

The Construction Playbook, three years on: ICE Presidential Roundtable Summary

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Background

The aim behind the UK Government's Construction Playbook is to enable faster, better, and greener infrastructure delivery through improved processes and stronger relationships.

Three years on from its publication, the ICE convened an online roundtable with industry experts and senior civil service officials to discuss how the Playbook is living up to its ambitions.

Has embedding the Playbook into everyday working practice been successful? What will need refining further? And how can the Playbook best contribute to the government's ambitions for net zero emissions and nature-positive infrastructure?

These questions have a global interest. International participants highlighted that governments look to the Construction Playbook as a blueprint for best practice in improving delivery.

Recap: The first [Construction Playbook](#) was originally published by the Cabinet Office in late 2020. It sets out principles and policies to reform the way public works, projects, and programmes are assessed, procured, and managed. An [updated version of the Construction Playbook](#) was published in September 2022, with a focus on digitalisation, sustainability, building safety, frameworks, contracts, and contract management. A third edition is due later in 2024.

Key discussion points

- Embedding the Playbook in day-to-day delivery alongside workers' other responsibilities.
- Balancing value against cost to improve outcomes and encourage further application of Playbook principles.
- Building on the benefits of the Playbook by applying it more widely, specifically across local authorities, procurers, and government departments.
- Encouraging the adoption of Playbook principles through success stories, case studies, and evidence-based data.
- Aligning initiatives such as Project 13 with the Playbook, helping it deliver consistency across the industry.

Are we living up to the Playbook's ambitions?

Construction plays a key role in delivering social and economic infrastructure. The fundamental purpose of the Construction Playbook – to improve working processes and relationships – has remained constant.

The Playbook is agreed by government and industry and is a good 'junction' for connecting them. But the two must also hold one another to account when it comes to implementing it.

Industry requires consistency. Application of the Playbook can be selective, with certain procurers and local authorities complying more readily with some areas than others. However, the new version provides the opportunity to engage with customers and positively moderate the behaviour of clients and suppliers.

There was strong support for the progress made over the past three years. The Playbook is setting a positive course and encouraging people to look harder at making things work. On top of this, the Playbook is a good reference point for private sector clients and government departments and agencies who haven't heard of it.

How can we move the conversation around the Construction Playbook forward?

More success stories and case studies would help encourage more widespread adoption of the Construction Playbook. Applying the Playbook to smaller projects could lead to more demonstrable outcomes due to their shorter timeframes.

There is an imperative in the public sector to drive toward lowest costs, leading to less focus on quality. Challenging this mentality could improve outcomes.

Simplifying the Playbook's language could also improve its adoption in day-to-day practice.

Construction productivity has increased over the last few years. Professionals delivering projects experience cultural barriers to implementing Playbook principles in standard practice. These people need further support to balance the Playbook alongside their other responsibilities.

Are there comparable playbooks elsewhere in the world?

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been looking to the Construction Playbook as a potential methodology to change procurement and drive engagement with industry. However, an inherent 'bartering' culture in the region is still viewed as the key to success and keeping costs low.

Dubai has been looking at adopting its own playbook to change the way government procures its contracts. There is a view that adopting the Playbook as a framework would be extremely valuable. Before committing, however, governments need to see examples of the benefits of implementation.

For example, in New Zealand, a client adopted a version of Project 13. Yet, contractors withdrew, highlighting that reality does not always match rhetoric. There is a need to understand best value and for contracts to incentivise solving problems for the lowest cost.

In Hong Kong, there are concerns around competitive prices when it comes to collaborative models. Both Singapore and Hong Kong have strong anti-corruption policies and there are concerns that collaboration and sharing information could lead to corruption. These governments also require data to evidence that a model like the Playbook could work in practice.

Singapore has a standard of contracts for government works and recently introduced a collaborative module requiring partnership workshops. Singapore does not yet have an equivalent of the Construction Playbook, yet it widely applies its terminology. An Industry Transformation Map facilitates integration and collaboration through the value chain.

What can be improved?

The Playbook should be better known across UK Government departments. Indeed, there has been mixed application of Playbook principles, while capacity and capability have varied from department to department.

Government departments need active briefing and education around the Playbook and its implementation. With an election coming, new ministers will also need to be briefed.

Additionally, the Playbook is often implemented in siloes when it is asking industry to apply a systems-thinking approach to the entire construction and operations process. Civil servants need to adhere to overarching governance to ensure a consistent approach to project cost control and smooth delivery.

There are multiple initiatives stemming from different sources, such as [Project 13 principles](#). The third Construction Playbook update should consolidate some of these. Aligning these initiatives would make the Playbook more of a central vehicle for delivering consistency, bringing together other elements of industry work in a coherent form.

However, version 3 of the Playbook may focus more on more minor revisions than on modern methods of construction and incentivisation mechanisms, or providing evidence to illustrate best practice.

The Playbook's ambition should focus on value rather than cost, including areas such as carbon and biodiversity. If there is a recommendation made to ministers to mandate the Playbook, the reasons for this and the information to back it up must be more evident.

Questions to take away

- How can the Construction Playbook help achieve broader government ambitions for net zero emissions and nature-positive infrastructure?
- How can the Playbook be embedded further into day-to-day delivery?
- How can the industry improve awareness of the Playbook across government departments?
- What more can the Cabinet Office and Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) do to capture and promote successes and best practice linked to application of the Playbook?
- How the Construction Playbook promote a systems-thinking approach?
- Is the Playbook being applied to smaller projects where it can achieve quicker, more demonstrable outcomes?