

The background of the cover features a complex digital aesthetic. It includes a central, multi-faceted geometric shape resembling a brain or a data node, rendered in shades of blue and cyan. This shape is overlaid with a network of glowing white and blue lines, suggesting neural connections or data flow. The background is a dark blue gradient, punctuated by numerous small, bright blue and white dots, some of which are connected by thin, faint lines, creating a sense of depth and connectivity. The overall effect is one of advanced technology and artificial intelligence.

AI Adoption Principles

Guidelines for Regional AI Adoption
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West Midlands
Combined Authority



Purpose of this document

This document provides a set of high-level principles and practical guidelines to support regional and sector-based clusters in enabling widespread, responsible, and impactful adoption of artificial intelligence (AI). It is intended to complement the more detailed **AI Adoption Roadmaps** by offering foundational guidance that clusters can use to shape their strategies, inform delivery models, and engage with a wide range of organisations at different stages of AI maturity.

These principles aim to promote consistency, reduce duplication of effort, and ensure that AI adoption drives real value for companies, regions, and economies. They are grounded in real-world insights from SMEs, industry leaders, and innovation bodies.

Guiding principles for AI adoption across clusters

1. Start with what you can do here and now

Many organisations—especially SMEs—are interested in AI but lack time, budget, or technical resources to embark on large-scale programmes. Adoption strategies should begin with **practical, low-cost steps** that create early value and build internal confidence.

- Focus on easily implementable AI tools (e.g. automation, analytics, forecasting).
- Promote quick-win pilots and low-risk experiments.
- Avoid waiting for the “perfect moment” or a large transformation budget.

2. Use a capability model that reflects varying AI maturity

Organisations within a cluster will be at **different stages of AI maturity**. Strategies and interventions must be tailored to support a wide range of capabilities—from early awareness to advanced integration.

- Conduct maturity surveys or assessments to segment the audience.
- Design support pathways for early-stage, mid-level, and advanced adopters.
- Allow organisations to move non-linearly through support phases.

3. Focus on commercial value and outcomes

AI adoption should not be about tech for technology’s sake. It must be anchored in delivering **real commercial value**, whether through cost reduction, revenue growth, process optimisation, or new product development.

- Help member organisations clearly articulate their AI use cases.
- Support companies in commercialising their ideas with business case templates, investor readiness tools, and mentoring.
- Create clear examples of return on investment (ROI) from AI pilots.

4. Support collaboration and knowledge sharing

Clusters have a unique opportunity to act as **collaboration hubs**, connecting organisations, researchers, and solution providers. Peer learning, shared experiences, and collective problem-solving accelerate progress for everyone.

- Facilitate regular events, communities of practice, and thematic working groups.
- Promote cross-sector collaboration and share successful use cases openly.
- Encourage joint pilots and shared data access where appropriate.

5. Recognise that AI alone is not the silver bullet

AI adoption is not just about technology—it is a **transformation process** that affects culture, strategy, skills, processes, and governance. AI is a powerful enabler, but real change requires:

- A willingness to reimagine processes and business models.
- Investment in upskilling staff and adapting workflows.
- Alignment with broader digital transformation efforts and organisational goals.

6. Make AI accessible to SMEs

To support equitable and inclusive AI adoption, it's essential that smaller organisations have **access to affordable tools, expertise, and resources**.

- Curate and share lists of accessible AI tools, datasets, APIs, and platforms.
- Offer discounted or free access to training, mentorship, and sandboxes.
- Facilitate connections to public funding, innovation vouchers, and shared infrastructure.

7. Provide curated resources, tools, and supplier lists

Clusters should act as a **curator of trustworthy resources** to cut through the noise and help members find what they need quickly.

- Publish curated directories of pre-vetted suppliers, tools, and solution providers.
- Provide templates for contracts, data sharing, governance, and compliance.
- Regularly update guidance based on member feedback and market trends.

Applying these principles in practice

These principles are not intended to be prescriptive. Instead, they offer a flexible framework that can be used to:

- Design or review your cluster's AI adoption strategy.
- Inform funding bids, programme design, and partnerships.
- Evaluate AI adoption readiness across a membership base.
- Prioritise support for maximum value and impact.



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