

Innovate UK launches four-year design strategy

The UK's innovation agency, Innovate UK, today publishes a strategy that seeks to encourage and support excellent design in innovation. The document, ['Design in Innovation strategy, 2020-2024'](#), recognises that the UK is a world-leader in design excellence and there are great opportunities for business to realise more value by tapping into that capability and embedding design within their processes and culture.

Yet there are barriers to progress, it is not good enough for an idea to be technically feasible, it must also be desirable and fit-for-purpose. To address this, Innovate UK will launch a programme that will meet business need under four themes:

- Making the case for investment in design
- Reducing the cost of entry for those new to design
- Helping businesses access the best design talent
- Helping businesses maximise the value contribution of design

The programme will include grant funding opportunities for human-centred design activity as well as broader initiatives, which will be assessed against success criteria in order to deliver value. Innovate UK will work with industry partners and across government to fully embed design in innovation, to ensure the UK's world-class designers maximise their contribution to sustainable economic growth.

In the foreword to the strategy, Dr Ian Campbell, Executive Chair, Innovate UK writes:

“Over the last five years, our programmes of investment and support for design have produced impressive results. However, more can be done – despite the UK's enormous strengths in design, there remains a significant opportunity for more businesses to exploit that potential: recognising, adopting and investing in the best quality design to innovate more effectively, compete successfully and grow faster.

“As this strategy demonstrates, for those businesses and organisations that truly embed design into their innovation processes and strategies, the potential benefits are considerable.”

The strategy outlines four ways that good design boosts businesses and the economy, by:

- Delivering more valuable outcomes
- Reducing innovation risk
- Accelerating scale-up
- Improving business performance

This is backed by evidence. Long-term studies by McKinsey and the Design

Management Institute (DMI) have compared the performance of businesses with strong design capability against that of their peers. This shows that businesses that used design best, outperformed their peers by around 200% in terms of revenue and shareholder returns.

Innovation is not only about having ideas, it is about creating value from those ideas. If the economic, social and environmental benefits are to be realised, then it is essential that those ideas are readily adopted and used by people. Technology enables supply, but people determine demand. Successful innovation requires both to be aligned, and it is here that great design, as the interface between people and technology, is crucial.

We are all familiar with new ideas that promise much, but fail to deliver because they are difficult to use, are unappealing or even stigmatising – remember the Sinclair C5? On the other hand, we will happily pay a premium for goods and services that are appealing and useful.

For example, with the original iPod – people did not buy it because of the clever technology inside, they bought it because of the benefit – “your entire CD collection in your pocket” – and kept buying Apple products and services – often at a premium – because of the delightful, frustration-free ownership experience.

Dr Campbell added:

“Innovate UK is at the forefront of the government’s commitment to increase public and private investment in R&D activities. By ensuring that this is integrated with design, the likelihood of success will increase, boosting the return on our own investments and helping to bring wider, long-term outcomes for the whole country. In short, design creates value.”

Notes for editors

You can download the strategy here:

[Innovate UK Design Strategy](#) (PDF, 6.59MB, 23 pages)

And find further support and guidance on design in innovation through the [Knowledge Transfer Network](#).

About Innovate UK

Innovate UK is part of UK Research and Innovation, a non-departmental public body funded by a grant-in-aid from the UK government. For more information, visit the UK Research and Innovation website. We drive productivity and economic growth by supporting businesses to develop and realise the potential of new ideas, including those from the UK’s world-class research base.

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