

The 7 design choices that make an ecosystem skills audit decision-grade

A practitioner's guide



FROM INSIGHT TO ACTION



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From Assessments to Action: Decision-making focused Audit



What is this guide

This playbook sets out **seven design choices** that make an ecosystem skills audits inform decisions (**decision-grade**). This focus positions an audit as a **labour market tool** that can guide what to fund, what initiatives to prioritise and strengthen.



Why this guide is necessary

This guide helps ecosystems stakeholders design skills audits that support decisions on investment and growth pathways.

This guide solves the common audit gaps, where they:

- Measure credentials but not readiness to deliver real work
- Exclude capability built through informal/non-degree pathways
- Stop at diagnosis without linking findings to decisions



Who this guide is for

Primary audience – Ecosystem leaders and decision-makers: Sector bodies, agencies, funders, and associations shaping Investment, commissioning/procurement, pathways into roles and assessment standards.

Secondary audience – Implementers: Research and project teams responsible for delivering skills audits



Decision-grade?: Audit Spectrum

“*Decision-grade*” refers to the extent to which recommendations from an assessment or audit are sufficiently robust, validated, and actionable to support informed decision-making.

Decision-grade audits are rely less on self-reporting but build on evidence of applied capability and real delivery.

Less decision-grade

More decision-grade

Self-Report	Credentials	Portfolio Evidence	Assessed Deliverables	Workplace Performance
Individuals state their own skill level. Weak predictor of delivery	Degrees, certificates, and course completion. Signals exposure, not competence	Work samples, projects, models and briefs Stronger signal, show applied capability	Direct evidence of delivery readiness	Stronger predictor of sustained roles

Decision Areas

Investment



What enabling infrastructure or capability building should be funded first?

Commissioning & Procurement



What work packages to procure repeatedly, by whom, and on what cadence?

Pathways into Roles



Which work-integrated routes should be strengthened?

Capability Assessment



What enabling infrastructure or capability building should be funded first?





Decision-Grade Audit Design Choices

The design choices for the decision-grade audit are segmented into three key phases

FRAME THE AUDIT

01

Start from decisions, not data

Define which investment, commissioning or pathway decisions the audit must inform

02

Build a clear skills taxonomy

Develop a structured capability framework before measurement begins

03

Segment the ecosystem correctly

Differentiate upstream, midstream, downstream and infrastructure-bound roles

MEASURE THE MARKET

04

Measure real demand signals

Capture commissioning intent, budget flows and repeat work

05

Measure capability evidence, not just credentials

Include portfolio evidence, assessed outputs and informal/self-taught capability

06

Include the informal cohort

Explicitly capture self-taught practitioners who are unemployed or freelancers

TRANSLATE INTO ACTION

07

Close with scenarios and prioritised options linked to bottlenecks

Translate results into clear priority options for investment, commissioning and pathway design





01 | Start from decisions, not data



Why this matters

When there is no clarity on what must change (e.g investment), the audit risks producing insights without direction.

Common failure

- x Starting with surveys before defining decision use
- x Producing descriptive findings that sit outside planning cycles
- x Delivering insights without clear ownership

Better design

Define the decision first:

- ✓ What must be funded?
- ✓ What must be commissioned differently?
- ✓ What pathways must change?

Decision Framing Template

Decision Area	Specific Decision To Be Informed	Decision Owner	Planning Cycle	Evidence Required

If the audit cannot influence concrete decisions in the next cycle, it is not decision-grade.





02 | Build a clear skills taxonomy



Why this matters

A uniform taxonomy ensures demand, supply and capability are measured against the same structure

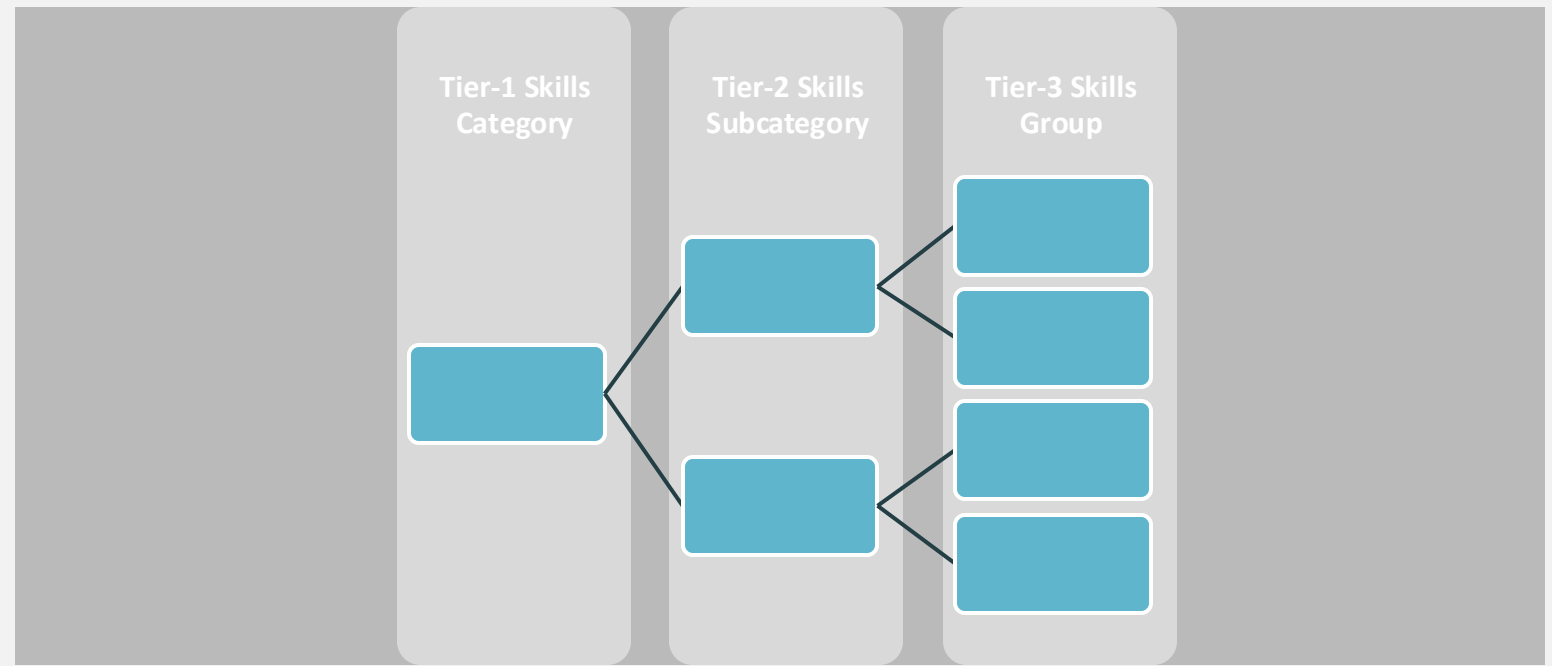
Common failure

- x No clear skills categories
- x Mixing skills categories with tool and job titles
- x Inconsistent definitions across stakeholders
- x Measuring skills without task level clarity

Better design

- Define:
- ✓ Tier-1 skills categories
 - ✓ Tier-2/Tier-3 sub categories

Skills Taxonomy Framework



Skills taxonomy enables measurable alignment.



01



02



03



04



05



06



07





03 | Segment the ecosystem correctly



Why this matters

Capability formation differs across upstream, midstream and downstream. Interventions that ignore infrastructure intensity misdiagnose bottlenecks.

Common failure

- x Treating the ecosystem as homogenous
- x Ignoring infrastructure dependency
- x Failing to map influence and engagement dynamics

Better design

Segment by:

- ✓ Stakeholder interest & Influence
- ✓ Value chain position
- ✓ Tier-1 skills

Stakeholder Mapping Sample Template

Stakeholder Details	Stakeholder Category	Organisation	Role	Segment on value chain	Tier-1/2 Skills	Infrastructure Dependency (H,M,L)	Interest (H,M,L)	Influence (H,M,L)	Engagement Goal

Segmentation enables targeted interventions.





04 | Measure real demand signals



Why this matters

A strategy that is anchored in aspiration will misallocate investment

Common failure

- x Asking what skills are important
- x Inferred demand from training provision
- x Asking the same interview questions to every stakeholder category
- x Asking the same survey questions to every stakeholder category

Better design

Segment stakeholders and measure:

- ✓ Organisations actively recruiting
- ✓ Commissioned work pipeline
- ✓ Delivery constraints
- ✓ Hiring cadence

Demand Signal Instrument Template

Stakeholder Category	Current Hiring Demand (Tier-1/2/3)	Commissioned Work Pipeline	Delivery constraints	Hiring Cadence

Demand signals must reflect commissioning and hiring behaviour, not perceived importance.





05 | Measure capability evidence, not just credentials



Why this matters

Credentials do not consistently predict delivery readiness; applied output and assessed performance are more reliable indicators

Common failure

- x Counting degrees without testing applied competence
- x Treating formal and informal pathways identically
- x Ignoring portfolio or project evidence

Better design

Capture:

- ✓ Task-level capability
- ✓ Applied project experience
- ✓ Evidence of contribution to real work

Capability Evidence Template

Acquired Skill Formal/Informal Training	Highest Education Level	Skills Capability Areas (Tier-1/2/3)	Portfolio Evidence	Delivery Experience

Measure what predicts delivery, not what signals attendance.





06 | Include the informal cohort



Why this matters

In many ecosystems, informally trained individuals represent a meaningful share of applied capability. Excluding them distorts the supply picture

Common failure

- x Sampling only formally trained practitioners
- x Designing surveys that assume institutional pathways
- x Treating informal capability as marginal

Better design

- ✓ Explicitly segment and design instruments for informally trained/self-taught individuals

Capability Evidence Template

Acquired Skill Formal/Informal Training	Highest Education Level	Sector Skills Are Applied	Skills Capability Areas (Tier-1/2/3)	Portfolio Evidence	Delivery Experience

If you exclude informal capability, you underestimate supply.





07 | Close with scenarios and prioritised options linked to bottlenecks



Why this matters

Findings alone do not shift systems, but phased, owned recommendations do.

Common failure

- x Long recommendation lists
- x No ownership
- x No measurable KPIs

Better design

- Present recommendations with:
- ✓ Phased sequencing
 - ✓ Clear Owners
 - ✓ Dependencies
 - ✓ KPIs

Phased Recommendation Matrix

Recommendation	Objective	Primary Owner	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	KPIs	Dependencies

Translate insights into sequenced, measurable action.





Running an Audit in Practice



Minimum Structure Framework

01

Decision framing

Clarify the decisions the audit must inform.

02

Taxonomy alignment

Ensure demand and supply evidence are measured against the same Tier-1 and Tier-2/3 structure

03

Segmented instruments

Design surveys and interviews for each stakeholder group rather than using a single tool

04

Actionable outputs

Translate findings into phased recommendations with clear owners, KPIs and dependencies.



Common Pitfalls

1. Starting with surveys before defining decisions
2. Measuring credentials instead of capability
3. Using identical tools across stakeholders
4. Ignoring the informal/self-taught cohort



Mitigations

1. Begin with the decision areas the audit must inform
2. Measure recruitment, commissioned work and delivery constraints
3. Segment instruments across stakeholder categories
4. Design surveys for an informal cohort



A decision-grade audit is defined less by its methods than by the discipline of its design choices.

Annexure 1: Space Ecosystem Maturity Rating

