



**COLLECTIVE**

Founded by **fe** news



**Thinking About...**

**Artificial Intelligence**

**Investing in the Sector  
of the Future**

**Progression**

**EDUCATION & TRAINING  
FOUNDATION**

**ETCF**

## INTRODUCTION

# WHY WE CREATED THE FE COLLECTIVE

BY GAVIN O'MEARA, CEO, FE NEWS

A massive thank you to everyone who contributed to this, the first FE Collective report. We had an idea to try something new. If we keep meeting the same people, attending the same events and writing the same reports, then we must expect the same results. So, after a lot of thinking and planning (the [FE Collective](#) has been rattling around as a concept in my head for four years now), we step out with a new and innovative event and report. This is the FE Collective.

It gives us a unique and timely opportunity to look at the impact of AI on the future of skills and work, investing in the sector of the future and exploring progression in FE. Prior to our event, Goldman Sachs had [released a report](#) stating that AI could replace 300 Million jobs globally. The FE Collective was just a couple of weeks before the world's first AI Safety Summit, a gathering at Bletchley of 28 international leaders and big tech. From reports, it sounds like they were potentially inspired by the FE Collective gathering! At the very least, the timing of our event on 17 October was pretty good.

The idea of the FE Collective is to flip the 'chalk and talk' conference model. Let everyone get involved in the event and particularly in shaping the outcome, this report. It is about harnessing the collective intelligence (hence the name), creating a knowledge exchange and inclusive think tank (we even picked up our badges for the event off a giant fish tank). There is massive value in the collective voice of experts in our sector, but also those outside of the traditional FE and Skills ecosystem too.

In Birmingham, it felt like important conversations were taking place on ideas and visions for a future FE and Skills sector, and how those within it can lead and shape it. So often we are influenced by the few. We wanted to explore the wisdom of the crowd to collect diverse views, experiences and solutions from across the entire FE and Skills ecosystem. You could say we're being democratic because we believe everyone should have a voice, and every voice is valuable.



So I am incredible humbled and proud to be able to open this report. Thank you to every single person who came along to the event, who got stuck in and involved. You are the FE Collective and this is your report and outcomes. With over 100 voices sharing ideas, we have done our best to highlight these and shine a light on the outcomes. This wasn't just a talking shop, but also a solutions and outcomes-driven event. This report hopes to capture that. With so many voices we can't share them all, but I hope we have given everyone a voice where we can. The FE Collective was inclusive and I loved the diverse voices and opinions throughout the day, it was fantastic.

On top of all of this, by attending and getting involved in the sessions and workshops, you even gained some CPD! Your continuing professional development and your involvement in the professionalisation of the sector was a highly important aspect of the event.

My reflections on the event are at the end of this report. For now, I hope you enjoy reading this and accessing the additional content behind the links, and that it inspires you to join us next time.

A massive thank you to our friends at [NCFE](#) for being our first ever event sponsor and for helping to make this happen and bring everyone together, and to [The Education and Training Foundation](#) for co-sponsoring this report and

## INTRODUCTION

outcomes from the event along with NCFE. Thank you also to our fabulous exhibitors whose support also made this event happen – OneFile, Tahdah, Lightcast and OAL.

The FE Collective will always be a work in progress, because we can continually improve, so your feedback on this report and the event if you were there, is very welcomed.

*To stay updated and access all resources from the FE Collective, including speaker slides from the event, visit the [FE Collective Hub](#).*

*Engage with the FE Collective community and explore more about the FE Collective, along with information on upcoming events, initiatives, and discussions, by visiting [fenews.co.uk](https://fenews.co.uk).*



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## FOREWORD

On the eve of the first FE Collective in Birmingham, headline sponsors NCFE published their [report](#) on the transformation needed in further education. Here, NCFE CEO David Gallagher, introduces this vital publication and he calls for a collective approach to driving progress in the sector.

# SCALING THE SKILLS MOUNTAIN: WHY WE NEED A TRANSFORMED SYSTEM FIT FOR THE FUTURE

BY DAVID GALLAGHER, CEO OF NCFE



We're at the foothills of a revolution in learning. What we learn, how we learn, where we learn, and how often we need to unlearn and relearn, is changing completely. Yet our mainstream education system still does things the way we did it in the first industrial revolution.

We need to think in revolutionary terms by asking what's possible but do this collectively; learning from a whole raft of stakeholders with ideas, thoughts, and data to inform the change. It's why we were so keen to support FE News on this initiative and bring together a diverse mix of perspectives.

The [Transforming Skills report](#) developed jointly by [NCFE](#), [Corndel](#) and [the Edge Foundation](#), doesn't look to solve funding issues or problems around policy. It sets out a vision of what a transformed skills system could look like through five clear recommendations.

The first is about embedding uniquely human skills into the core of curriculum at every age and stage. Things like creativity, problem solving, resilience and decision making. If we stop for a moment and think about our careers, it's the traits, the characteristics and the skills we've built up through life experiences.

Every person deserves the opportunity to develop those skills, but if you're born in the wrong postcode or into a family that doesn't know how to nurture them, maybe you won't have the same chances. That's why mainstream education should place them right at the core.

The [Transforming Skills report](#) also looks at assessment. If we don't measure the right things, in the right way, at the right time, are we truly enabling people to fulfil their potential? What happens at the end needs to inform what happens at the start, and every stage of that learning journey.

Our call is to modernise assessment to make it more inclusive, to make it fair, to make it fit for purpose. We're particularly interested in vocational and technical learning, but this has implications for every aspect of learning.

The third recommendation is careers advice – something we've debated for the last 20 years. The key difference is giving individuals agency; helping them understand themselves, which is often forgotten.

If we continue to push information to people who don't understand themselves, their potential, their strengths and who don't understand those opportunities and what might be right for them, how can they possibly make an informed choice?

**NCFE**



The report also looks at an agile and responsive skills system. The world of work, the economy, skills requirements are changing rapidly, yet it takes two years to develop an apprenticeship standard. Add another year for market adoption and a further year to produce knowledgeable, skilled and productive apprentices in the workforce.

Occupations don't stand still for four years. That's just one of countless examples as to why our skills system is falling further behind the pace of change. Something needs to happen if we're to at least catch up, if not get ahead.

The final recommendation is harnessing technology and data to improve the whole system. How do we make it more efficient, help learners understand themselves, educate ourselves to better understand learners, and create a system that's self-improving?

Working alongside Corndel and Edge Foundation on Transforming Skills, we consulted with countless stakeholders, learners and educators and the findings are from deep, rich, broad-based insight – just as we saw at the event and represented in this report.

This collective approach is the only way our sector can drive change and climb the skills mountain.



Watch David Gallagher's interview at the FE Collective [here](#).



# TRANSFORMING SKILLS: A CALL TO ACTION

SEPTEMBER 2023



COLLECTIVE



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, SOLUTIONS AND ACTIONS.

For the first-ever FE Collective, we used a matrix framework: Challenges, opportunities, solutions and actions.

A collaboration of some of the leading professionals, thinkers and academics in the field, the FE Collective examined three critical areas for the future of FE and Skills – Artificial Intelligence (AI), investing in the sector and future routes for progression. Key findings include:

- Complicated, scarce and lagged public funding of FE and Skills must be replaced with a more agile, localised and modular system of investment and provision
- The Government's 'parent-child' micro-management of FE and Skills should be scrapped in favour of greater autonomy and trust in the sector's knowledge, understanding and vision for its future
- FE and Skills can become more 'investment ready' for public and private investors with a long-term strategic plan that gives clarity on skills needs for the jobs of the future
- AI can revolutionise learning for the better – but more investment is vital alongside better guidance on safeguarding and ownership of data
- Professionalisation of the sector is key to its progress, with educators, leaders and governance given better guidance on progression routes and continuing professional development

Led by experts, the morning session was opened with topical scene setting, laying out the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead.

The following panel sessions had key stakeholders adding their own specific perspectives.

FE Collective attendees then joined the debate, giving them the opportunity to voice their questions.

To add to the discussions, our data partner Lightcast presented Data and Labour Market Insights.



In the afternoon, the FE Collective split into working groups to discuss the issues raised in the morning scene-setting sessions, and to identify the opportunities these give and the potential solutions and actions.

In this report, we will present the 'Top 10 Take-Aways' alongside a suggested call to action. These are, of course, subjective and were informed by the conversations shared across the day. Our aim is to capture the 'Collective Voice' of the sector.

This report showcases the diversity of voices and the richness of conversations shared on the day. However, it also identifies central themes that emerged from those discussions.

The FE and Skills sector wants and needs more trust and autonomy to design and deliver strategies, but also guidance on managing the risks.

Hopefully, you will be inspired by the ambition and ingenuity of the sector, and enlightened on the major challenges it now faces.

The sector has sky-high potential. However, we need to work as one, in collaboration, to realise it.

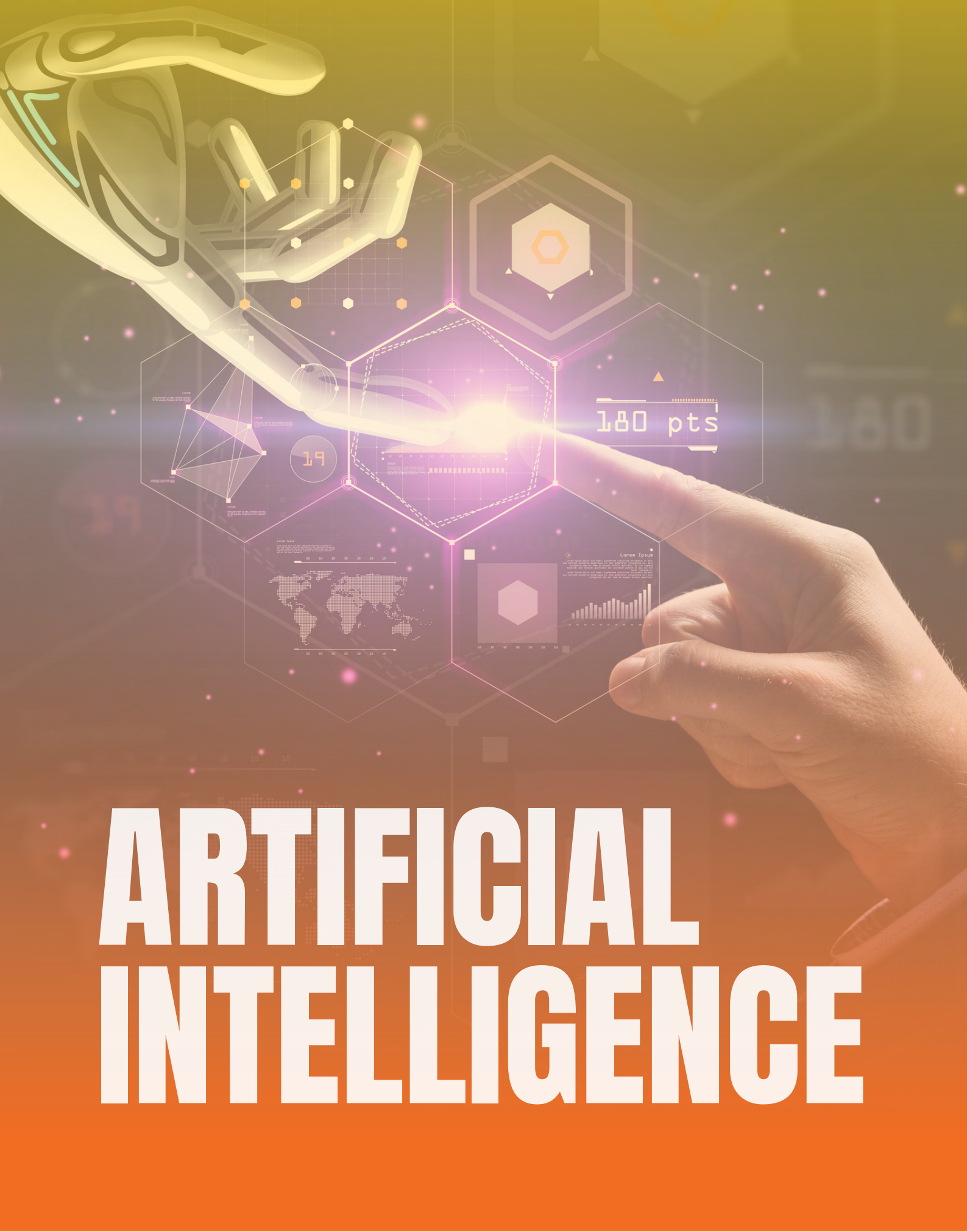




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# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

## 1 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

# SCENE SETTER

**BY PAUL GRAINGER, SENIOR HONORARY RESEARCH ASSOCIATE AT ICL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION / CO-CHAIR T20 TASKFORCE, DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

Artificial intelligence is fast becoming an indispensable tool in further education and skills, revolutionising the way students learn and teachers teach. This disruptive tech's ingenuity comes with a flip side, however. Misinformation, biases and unreliable sources are among the ethical concerns testing our confidence in it.

There is no doubt that AI's effects on education, skills and work need serious attention and so what a brilliant first topic for the first ever FE Collective. We set out to unpick AI's ethics and influence on learning, and explore its seismic impact on assessment.

Paul Grainger set the scene for the first session of the morning. The world is changing so rapidly, he said, that if you design technological solutions, those with malign intent will find their way around them. We have to look actively at the curricula, said Paul, and prepare people to defend themselves.

In the run-up to the FE Collective in Birmingham, Paul produced a piece for FE News that laid down the challenge – what do we mean by 'intelligence'? "By and large new technologies relieve us of drudgeries," he wrote.

"Key-word searches relieve us of tedious combing through references. Instant access to facts means recall is less valued as a sign of 'intelligence'. ChatGPT can take much of the humdrum out of assignment writing, particularly proof-reading. But we have to remain in control, otherwise there will be a race to mundanity."

Continuing that theme in the scene-setting session, Paul said: "We have got to educate people to live in that world. The metaverse is so immersive that it's difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction. How can we help people to navigate that and produce their own identity and protect it?"

The AI conversation throughout conference kept coming back to assessment. Reflecting on his personal experiences in education, Paul said: "I was retested on recall, regurgitation and fluency. All those skills have been automated, but that throws down the gauntlet to this, the challenge. If assessment is a problem, it's not just making sure that this piece of work is the student's own and



Watch Paul Grainger's interview at the FE Collective [here](#).

not something that has been downloaded from Google. It's about what it is that we are assessing. If Google has all the facts and ChatGPT gives us the fluency, what is it that we are assessing?

"FE is interested in competence, which is very different from recall. We need to possess what human skills remain valid in an automated world and then how to assess that. Then we are going to have a closer link between curriculum and assessment, and what learning has taken place."

FE News caught up with Paul post-session, where he summed up his scene-setter and reflected on the panel discussion. He said: "I think there's a general agreement that AI is a good thing, we didn't relapse into the danger of saying it's terrible and we cannot just go back to a pre-AI world. We realised that it's here and it's here to stay, and that we should embrace it. I think most people realise that we can put most of the drudgery of life over to AI, which can do the really boring things like proof-reading and so forth, and that frees us up to do what we're really about, which is creativity and giving a sense of purpose to life."

"The other thing that I'm particularly keen to argue is that we're no longer acting as individuals, we're all going to join teams of some sort, and it's not just the skills set you have, but the way it interacts with the skills set that other people have, which will determine the success of the team."

## 1 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

# PANEL DISCUSSION

### Our panellists

The scene was set for a panel discussion with Paul joined by Gray Mytton, Assessment Innovation Manager at [NCFE](#), Richard Foster-Fletcher, Executive Chair at [MKAL.org](#), and National Head of EdTech and Digital Skills at [ETF](#), Vikki Liogier. And with this, as with subsequent sessions, FE Collective members posed questions to the panel from the floor and through the interactive platform Slido.

"The vision (of AI), a part of it, is this personalisation at scale," said Richard. "When you think about the personalisation of students at scale, we start to see some of the excitement around its use." But there are numerous risks and we are 'ethical pioneers navigating generative AI's uncharted waters'. Those known risks include job displacement, inaccuracy of content and deliberate misinformation. The risk of the erosion of human agency is unknown.

Picking up on misinformation, one of the key concerns of AI in education, a Slido user pinged the question, "If we fell into the trap of social media and a distorted reality of what is fact, how can we be sure that AI generates 'facts'?"

For Richard, we needed to approach AI "with our eyes open", so not repeating the mistakes we made with social media. There is an asymmetry of knowledge and understanding, he said. By using AI as individuals to understand, we are providing commercially valuable knowledge to corporations. "If we only talk about the existential threats of AI, we miss out on thinking about that child chatting online while we have no idea of what they're in front of, and the biases of that data," he said. It was a conundrum that would be investigated in the workshops to follow.

For more from Richard on the use of AI, watch our video interview with him at the FE Collective

#### What are we assessing now?

Slido questions from the Collective honed in on assessment. "If Google can learn and produce 'the facts', what are your thoughts on what exactly we are assessing now, in terms of human skills?" asked one member.

Getting the best out of AI and assessment was the focus for Gray Mytton at NCFE. The team, he said, had asked the question, could it digitally capture the style of content with AI of an NCFE-approved set of questions? This was achieved and it enabled NCFE to offer more services, such as formative assessment questions.



Paul Grainger, Gray Mytton, Richard Foster-Fletcher and Vikki Liogier on stage at the FE Collective

Gray spoke about NCFE's AI journey and of its value in producing assessment content and providing real-time feedback, and its challenges in personalising learning and marking summative assessments. "We need to understand how we can best use AI for the best benefit of learners," he said. "It's not perfect, but then if we accept that, then where do we draw the line? What are our expectations? We really believe that if you put high quality data in then you get high quality data out."

#### Enhancing literacy to get most from AI

Vikki Liogier began her journey into the world of art and AI in September 2022, creating an Instagram account to share her creative experiments and what she is learning. Pre-conference, Vikki wrote this for FE News: "Just like snapping pictures doesn't make everyone a professional photographer, producing AI visuals doesn't mean it is automatically good art. The real deal is using the right words and prompts. It is about the power of words! The skill to craft compelling prompts through word associations, combinations, and clear descriptions are the keystones to enhancing our visual outputs."

So, this was Vikki's question to the FE Collective during her colourful presentation: "How can we enhance the literacies of learners and educators to empower them to make the most of the full spectrum of Gen AI?"

Vikki expanded on the theme when FE News interviewed her post-session – watch here.



# 1 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

Beamed onto the back wall of our conference room at The Studio, the FE Collective's questions explored the whole gamut of talking points on the use of AI, including, "How can we bake difference/intersectionality into AI? How can we avoid replicating inequality?"

Our level of stewardship of AI doesn't match our knowledge of it, said Richard. We need to address these biases, which are Westernised and inherent. It's important for us to work with AI, triangulating so we know the information is valid, said Vikki. We need to validate, and critical analysis is required. "If we are not able to question what we get, we will never get what we want," she said.

## Accuracy in assessment

And then that question of marking and assessment with AI. NCFE has found that AI models trained using examiner-marked responses could apply logic to novel question responses well, giving the same mark as human experts up to 95% of the time on short answers. Is 95% accuracy good enough, asked Gray. "What kind of level of accuracy can we accept and are we ready for automated marking of exams?" he asked.

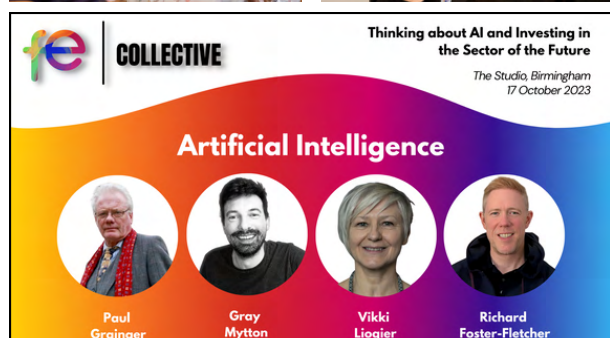
Watch the FE News interview with Gray Mytton at the FE Collective here.



Asked later by FE News for the key areas of consideration for FE and its approach to AI, Paul said: "There are two things AI can help with. One is that further education has always been about competence. We're not worried about arranging people into a pecking order. What we're keen on is making sure that if for example you turn out a gas engineer with a certificate, that person is competent to fit gas safely. And I think AI can help because observation and hands-on training are expensive to provide, and the more that AI can support you in doing it, the better.

"It can also help you with assessment. We've got to be careful here, because we want to make sure that we are assessing the right things. But I think with assessment, we moved on rapidly during Covid, during which some assessment was able to be put online, so you didn't have to have the very expensive business of having an examiner standing and watching every move. So I think it makes FE more efficient."

Plenty of AI food for thought as we humans entered the workshop sessions in the afternoon.



Watch the Artificial Intelligence session at the FE Collective here

## 1 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

# DATA AND LABOUR MARKET INSIGHTS

## ELENA MAGRINI, HEAD OF GLOBAL RESEARCH AT LIGHTCAST

"Growth in AI happening right across sectors and the labour market," said Elena Magrini in her insightful presentation on artificial intelligence, data and the labour market.

In between our scene-setting sessions on AI in further education and Investing in the sector, Elena, of Lightcast, took us on a deep dive into AI's impact on skills and the supply and demand of labour.

"It's difficult to grasp just how dependent we are on technology to perform our daily tasks, whether at work or in our personal lives," said Elena in an interview for FE News ahead of conference. "The labour market is reflective of this new digital world, with the demand for digital skills climbing steadily over the last few years."

### At conference, Elena told the FE Collective that:

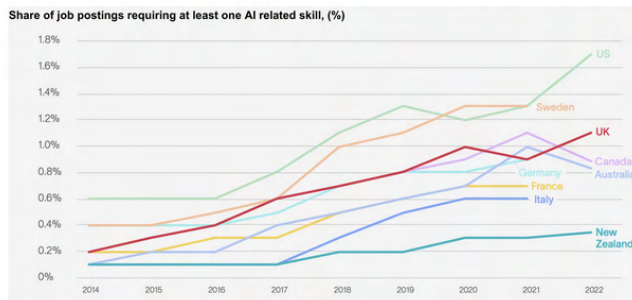
- Digital skills are in high demand and their complexity is increasing fast
- Demand for AI is spreading across occupations and sectors – it is not just for IT roles
- AI jobs are well paid, high value opportunities both for people and for places
- Demand for AI jobs is still concentrated in a few parts of the UK, in particular in the South
- AI skills are key to AI jobs, but need to be complemented with common and technical skills

"We can already see how AI technologies are impacting jobs across industries," said Elena.



### The rise of Artificial Intelligence

DEMAND FOR AI SKILLS TRIPLD IN THE UK LABOUR MARKET OVER THE LAST DECADE



"Much like the broader digital skills category, AI skills are being increasingly requested regardless of the industry or nature of the role. We can see this sustained growth even in sectors that are mostly customer-facing, such as accommodation and food services or human health and social work activities."

### Demand for AI skills on the rise

Four out of 10 employers specifically mentioned digital skills in job postings, The Collective were told. Demand for digital skills was on the rise evening in traditionally non-digital sectors, such as care work and storage. Microsoft Office and general computer literacy were the digital skills most in demand, but demand for AI skills had tripled in the UK labour market over the last decade. At the same time, AI jobs carried a salary premium even within the same roles and occupations.

Geographically, in England, demand for AI roles was concentrated in the south, with London, Oxford and Cambridge the hotspots. And in these AI roles, employers are looking for more than just skills in the use of artificial intelligence. Other 'human skills' include communication, teamwork, problem solving and creativity. The top five technical skills were (general purpose coding language) Python, data science, (structured query language) SQL, software engineering and software development.

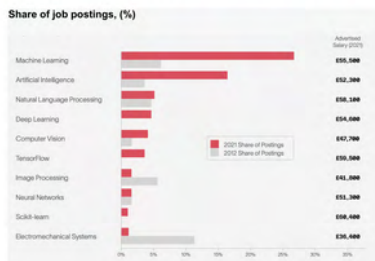
To reap the opportunities that AI brings us, said Elena, we need an understanding of the



# 1 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: DATA AND LABOUR MARKET INSIGHTS

## How to reap the AI opportunity

SKILLS NEEDS OF AI JOBS - MORE THAN JUST AI SKILLS



Other skill demanded	
TOP 5 HUMAN SKILLS	TOP 5 TECHNICAL SKILLS
Communication	Python
Teamwork	Data science
Research	SQL
Problem solving	Software engineering
Creativity	Software development

specialised skills for AI roles and which AI tools are on the rise. This helps businesses to future-proof their workforce and ensure they are fully equipped for a digitally-driven world.

"Technology advancements can be scary, especially as their impacts are yet to be fully understood," Elena told FE News. "But there's no need to panic with AI. In fact, this technology can bring a myriad of opportunities for both businesses and employees."



Watch the FE News interview with Elena Magrini at the FE Collective [here](#).

More data insights from Lightcast on the evolving labour market and the skills in demand, can be found [here](#).



Watch the 'Data and Labour Market Insights' session at the FE Collective [here](#).





# 1 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: WORKING GROUP

From Paul Grainger's scene-setter, to the panel discussion to Elena Magrini's labour market insights, the morning's first topic had ignited a lively debate on the pros and cons of AI's fast-developing influence in education. With boundless possibilities came business critical risks. Its potential for progress in many areas of FE was matched by the scope for its abuse and mis-use.

AI has surely changed forever the way students are assessed. As students harness its limitless potential, educators are returning to the drawing board to design other methods of assessment. So FE Collective members joined two workshops in the afternoon, to consider the impact of AI on assessment and to unravel the ethics of AI's use by learners and educators.

## AI in Assessment

Questions awaiting this workshop group, moderated by Gray Mytton, included:

- What is the future of AI and Assessment?
- What can we learn from the Mutant algorithm from the pandemic and look to the future of assessment, using all of the tools possible?
- How can we make sure of a fair and unbiased future in assessment using tools like Artificial intelligence?

## Collective Voices

"We need to lobby the Government to ensure teachers are confident in using and dealing with AI"

**"The challenge is how to govern and regulate AI and its output"**

"We have an opportunity to introduce an agile curriculum and to personalise assessment"

"There is an opportunity to help people understand cognitive biases and learn how to manage them"



The FE Collective identified many challenges that AI could bring to the delivery of fair and meaningful assessments, said Gray. These fell within three categories.

Firstly, the challenges of regulating AI use in the sector was identified, both in general to ensure that the education system uses high quality AI services, and specifically in areas such as the right of appeal for learners in high stakes assessment.

Secondly, the workshop considered the myriad challenges when it comes to deploying AI services and approaches. These included threats to EDI (equity, diversity and inclusion), trust in the automation within the system (especially after TAGs), costs of the services and the equipment needed to deploy them, and difficulties introducing new approaches to the traditional and rigid assessment system.

Thirdly, this FE Collective group looked at the challenge of supporting the fantastic people in the sector including teachers and learners to maintain creativity, agency, diversity, and the all-important personal relationship between learner and educator.

Despite these challenges, the FE Collective were excited by the opportunities and solutions that AI in Assessment brings, reported Gray, and the potential improvements to the experience of learning and working in the sector that it may bring.

Gray said: "The potential to personalise curricula using real-time formative feedback is tantalising. Combined with an AI coach that supports and

# 1 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: WORKING GROUP

nurtures individuals, a private school experience at public schools feels within reach. Learning from systems currently working at scale, for example Duolingo, to develop language skills, would be a good first step.

“In addition, building on the the work currently taking place to harness the power of generative AI in creating fair and consistent formative and summative assessment solutions seems sensible.”

## Consistency and fairness in assessment

“There was excitement in this session”, said Gray, “about the opportunity to increase consistency and fairness in the assessment system whilst making it agile and responsive to learner and employer needs, as long as this work doesn’t take away from the need to improve the reliability of the current system. AI appears to be a good candidate to instil higher levels of quality control and continuous improvement in the assessment system”, he said, “by surfacing and interpreting patterns of behaviour that would otherwise remain hidden.”

“The Collective hoped that the growth of AI in the world would speed up reform so that instead of trying only to improve the current system, we imagine and operationalise a new and better one,” said Gray.

Whilst some areas of assessment may need to look and feel like todays, for example in language and maths skills, there are opportunities to imagine teaching, learning and assessment that includes AI and acknowledges the value it can bring to learning and work, reported Gray. Increasing the AI literacy of the wider education workforce, including leaders, would be a good place to start. There was also hope that by learning about AI bias, learners will be able to recognise their own cognitive biases and how to use this knowledge to increase inclusion.

As we begin to embrace AI in assessment, as we must to ensure we keep up with the world of work that learners are headed for, it feels like trust is the fundamental tenet on which to build a new system. Building trust in AI, through transparency, an openness about mistakes, a drive to augment not replace people, becomes the first step towards success, whatever that looks like.



AI and the future of assessment

Moderated by Dr Gray Mytton,  
Assessment Innovation Manager, NCFE

# 1 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: **WORKING GROUP**

## **Unravelling ethics and impact of AI in Skills and Work**

Questions awaiting this workshop group, moderated by OneFile's David Harwood, included:

- How do we harness AI to shape personalised learning?
- What are the key ethical issues in AI threatening the integrity of FE?
- How do we manage the ethical risks associated with AI use?

### **Collective Voices**

"The frequency of innovation has increased so that new skills are needing to be developed more quickly. How do we make people competent critical thinkers?"

**"Generative AI can help us meet most of the challenges, but the ethical issues must be considered"**

"Humans have common sense. They can use this to assess AI outputs"

**"It's not about automation,  
it's about augmentation.  
Keep humans in the loop"**

"Be more transparent about how the AI makes its decisions"



This workshop brought together a diverse group of educators, technologists, and stakeholders. The aim was to explore the complex relationship between artificial intelligence (AI), ethics, and skill development.

Here, David gives the key takeaways from the workshop, encompassing challenges, opportunities, proposed solutions, and actionable steps.

### **The ethical challenges of AI**

Several recurring themes emerged during the workshop, highlighting the challenges of integrating AI in education and the workplace. A primary concern was the prevalence of bias within AI systems. Attendees emphasised removing bias and ensuring fairness in AI algorithms to prevent discriminatory outcomes. The potential for false positives in AI decision-making was also acknowledged.

Another critical concern that participants discussed was the use of AI in meetings, notably when recorded, which raised substantial concerns about the potential breach of personal data. Ensuring robust privacy safeguards in AI implementations, particularly in data-intensive contexts, was deemed essential.

The traditional, linear education delivery was challenged as inadequate for learners at various stages of their educational journey. AI was identified as a potential solution to address



# 1 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: WORKING GROUP

this challenge by providing personalised learning experiences.

The workshop participants recognised that not just learners require education in the new AI-driven educational landscape. Still, other stakeholders, such as parents, must be informed and engaged to provide adequate support and guidance.

The successful integration of AI into educational and workplace settings necessitates comprehensive staff training to ensure that educators and support personnel can effectively leverage AI technologies.

A recurrent concern was the potential for AI data models to perpetuate or exacerbate existing biases, highlighting the importance of addressing bias during the development of these models.



Unravelling ethics and impact  
of AI in Skills and Work

Moderated by David Harwood,  
Chief Technology Officer at OneFile..

## 1 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

# TOP 10 TAKEAWAYS

1. AI can support teaching by being vivid, immediate, and personalised. AI can provide bespoke learning, engage students, take some of the drudgery out of learning and give immediate feedback.

2. The numerous risks of AI use in further education include known risks, such as job displacement, inaccuracy of content, exacerbating existing biases and deliberate misinformation, and unknown risks, such as the erosion of human agency.

3. Building trust in AI, through transparency, an openness about mistakes, a drive to augment not replace people, becomes the first step towards success, whatever that looks like.

4. There is the potential to personalise curricula using real-time formative feedback. Combined with a supportive AI coach, a private school experience at public schools feels within reach.

5. A final note from Paul Grainger, in his summing up: "Education will be vital in moving us towards a just transition to a society, where the wealth and power generated by AI are distributed fairly, in an ethos of the responsible use of resources."

6. FE and Skills sector must engage and work with science, innovation and technology more closely to ensure the skills element is central to the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and super computing.

7. As the Government department responsible for standards in education, Ofsted needs to provide guidance on safeguarding and the use of AI.

8. Lessons on data use and safeguarding can be learned from our experiences with social media. These lessons can inform the safe use of AI and the fast-emerging Organoid Intelligence (OI). Among those safeguarding issues is the ownership of data.

9. Let's invest in training to get best use of AI in further education. The recent funding announcement from DfE was encouraging, but how will this impact FE and Skills? We need training for educators and leaders, on generative AI for creating content to lesson planning and 'co-bots' that reduce admin time.

10. AI skills are concentrated in a small number of locations in England. We need to consider the geography of skills and resources and how this goes hand in hand with the future of local skills plans.

*\* These were just a selection of the many ideas, provocations and innovations shared during the scene-setter, panel discussion and workshops, and we cannot capture them all in this report. It's why there's no substitution for being at an FE Collective event!*

## CALL TO ACTION

### DEVELOP INFORMATION THAT GUIDES THE FE AND SKILLS SECTOR ON THE RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF USE OF AI IN LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

## THE POST-SCRIPT - RISHI AND ELON

The timing of the FE Collective gives us a unique opportunity. The FE Collective, looking at the impact of AI on skills and the jobs of the future, Investing in the sector of the future and exploring Progression, was just over two weeks before the Global AI Safety Summit at Bletchley, in England. Here, representatives from 28 nations, including the US and China, signed the 'Bletchley Declaration' to collaborate to research safety concerns around the world's most capable AI models. The Bletchley Declaration explores threats and opportunities, in the same spirit as the FE Collective, through collaboration and cooperation. This was an event that grabbed headlines, not least for the interview by UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak of tech billionaire Elon Musk.





COLLECTIVE

NCFE

EDUCATION & TRAINING  
FOUNDATION

The background features a light blue dashed grid over a dark blue gradient. Several line graphs in light blue, green, and yellow are plotted across the grid, with some points highlighted by glowing blue circles. At the bottom, a series of vertical bars of varying heights are shown in a light blue color.

# INVESTING IN THE SECTOR OF THE FUTURE



## 2 INVESTING IN THE SECTOR OF THE FUTURE

## SCENE SETTER

BY CHARLES MCINTYRE, CEO, IBIS CAPITAL

Further education is an integral element of mainstream education in Britain, but investment in FE is increasingly scarce to come by, say Principals. Funding the Sector of the Future was one of our first FE Collective sessions because investment is so fundamental to the success of our sector today and in years to come.

Its focus at the conference, on the government element, at least, was arguably more than justified by previously published evidence. A report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies found that 16–19 funding in England, had experienced the biggest drop of any education sector, with funding per student FE and sixth-form colleges falling by 12% in real terms between 2010–11 and 2019–20.

If the level of funding dropped, the conference heard, in such a convoluted system with countless hoops to jump through, the college Principal's financial challenges was an unenviable one.

Charles McIntyre invests and advises on edtech, and linked the first session, on AI, to private sector funding. Charles examined the areas where private investment in technology for education would be needed. There will be a transformative shift from AI to OI (Organoid Intelligence), he said, and it will have a significant impact on education, skills and the workplace.

Inhibitors to investment in education technology, however, included the time it takes for tech to triumph in regulated industries, and the shortness of its investment cycle as new technologies overtake established ones, he said. More clarity was needed for private investors on the "direction of travel" with the use of technology in education.

Asked by Gavin what were the practical things the sector could do to attract investment, Charles said: "There needs to be a clarity of vision. Once you have a collective view of the end vision, you can then draw people in to give a direction. And what that does is gives more certainty to the wider investment community, to what the aim is, therefore what the measurement should be, where the focus of that investment should go, on a practical level, at the grassroots.

"So thinking about how today practically can be valuable, use today to come to a view of what that vision of the future should be. We've got the tools, we've got the technology, but what really lies underneath that is having the people who've



Watch Charles McIntyre's interview at the FE Collective [here](#).

got the will, the ambition, and the funding to help make that happen. It's bringing those people together with that common view, which can take us into the next decade, and you can coalesce funding around that."

The panel discussion to follow, and the afternoon workshop conversations, were to examine the many different sources of investment needed, both private and public, and it was agreed that compelling information on returns on investment would be essential. Investors, public and private, needed to clearly see the dividends in clear, measurable progress.

Speaking after his scene-setting and the panel discussion, Charles said: "We were able to look at both policy and strategy, but we also had very practical elements from people at the coalface in terms of delivering training and education.

"What does investing mean? What was clear today is that there is a very big difference between private sector investing and government funding, and the reason that that becomes relevant to this topic is that the access to government funding is one that is very convoluted and complex, and one which means that the operator and deliverers of this type of training I think struggle to find how best to respond to it. In the private sector it tends to be clearer because it is about looking at where you can measure deliverable outcomes.

"Investment in the sector is badly needed, we are short on the government side in terms of access to funding, the private sector is looking for a clear direction of travel on where it can invest, and what we need to work on is to how to get that message out there, of where you can get real return on investment."

## 2 INVESTING IN THE SECTOR OF THE FUTURE

# PANEL DISCUSSION

### Our Panellists

The scene was set for the debate on how we can tackle further education funding.

Ahead of the session, NCFE Head of Policy Michael Lemin had highlighted the impact of political and economic uncertainty on the level of investment in FE. He told FE News: "We find ourselves in a position where we must be realistic. If we are to seriously engage with Government, it is not a case of asking for further investment, but rather looking carefully at where existing resources are deployed, and thinking about whether we can do things differently within existing budgets."

Into the session, Michael said funding was likely to come in the current envelope. Both major political parties were applying the same fiscal rules, with tight restrictions on borrowing. A sector-wide push was needed. "The FE Collective has real, real potential," he said. "We often work in isolation in FE. If the people in our sector can coalesce around five recommendations to government, it's such a powerful voice."

**Watch Michael Lemin's interview at the FE Collective [here](#).**

MK Colleges Group Principal and CEO Sally Alexander agreed that the sector needed to raise its voice. Responding to an audience question on funding, she replied: "We need to raise our profile and understanding of what we do as a sector to attract investment." Using a project with Red Bull as an example, she continued: "For me, it's about making sure you are helping organisations to achieve their aims and achieve what they need to achieve."

Now is our time, but funding is complicated, said Sally. "We are balancing lagged funding, a changing and more devolved AEB (adult education budget) landscape and mixed signals on whether colleges should be trying to diversify income," she said. The pandemic and cost of living crisis had disrupted typical consumer behaviour, said Sally, making it harder to predict income streams.

Meanwhile, changing government priorities for education and an election without an obvious outcome means that political will is also hard to plan for, she added.

We have a strange funding system with lagged funding, said Sally. While lagged funding can bring



*Jill Whittaker, Michael Lemin, Sally Alexander and Charles McIntyre on stage at the FE Collective.*

financial stability, it stifles growth, and we are part of this country's growth solution. "What other business could be expected to grow by 20% without clear sight of what increased income that growth would generate," she said. Numbers of 16–18-year-olds are expected to grow by 30% in some areas over the next five years, which will test the sector enormously. "We need to commit to long-term capital investment," said Sally. "We need those estates to motivate our learners."

**Watch Sally Alexander's interview at the FE Collective [here](#).**

Jill Whittaker, Managing Director at HIT Training Ltd, saw investment in technology as key, but our track record as a sector in harnessing the potential of EdTech had been "disappointing".

"Where I see the greatest value of emerging technologies is in reducing the day-to-day drudgery of my people and their clients – freeing up time currently taken by administration (probably about 25% of their time) to allow them to get on with delivering, and receiving, a great personal learning experience," said Jill.

"For me, investing in the future isn't just about AI, technology and machine-led strategies. Humans need to be looked after, nurtured, and engaged in the businesses that pay their wages. People matter."

**Jill expands on the theme in her interview at the FE Collective– [Watch here](#).**

## 2 INVESTING IN THE SECTOR OF THE FUTURE

So, from government policy and demonstrating ROI to investing in the right skills. "What can we do with so-called 'soft skills, such as communication skills, attitudes, behaviours and analytical skills," asked Jill.

This was a session that underscored the consensus held by many in the sector that investment in FE is not in relation to its clear value to society and the economy. Commonality emerged during the first FE Collective on a number of issues including this one. And, in simplest terms, the funding of FE is a question of trust, panelists agreed. "We need trust in the system itself to deliver what is needed," said Michael Lemin. "The Government's approach to qualification design, the micro-managing, it's not helpful."

Last question to the panel before the next session: What is top of your Wishlist, following today's discussion? "One of the biggest challenges we have in the sector at the moment is parity of funding for our staffing and we can't do anything if we haven't got the staff," said Sally. Michael agreed that "we can do everything else but if we don't have the right teacher in front of the learner, it won't work". Jill ended with the key question of measurement, and "ensuring outcomes are defined properly".





**Thinking about AI and Investing in the Sector of the Future**  
The Studio, Birmingham  
17 October 2023

**Investing in the Sector of the future**



Charles McIntyre



Michael Lemin



Sally Alexander



Jill Whittaker

Watch the 'Investing in the Sector of the Future' session at the FE Collective here.



## 2 INVESTING IN THE SECTOR OF THE FUTURE

# WORKING GROUP

Further education is an integral element of mainstream education in Britain, so what gives with the funding?

Our scene-setting and panel discussion shed light on the scarcity and complexity of FE funding. On Government investment, ahead of the conference, a report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies had been highlighted. It found that 16-19 funding in England had experienced the biggest drop of any education sector, with funding per student FE and sixth-form colleges falling by 12% in real terms between 2010-11 and 2019-20.

We heard in the panel discussion from Sally Alexander on the funding hoops to jump through for colleges. Charles McIntyre's scene-setting revealed issues with private investment in FE also, most notably the lack of a clear direction of travel with technology.

## Investing in the Sector of the Future

So, as the FE Collective headed for this workshop session, moderated by Lou Mycroft, here were some of the questions awaiting:

- If the world of education and work are changing, what do we need to consider for the investing in the sector of the future?
- Do we need to rethink the current funding models?
- How do we attract more investment into the FE sector to make it fit for developing the skills of the now and the future?
- Does colleges becoming part of the public sector impact the amount of investment or funding models for the future?
- Are we investing in the right areas?



## Collective Voices

**"In the current system we have a parent government treating the sector like children. What would it be like if we could flip that and co-create with the experience we have collectively?"**

**"We are in such a rush to rush to the future we forget what we already have learned..."**

**"Industry needs to have more say over what is deliverable through the levy pot"**

**"Instead of constantly looking forward, we should also recognise the value of the experience we have in our sector"**

**"More collaboration is needed between FE institutions and businesses"**

## 2 INVESTING IN THE SECTOR OF THE FUTURE

# WORKING GROUP

Summing up this debate, trust and autonomy were fundamental issues, said Lou. At the heart of both is a relationship with government which plays out as parent/child, infantilising us and undermining autonomy and trust. "What if we co-created policy as equals?" we asked. "What might that look like?"

### This is Lou's report of the session:

One of our numbers elegantly articulated the paradox of our sector: "Because we'll do anything to support anyone, people can't work out what we are."

### We need to:

- Divorce FE policy and funding from short-term political cycles, as with Germany's model
- Rebrand FE in our own words as a way of stepping into our power

Out of these strategic drivers flowed everything else. The possibility of creating a funding methodology which doesn't exhaust us and take our energies away from the work that matters. Developing qualifications which don't make us – or students – hostages to fortune when the end-point assessment isn't met (much like the university model of offering postgraduate credits). We are proud to be accountable as a public service, but the way in which we are currently monitored makes us anxious and risk-averse.

Short-termism is a risk that we don't have the power to fix in the current model. Policy independence would provide a stability FE is thirsty for. We know how to address the complex issues we face, but under the weight of rapid change and scrutiny we find it impossible to trust our own judgement and self-worth.

### Rebranding the profession

Not only are we confused about qualification routes but families are too. How can we better facilitate young people making decisions that will affect their whole lives from the middle of churning and ideological change? We have to rebrand the profession. How can we make FE more attractive to a potential workforce? Money matters, of course, but there is also much to do in changing perceptions and taking practical action to ameliorate the often brutal realities of workload and pace.

"We didn't make a good enough job of apprenticeship reform in 2017," said one of our numbers, "so it's a messy relationship between qualifications and occupational competence." We value partnerships with employers but FE policy ties their hands; the levy needs to open as a 'Skills Levy', enabling employers to have choice, meaning they are more likely to invest.

We need a professional PR, not done to us but driven by ourselves.

We have to invest in the workforce we have. Career pathways are a mess. This underpins workforce churn, wellbeing and pay – and pits us against one another as employers. Genuine collaboration, which is anti-competitive by nature, is not a pipe dream; we might compete for students and staff in a local area but working collaboratively makes us all stronger.

In today's world, crisis is as inevitable as change. To work collectively is to work resiliently and it's the only way to tackle cycles of disinvestment and panic, regaining faith in our own judgement. Devolution offers meaningful opportunities, with the caveat that we have to find ways to embrace what's offered by multi-site organisations who don't easily find a place in the localism agenda.

The FE Collective brought people together to co-create new thinking. It has to continue. If we are a committed collective, who are anti-competitive in work, gather with other change-making communities in FE, we can add energy and insight to our endeavours."

*Moderated by Lou Mycroft,  
Changemaker, FE Constellations.*

Investing in the  
Sector of the Future



## 2 INVESTING IN THE SECTOR OF THE FUTURE



# TOP 10 TAKEAWAYS

1. Public funding of further education in the UK is complicated, convoluted and scarce, while private investment is hindered by a lack long-term clarity on direction of travel for use of technology.
  2. The lagged funding model of public investment brings stability but stifles growth in the sector.
  3. The key area for investment is the FE workforce. Humans need to be looked after, nurtured, and engaged in the businesses that pay their wages. People matter.
  4. Because FE will do anything to support anyone, people can't work out what the sector is. Further education needs to take ownership of its brand.
  5. Trust and autonomy are fundamental to the issues with FE investment, We must replace the parent-trust relationship with government to one in which the sector is an equal, trusted for its knowledge and understanding, and vision for the future of the sector.
  6. FE and Skills needs to be investment ready. And this means ready for investment from Government, the commercial and private sector, from employers and from international partners
  7. Modular, stackable skills can help meet the pace of change. These can contribute towards long-term courses, but the modular sections are also 'hot swap-able' to serve emerging skills needs.
  8. To build trust, we must take ownership of the FE and Skills brand. This should be sector-wide and led by the sector, not Government.
  9. We are crying out for a long-term and sustainable plan that doesn't constantly change, enabling us to collaborate and make strategic decisions together.
  10. Professionalisation of the sector means much more than investment in buildings or estates; it's about developing the educators, leaders and governance of the future. A Continuing Professional Development Strategy, potentially that is modular led and continuously updated, will support this.
- \* For more on the FE Collective's discussions on this and other topics tackled in Birmingham, visit the [FE Collective Hub here](#).*

## CALL TO ACTION

**GIVE MORE CLARITY ON THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF  
THE FE AND SKILLS SECTOR TO GIVE INVESTORS THE  
CONFIDENCE THEY NEED TO INVEST**





**PROGRESSION,  
IS THERE A  
BETTER WAY?**

## 3 PROGRESSION, IS THERE A BETTER WAY?

## SCENE SETTER

BY TOM BEWICK, CEO, ECCTIS



We live in an uncertain, volatile and complicated world and this country needs an education system that delivers a workforce up for the challenge. With upcoming elections in mind, and a rapidly changing workforce, the FE Collective's third and final scene-setter examined how we can develop a skills policy that is fit for purpose, but has the flexibility to adapt to the changes? At the same time, the UK has a productivity problem. We wanted to explore the causes and solutions. How can we look to improve this and develop the skills and policies to address UK productivity, to address skills gaps and to encourage continual improvement?

Scene-setter Tom Bewick invited the FE Collective to consider the three Ps of progression:

- Productivity – boosting the living standards and take-home pay for everyone, via re-skilling
- People – proper investment in workers, by both state and employers
- Performance of the sector – shift the debate on from Whitehall micro-management towards a higher-trust skills ecosystem

Productivity had flatlined since 2010 as wages stagnated since the 2008 recession, said Tom. At the same time, adult FE spending had dropped by two thirds since 2003–2004. To meet these challenges, the sector since 2010 has been faced with an increase in the regulatory burden. We now had a 'low-trust skills system', said Tom. "We have a very low-trust model, a top-down approach," he said. "We know the solutions for our young people are in the hearts and minds of our teachers and educators."

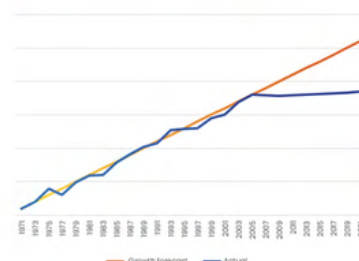
Tom had co-authored the report Running to Stand Still: Why decades of skills reform have failed to shift the dial on UK productivity and investment in training. Setting the scene, he invited the FE Collective to consider how we can shape an inclusive model that works for everyone, from learner to employer.

Source:ONS

Figure 5

UK productivity growth since 1971

With trend continuation from 2008 onwards



## We are on the frontline

Speaking to FE News before this third FE Collective session, Tom said: "The session here today is about progress for the sector. How do we progress in terms of productivity, because we have an economy that has flatlined over the last 20 years? Wages have grown by a measly 4% compared to the 40% in the 30 years previous to 2008.

"It's about people, how do we invest in the people of the sector. What public investment do we need. We have actually seen that decline for adults by two thirds since 2010. And how do we, in terms of employers, what investment do they need to make in people so that we get that productivity and skills escalator working again for the benefit of everyone again?

"Finally, it's about the sector, because we are the educators at the end of the day. We are on the frontline caring and nurturing, enabling people that meets that skills and productivity challenge. So really, in this session, what we will be looking at is progress, yes in a philosophical way, but also how do we ground it in the economy so that what we have going forward for our young people, but also for adults in the workforce, is an economy that is growing in the interests of everyone, and not just a few at the top."

Watch Tom Bewick's interview at the FE Collective [here](#).

### 3 PROGRESSION, IS THERE A BETTER WAY?

# PANEL DISCUSSION

Tom Bewick, Chief Executive at Ecctis, Katerina Kolyva, CEO of Education and Training Foundation (ETF), International Career Development Specialist Deirdre Hughes.

The panel discussion that followed captured the complexities of this huge topic. From partnership working, to providing the right skills for individuals, to use of technology, to national labour market policy. Prior to conference, the FE Collective had been asked to consider policy and productivity, careers advice and developing the educators and leaders of the future.

Katerina Kolyva, CEO of Education and Training Foundation (ETF), said: "Progression for me is about workforce, it's about how do we ensure that all the professionals that serve the further education and skills sector progress in their own careers, take ownership for their own individual progression, but also recognise that they are part of a wider system.

"Taking that perspective, it is how all of us need to start operating and thinking as part of a wider system. It's not about online versus campus, it's not about private or public, it's all of those things. It's about how do we navigate and translate our work, our role, to address the issues."

**Watch Katerina Kolyva's interview at the FE Collective here.**

The FE Collective heard that we have a system that is under-valued, under-funded and under-trusted, but is over-regulated and over-engineered, the FE Collective heard.

#### **Personalised support in local communities**

Career development specialist Deirdre Hughes invited the FE Collective to consider the importance of career development in progression. "Livelihoods matter", she said. We need to support individuals to reach their full potential, increase their wellbeing and income, and ideally provide study and work satisfaction. "As society and the world of work changes, developing confidence, skills and competencies will be essential," she said. "Technological solutions, such as AI, virtual gaming, chatbots and avatars may suit some people, but most will want some form of contact."

Consider careers advice and support, said Deirdre. "Where do people go for personalised

#### **Our panellists**



*Katerina Kolyva, Deirdre Hughes and Tom Bewick on stage at the FE Collective.*

support in local communities? What exists in their area? How do they access it? We have to move towards co-designed community and online spaces."

**Hear more from Deirdre Hughes on career development in her interview at the FE Collective here.**

Collaboration emerged as a key theme in this session. AI session scene-setter Paul Grainger joined this conversation to talk about interconnectedness. "It's about teams of people," he said. "Progression is a team effort."

The discussion turned to the use of AI and other technologies as drivers for progression in the sector, and highlighted here were the pros and the cons. An attendee asked the panel: "The job ads seemed to be asking for highly advanced skills, maybe PhDs. What can FE do to help students along the AI road?"

Deirdre said: "I would invite us to get into the real life understanding of what men and women are looking for. We can use AI as social technology, and it can be used for good. It doesn't have to be disruptive."

#### **We need systems thinking**

So how can FE play its part in shifting the dial on productivity at a national level? "One of the biggest challenges is to turn around an economic model that is focused on labour supply than



### 3 PROGRESSION, IS THERE A BETTER WAY?

quality of work,” said Tom. “If you focus only on the size of the cake and not on skills and investment in quality of those jobs, the slice stays the same even though the cake is getting bigger. We only grow the supply. This country is not going to get any more prosperous than it is, and we stagnate into becoming a middle income country.”

“The marketisation of education has let the market rip and let’s see what the effects are,” said Deirdre. “We should not underestimate the effects of what that has done. The mistake that has been made is that the professionals at the chalk face have not been listened to or consulted. You are all professionals in this room and you know your subject, and we have to get the public and private partnership reignited.”

Katerina had spoken at the outset of the session about system thinking and it was a theme, in the discussion and audience questions, that together we must adopt a systemic approach. A Slido participant said, “Dr Kolyva mentioned ‘systems thinking’. Is this in the current FE curriculum? If not, should it be?”

Katerina said: “Our issues are global issues, so how do we use progression as a theme in terms of our thinking, and how do indeed use systems thinking, and understand that we are part of a wider system in our leadership and in our approach, so that we can take a more politically astute approach, and look at relationships and problem solving in a slightly different way.

“We are all individuals, individual professionals, so in terms of progression, we want to be looking both internally, in our ourselves, what do we need for our own individual progression, whether it’s career progression, learning progression, system thinking progression, or indeed AI progression, just to give some examples. But being part of the system means we also need the system to progress to be able to support us. The idea of professionalism is about both taking ownership of our own learning, our own career development, whilst at the same time recognising that the system we operate within must be one that is conducive for us to progress.

Much inspiration in this session for the workshops that were to follow.



### 3 PROGRESSION, IS THERE A BETTER WAY?

# WORKING GROUP

This was a session about the future of FE. We live in an uncertain, volatile and complicated world and this country needs an education system that delivers a workforce up for the challenge. With upcoming elections in mind, and a rapidly changing workforce, the group in this workshop were asked how can we develop a skills policy that is fit for purpose, but has the flexibility to adapt to the changes? At the same time, the UK has a productivity problem. How can we look to improve this and develop the skills and policies to address UK productivity, to address skills gaps and to encourage continual improvement?

## Policy and Productivity

Questions facing this FE Collective group, moderated by Chris Cherry

- How do we deliver a continuous and agile skills system to meet the needs of the jobs of today and the future?
- How do we raise productivity?
- What are the main skills and productivity challenges in the next decade?
- If you were the new Secretary of State for Education, what would be your priority policy areas in FE?
- If we can we learn from the FE systems of other countries, which ones? What lessons can we learn from beyond our shores?



## Collective Voices

"Can we establish 'quick starter' training for new employees made up of stackable credit that can make up larger qualifications or apprenticeships?"

**"We can empower learners with up-to-date information on their strength areas and personalised opportunities for skills development"**

"Let's reverse or put a stop to all current reforms and have genuine consultation, utilising the experience of the sector"

"We need a genuinely independent education unit that isn't politically linked, and simplified funding streams and reduced bureaucracy"





### 3 PROGRESSION, IS THERE A BETTER WAY?

# WORKING GROUP

This FE Collective group first considered the challenges facing progress in FE in terms of policy and productivity. These included:

- The trust (or lack of) in the sector. Some poor providers have meant that funding trust is never apparent and this places disproportionate administrative burdens on the delivery side of provision
- Policies are short term and not strategic enough to allow time to deliver, embed and evaluate. Turbulence in leadership at the national level erodes ability to deliver
- Funding is insufficient. Every area says this but for FE, said one FE Collective member, "the unequal value of equivalent programmes with schools is marked and insulting to FE"
- FE is still asked to remediate the failings in other areas of education – schools, employer training decisions and policy programmes such as traineeships and Kickstart legacies
- We have competing agencies and confusion over remits. It was argued that Ofsted was not offering any leadership beyond inspections – e.g. no support for follow up, action plans or remediation

Chris's group then moved onto opportunities. "Can we rethink post-14 education", the group asked, "aligning it to skills needs, other than skills wants?" Turning their attention to the likelihood of a General Election in 2024, a new government might offer fresh thinking for stale policies, it was suggested. And what about AI in assessment? This can support the removal of low level admin tasks and increase confidence and trust.

The group moved into solutions mode, suggesting that a genuinely independent education board/agency is created to oversee the mess of current agencies and the confused remits and occasional operation outside of remit. We need to invest in the right technology to ensure that teaching and learning staff spend their time doing just that – increase trust and allow the professional to do their job.

#### Actions?

- Create an Education Board/Agency to roll up the jumble of stuff (the quagmire of quangos)
- Identify the strategic pinch points of trust in the sector and remove the burden of constant justification of every action
- Create a clear channel to policy, and be inside and not outside the decision making process



## Policy and Productivity

*Moderated by Chris Cherry,  
Director, Red Cherry Projects Ltd*



### 3 PROGRESSION, IS THERE A BETTER WAY?

# WORKING GROUP

Further education needs skilled educators and leaders, so how do we develop the FE talent pipeline?

FE plays a central role in providing life opportunities for all, and it delivers skilled, enthusiastic people into the workplace. Attracting, nurturing and retaining talent is one of the key challenges for our sector as an employer. In this workshop on progression, NCFE's Philip Le Feuvre led a discussion on how to create and sustain an FE workforce that can inspire, motivate and prepare our learners for the world of work. This group looked at integrating careers advice and guidance, and how it's communicated to learners, parents and employers. And how can we ensure choice for entry level students, returners to work and the economically inactive?

## Careers advice and developing the educators and leaders of the future

Questions for Philip and his group included:

- What can we do differently to attract talent into the sector?
- Is careers advice for FE under-selling the sector we work in?
- What other areas – mentoring, coaching, sponsorships – can strengthen the talent pipeline into FE?
- What do we need to do to integrate Careers advice and guidance into policy, sector thinking and to encourage lifelong learning and continual professional development?
- How can careers advice and developing leaders and educators of the future work hand in hand?
- How can careers advice encourage progression and productivity?



## Collective Voices

"The challenges with careers advice include access to information, regulation and safeguarding and unclear pathways"

"There are real opportunities to innovate around careers advice and develop frameworks on what is quality assured"

**"We need a greater focus on wellbeing in careers"**

"From the employer's point of view, if there was some sort of system where young people could input their qualifications, employers can identify those profiles and maybe we can start filling some of these skills shortages"

"Let's re-engage with those workers aged 50+. We need a better dialogue with adults about mid-life careers"

### 3 PROGRESSION, IS THERE A BETTER WAY?

# WORKING GROUP

This is Philip's report of his workshop session:

We started the session by talking about the FE workforce, but taking a step back, we quickly recognised this is a much bigger issue than just FE. A lot of the themes that we explored are also relevant across the beneficiaries that we support.

Some of the key themes that came up were around funding (including a lack of alignment between different funding pots), the huge disparities in information available, which ultimately affects the advice young people receive, and the role that parents and other stakeholders play when offering 'impartial' careers advice and guidance.

The most powerful tool discussed was chatbots – using gaming, artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) to offer careers advice and guidance. This can be beneficial to all ages but incredibly effective when trying to engage young people.

A range of AI chatbots are already available, but the next step is to look at how we can support better alignment between different institutions, schools and colleges to access these chatbots and know which ones are recommended for use in education.

We may need the Government to provide a framework or guidance on which tools are effective for different types of learners and of course, we can't forget about the support needed for advisors as well. It's not just the individual accessing the chatbot but we also need to explore how someone uses the outputs of it, including parents.

Continuing with the technology theme, we thought about the power of having a learner record that stays with you for life, which we know has been tried before. Some people in the group remembered the workbook they used to have and took everywhere. In the modern era, there's an opportunity to think about how technology could be used for a similar record of achievement.

#### Reframing careers advice

The next focus area was around reframing careers advice and guidance, and how it means something different to everyone. It's ok to think of a career as a livelihood, and too often we prioritise those who want to progress but not everyone looks at their working life that way.

Another area our group picked up on was that traditional trades need to be given a better profile. They offer great opportunities for young people, progression and self-employment, and we know that the university route is not the best option for every learner.

Finally, reengaging people who are aged over 50 is a massive opportunity for us in terms of careers advice and guidance. We can do this by focusing on transferrable, soft skills to remove the fear factor that still exists around transitioning careers and moving sectors and roles.

In summary, the main thing is the need to support people to make the choices that are right for them, both for their personal needs and their wellbeing. Careers advice and guidance should provide people of all ages with the appropriate help to be able to make informed decisions, but it's time to think differently in terms of how people want to access that support in the modern world.



Careers Advice

Moderated by Philip Le Feuvre,  
Chief Operating Officer at NCFE

### 3 PROGRESSION, IS THERE A BETTER WAY?



## TOP 10 TAKEAWAYS

1. We need to consider the three Ps of progress in FE – productivity (boosting the living standards and take-home pay for everyone, via re-skilling), people (proper investment in workers) and performance (shift towards a higher-trust skills ecosystem).

2. Let's start operating and thinking as part of a wider system. It's not about online versus campus, it's not about private or public, it's all of those of things.

3. Where do people go for personalised support in local communities? More information and advice is needed help people access support where they live. "We have to move towards co-designed community and online spaces".

4. The creation of an independent education board or agency, it was argued, would bring leadership and clarity, removing the "quagmire of quangos".

5. With careers advice, we must support people to make the choices that are right for them, both for their personal needs and their wellbeing. And it's time to think differently in terms of how people want to access that support in the modern world.

6. Trust in the different part of the FE and Skills ecosystem needs to be built for real progression. Most importantly, we need more trust and less micro-management from Government and Civil

Service, to shape a sector that can support productivity, continuous improvement and social justice.

7. We can harness technology to enhance careers advice and show the different strands of work, from permanent to freelance. This needs to link to tools such as AI, that can show the individual which skills they require to fulfil their education and career ambitions.

8. Professionalisation of the sector is key to its progress. Give the educators, leaders and governance of the future clear guidance on the progression routes, and encourage them in modular CPD routes to continually update their skills, and move from competence to excellence.

9. By taking control of its brand, FE and Skills can deliver a long-term strategic plan that develops future skills needs for the jobs of the future. By 'leaning into the power it has', the sector can deliver a productivity roadmap that is agile and adaptive to the ever-evolving world of work.

10. By using systems thinking, and understanding that we are part of a wider system in our leadership and in our approach, we can take a more politically astute approach.

*\* Were you at the FE Collective in Birmingham? If so, and there was a key take-away you would like to share, please get in touch [here](#). We want your voice to be heard.*

## CALL TO ACTION

**TRUST THE FE AND SKILLS SECTOR AND GIVE IT THE  
AUTONOMY AND RESOURCES IT NEEDS TO SHAPE  
ITS LONG-TERM FUTURE**



FE COLLECTIVE OCTOBER 2023

# FINAL WORD . . . UNTIL NEXT TIME

This report aimed to capture the many conversations at the first FE Collective conference, but also the sector's common voice. In such a mature but vibrant and diverse sector, there will always be differences in opinion on how to tackle the issues. FE, however, is a close-knit sector, that is fiercely proud of the role it plays in society and in underpinning the skills needs of UK plc. To this, the sector also reaches consensus on many of the critical challenges it faces. We heard that agreement loud and clear in Birmingham on the 17th of October 2023. It needs a stronger, collective voice and to own its brand. Above all, it needs to be trusted.

The final words go, first, to headline sponsor NCFE's Chief Operating Officer Philip Le Feuvre, and then to FE News CEO Gavin O'Meara.

Philip said: "One of my key takeaways from the FE Collective is that we need to support people to adapt to a rapidly and increasingly changing environment. This means helping them to understand how to analyse information, how to question and challenge, how to build data literacy, and also how to be resilient to change and ensure they're not scared of it.

"Government plays a critical role in this, but we also need to create greater trust in the sector to do its job. Let's commit to always seizing opportunities to collaborate, because when we work together as a collective, we are stronger, and we can advocate much more effectively with a single clear vision. We need to collectively bargain for our needs and for change that we feel is right. Coming together to work in ways like we have during the FE Collective and build from these rich discussions will allow us to create plans for our sector to succeed, ultimately supporting learners to achieve."

Gavin said: "If you were not at the FE Collective, you missed out. The atmosphere was just awesome, everyone working together, sharing ideas, innovating, egos left at the door, or the station, as everyone collaborated and new friendships and partnerships were made. It was awesome.

"The sector needs to come together and it needs to have a united voice, but we also need to know where to go, and I think the first FE Collective



helped us to work out what is the direction of travel and what is our voice and where do we need to be going next.

"The FE Collective has been really interesting. We have been able to get so many different parts of the eco-system together, so we've had investment bankers, people who are interested in the development of skills in the FE workforce and the labour market, college principals, training providers, awarding bodies. It has just been brilliant to connect them in different ways, to share ideas, share solutions and give everyone in the sector a voice. What's important is that we are looking at the opportunities, challenges and solutions, but also what are the actions.

"I think the most important thing for us as a sector, is to work out what we need to do to become more effective for learners, for the economy, to increase productivity, to look at what is the sector of the future, to look at what the skills are that we need to develop. All the people in the room at the first FE Collective have those expertise but it's been about bringing them together to share their insights. Together we are stronger.

**Watch Gavin O'Meara's interview  
at the FE Collective here.**

Thank you once again to our sponsors, NCFE and The Education and Training Foundation, for their invaluable support in making this event a success and to all exhibitors who attended.

To stay connected with the FE Collective community and learn more about our first conference, as well as upcoming events, initiatives, and discussions, please visit [fenews.co.uk](https://fenews.co.uk)

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