus on both technical and non-technical roles, including AI literacy for leaders
- Ensure accessibility for SMEs, including online delivery and subsidised options
- Align content with practical use cases and real-world applications

Develop and share collaboration frameworks and data-sharing templates

- Provide legal templates and practical guides to support joint projects
- Include non-disclosure agreements, data-sharing agreements, and partnership MOUs
- Offer guidance on managing intellectual property, liabilities, and roles
- Make it easier for SMEs and larger partners to work together with confidence

Pilot collaborative AI projects between smaller and larger organisations

- Match SMEs with larger businesses to co-design and deliver pilot projects
- Support shared problem-solving, knowledge exchange, and innovation
- Provide light facilitation or technical support where needed

- Use these pilots to demonstrate the value of combining agility and scale

Distribute governance and ethics toolkits to guide responsible AI use

- Share practical resources covering GDPR, procurement, and responsible AI principles
- Include checklists, templates, and guidance on bias, transparency, and compliance
- Tailor content to sector-specific regulatory contexts where applicable
- Encourage organisations to adopt light-touch governance models for internal use

Resources or tools available:

- Skills audit template and provider directory
- Sample training programme outlines (including bootcamps and apprenticeships)
- Collaboration agreement templates (IP, data-sharing, joint delivery)
- Governance and ethics toolkit (GDPR, NHS compliance, AI principles)
- Peer learning event guides and facilitation tools

Example use case:
A mid-sized logistics company and a local tech startup agree to co-develop a predictive maintenance tool using anonymised fleet data. With support from a collaboration framework and mentorship, the partners clearly define IP terms and jointly apply for external funding to scale the solution.

3.4 Phase 4: Funding and sector integration

Objective:
Secure funding for scaling AI solutions and ensure AI becomes a core part of sector operations.

Key activities:

Create a live AI funding guide for cluster members

- Compile and maintain a centralised resource of current funding opportunities
- Include government grants, innovation challenges, private investment, and regional programmes
- Categorise by business size, sector, and maturity stage
- Share through the knowledge hub and keep updated with new schemes

Provide bid-writing support and investment readiness resources

- Offer templates, guidance notes, and worked examples for funding applications
- Run workshops on proposal writing, budgeting, and impact reporting
- Match organisations with mentors or bid coaches
- Build internal confidence and improve success rates

Support sector-specific collaborative projects that showcase AI integration

- Identify shared challenges or priorities across the cluster
- Convene multi-partner bids involving SMEs, corporates, and research bodies
- Fund or coordinate pilot projects that demonstrate real-world integration
- Position these as proof points for wider adoption and funding

Offer regulatory and procurement guidance for AI adoption

- Share practical tools to help organisations understand and comply with AI-related procurement and legal requirements
- Include guidance on fair vendor selection, outcome-based procurement, and IP management

- Tailor resources to public and private sector needs
- Reduce friction in buying and deploying AI solutions

Engage investors and showcase regional AI innovation

- Host demo days, roundtables, or pitching events to highlight success stories
- Create a portfolio of investable AI projects across the cluster
- Work with WMCA and national partners to attract inward investment
- Position the cluster as a credible, investment-ready AI hub

Resources or tools available:

- AI funding portal and summary pack
- Bid-writing templates and proposal support materials
- Sector-specific guidance on procurement and AI regulation
- Investor engagement deck templates
- Showcase event format and participant pack

Example use case:
A software provider in the advanced manufacturing sector uses the roadmap to build a bid for Innovate UK funding. They use the templates to shape a strong application, secure a university partner, and win funding for an AI-enhanced supply chain analytics tool.

3.5 Phase 5: Strategic regional alignment

Objective:
Link cluster-level AI activity with broader regional plans and contribute to shared governance, infrastructure, and policy development.

Key activities:

Align cluster activity with regional strategies and infrastructure plans

- Map cluster-level AI work against WMCA priorities, such as the AI Growth plans and regional skills strategies
- Identify points of synergy with digital infrastructure, transport, skills, and industrial policy
- Use alignment to strengthen funding cases and regional positioning
- Engage with WMCA and other strategic bodies to ensure mutual visibility and coordination

Scale successful pilots into cross-cluster or region-wide initiatives

- Identify high-impact pilots or proven tools from earlier phases
- Develop playbooks or delivery models that can be shared with other clusters
- Create partnerships to roll out proven solutions across the wider region
- Position scaled initiatives as regional innovation showcases

Develop proposals for shared AI infrastructure and capabilities

- Co-develop business cases for shared data platforms, compute resources, or regulatory sandboxes
- Explore funding options and delivery models with partners (e.g. universities, tech providers, WMCA)
- Ensure accessibility and relevance for SMEs and other stakeholders
- Use these proposals to unlock strategic investment and national attention

Contribute to regional governance, ethics, and policy development

- Share insights from pilots, skills programmes, and governance toolkits

- Participate in regional consultations or working groups on AI policy and regulation
- Support the development of shared ethical AI standards or advisory bodies
- Help shape a trusted, responsible AI environment across the region

Promote cluster achievements to build profile and attract support

- Capture and share case studies, impact stories, and key lessons
- Publish a regional AI adoption report or cluster impact brief
- Present at regional, national, and industry events to raise visibility
- Use storytelling and evidence to influence policy, investment, and collaboration

Resources or tools available:

- Strategic alignment guide (with current WMCA priorities)
- Regional infrastructure proposal templates
- High-impact case study templates for government engagement
- Governance framework for AI Growth Zone alignment
- Policy consultation response tools

Example use case:
Following a successful pilot in predictive analytics, a digital agency collaborates with WMCA to scale the model region-wide through a proposed AI Growth plans. Their project is showcased at a regional investment forum, helping to attract national attention and additional funding.

4. Supporting tools and templates

Each phase of the AI adoption roadmap is underpinned by a core set of practical tools, templates, and resources designed to help organisations take action with confidence and clarity. These resources are modular, easy to access, and can be adapted for use by individual organisations, cluster leads, or delivery partners. Together, they reduce friction, accelerate learning, and support consistent, high-quality implementation across the region.

AI Maturity Survey Template
A standardised assessment tool that helps clusters map the AI readiness of member organisations. It includes questions covering current AI use, data maturity, workforce capability, leadership buy-in, and perceived barriers to adoption. Results can be used to segment organisations, prioritise support, and track progress over time.

Pilot Project Design and Evaluation Tools
Templates and checklists to help organisations design effective AI pilots—from defining the problem and selecting the right tools, to setting success metrics and evaluating outcomes. Includes sample logic models, ROI estimators, and risk management guides to support data-driven decision-making.

Training Directories and Course Outlines
Curated lists of relevant training opportunities across local providers, universities, and national programmes. Includes short courses, apprenticeships, bootcamps, and tailored executive education. Comes with outlines and suggested content for clusters looking to commission or co-design new training based on identified gaps.

Collaboration Frameworks and Legal Templates
A set of model agreements and practical guides to support cross-organisational collaboration. Includes templates for non-disclosure agreements, data-sharing agreements, IP arrangements, and joint delivery MOUs. Designed to make it easier for SMEs, corporates, and academic partners to work together with clarity and trust.

Funding Portal and Compliance Checklists
A live directory of funding opportunities, with filters by sector, organisation size, funding type, and maturity level. Also includes compliance checklists to help organisations understand key regulatory obligations (e.g. GDPR, AI ethics, procurement rules) and avoid pitfalls when applying for grants or working with public sector partners.

Case Studies and Knowledge-Sharing Formats
Templates and guidance for capturing and sharing lessons learned from AI pilots and adoption journeys. Includes short-form and long-form formats, storytelling tips, and impact reporting tools. Designed to encourage peer learning, demystify AI for others, and showcase the region's success to external investors and policymakers.

These resources are living assets. They can be updated and refined based on real-world use, cluster feedback, and evolving industry standards. Cluster leads are encouraged to use and adapt them as needed, and to contribute new tools back into the shared resource pool to strengthen the regional AI ecosystem.

5. Value chain and roadmap–proposal alignment

The AI adoption roadmap is complemented by a suite of five strategic AI proposals, together forming a complete support system to drive AI adoption across all stages of organisational maturity. This ecosystem aligns with the typical AI adoption lifecycle—starting with early innovation, moving through hands-on experimentation, and progressing to full operational integration.

At the core of this value chain are three proposals:

- **AI Startup Accelerator** – Supports early-stage AI ventures with mentorship, seed funding, and investor access to build a pipeline of innovation across the region.
- **AI Adoption Accelerator** – Enables SMEs to experiment with AI through innovation sandboxes, technical guidance, and curated tools—bridging the gap between awareness and action.
- **AI Activation Model for Business** – Provides tailored support for organisations ready to integrate AI into core operations, offering implementation roadmaps, supplier access, and productivity-focused guidance.

These are underpinned by two foundational enablers:

- **AI Skills Development Programme** – Delivers sector-specific training and upskilling in partnership with education and industry, ensuring the region has the workforce capacity to adopt and scale AI.
- **Regulatory and Ethical AI Guidance Framework** – Offers tools and training to support responsible, compliant AI use, covering ethics, governance, and key regulations such as GDPR and the EU AI Act.

Aligned with the roadmap's phased structure, these proposals act as delivery mechanisms and strategic enablers. The roadmap guides clusters and organisations through assessment, piloting, capability-building, funding, and alignment—while the proposals unlock resources, infrastructure, and expert support.

6. Appendices

APPENDIX 1: AI Maturity Survey

This AI Maturity Survey is presented as a proposed template to help clusters assess the current state of AI adoption among their member organisations. It is designed to categorise respondents into broad stages of maturity—early-stage adopters, mid-level adopters, and more advanced users—based on their current activity, readiness, and aspirations.

Before being finalised and distributed, clusters may wish to review and adapt the survey, adding or modifying sections to reflect emerging priorities or sector-specific challenges. In addition to structured questions, the survey is designed to capture context by offering the option to add free-text responses under each section. This allows participants to explain their answers in more detail, highlight unique challenges, or flag areas of opportunity not covered by standard response options.

At the end of the survey, a final open comments section invites broader reflections, suggestions, or recommendations. This will help the cluster shape more targeted support offers, inform the development of future phases of the roadmap, and identify opportunities for collaboration, funding, and skills development.

Section 1: AI Awareness and Knowledge

1. How would you rate your organisation's overall understanding of AI and its potential applications in your sector?

    - Very High: Deep knowledge and expertise
    - High: Good understanding with some expertise
    - Moderate: Basic knowledge but limited expertise
    - Low: Very limited knowledge
    - None: No knowledge of AI

2. Does your organisation currently have a dedicated AI strategy?

    - Yes, a formal AI strategy is in place
    - No, but we are developing one
    - No, and we are not currently planning one

3. What are the key barriers preventing further AI adoption in your organisation? (Select all that apply)

    - Lack of awareness or understanding

- Limited technical expertise
- Cost and investment concerns
- Uncertainty about ROI
- Regulatory and compliance challenges
- Data privacy and security concerns
- Other (please specify)

Section 2: Current AI Usage and Integration

4. Which stage best describes your organisation's AI adoption level?

   - **Early-stage adopter** (Exploring AI, no active implementation)
   - **Mid-level adopter** (Experimenting with AI tools, limited deployment)
   - **Advanced adopter** (AI embedded in core business processes)

5. In which areas is your organisation currently using AI? (Select all that apply)

   - INSERT SECTOR SPECIFIC OPTIONS

Section 3: Regulatory and Compliance Readiness

7. How familiar is your organisation with key regulatory frameworks affecting AI in your sector?

   - INSERT SECTOR SPECIFIC OPTIONS

8. Does your organisation have internal processes in place to ensure AI regulatory compliance?

   - Yes, fully established compliance processes
   - Partially, but more work is needed
   - No, we do not currently have compliance measures in place

9. What are the main regulatory challenges your organisation faces when implementing AI? (Select all that apply)

   - Uncertainty around compliance requirements
   - High cost of compliance
   - Difficulty obtaining regulatory approvals
   - Lack of internal expertise on AI regulations
   - Other (please specify)

Section 4: AI Infrastructure and Data Readiness

10. Does your organisation currently have access to structured health data for AI development?

    - Yes, well-structured and interoperable data
    - Yes, but data is fragmented and difficult to use
    - No, we lack structured health data

11. What are the biggest data-related challenges your organisation faces? (Select all that apply)

    - Data availability
    - Data quality and completeness
    - Interoperability between systems
    - Security and privacy concerns
    - Compliance with data protection laws
    - Other (please specify)

12. Are you currently collaborating with any external partners (e.g.,academic institutions, industry) to improve AI-related data access?

    - Yes
    - No, but we are interested
    - No, and we are not considering it

Section 5: Priority Challenges and Future AI Adoption

13. What are the top three business challenges your organisation faces where AI-driven solutions could have a significant impact?

    - INSERT SECTOR SPECIFIC OPTIONS

14. Are you actively seeking AI solutions to address these challenges?

    - Yes, we have specific AI projects in progress
    - Yes, but we are still in the exploratory phase
    - No, but we are open to learning more
    - No, and we do not see a need at this time

15. Would you be interested in participating in AI-focused workshops, training sessions, or collaborations facilitated by your cluster?

    - Yes
    - No
    - Maybe, depending on the topic


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