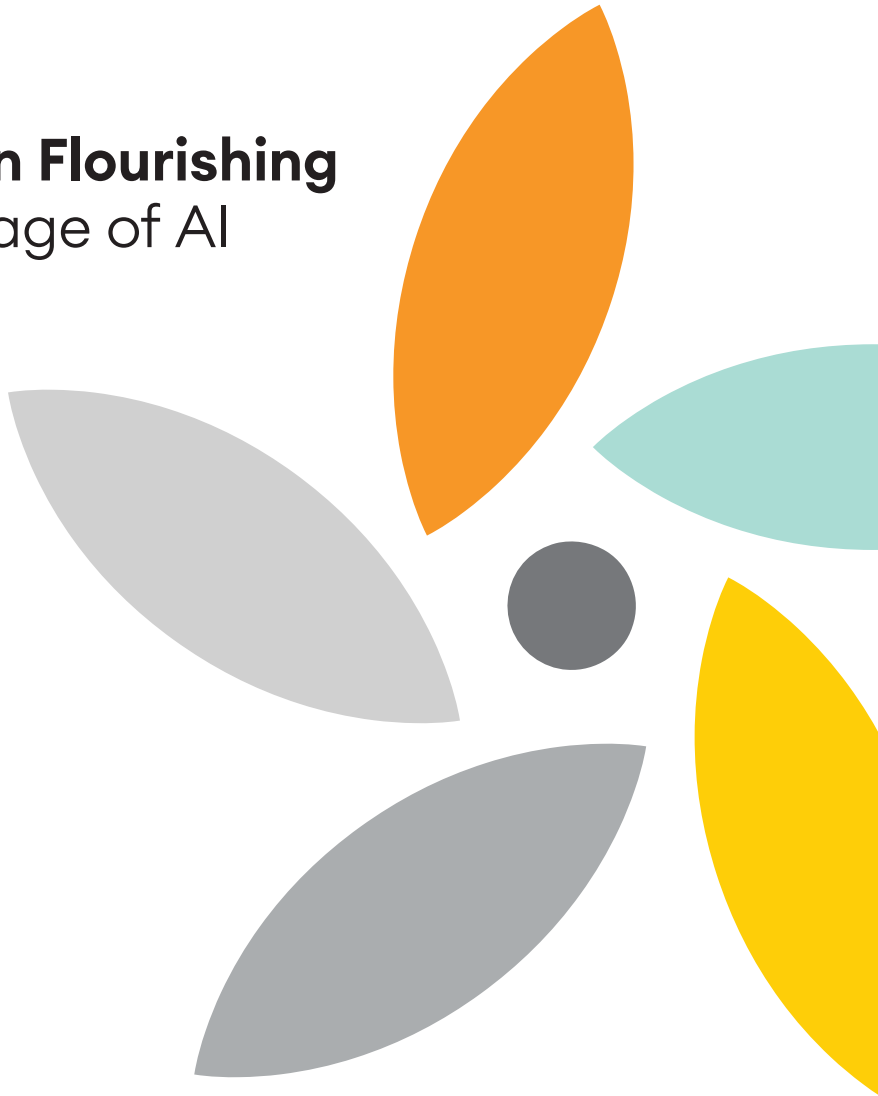


**Education for Human Flourishing
Campaign Launch**
12 October 2026

Human Flourishing in the age of AI



**WELLINGTON
COLLEGE
EDUCATION**

Welcome to Human Flourishing

We are asking you to come with us on a journey. Massive improvements have taken place in schools this century, including having the highest expectations of all young people regardless of background.



Anthony Seldon
Founding Director,
Wellington College Education

We're not advocating abandoning any of these gains. Instead, we are building on them in the light of radical economic, social and technological change to ensure that all young people leave school having had a positive, enriching experience, with the qualities, strengths and ambitions to lead positive lives at work and in society.

Schools are once-in-lifetime opportunities. The less privileged the child's background, the more vital schools are. Schools should be places of belonging where young people enjoy being, and where all their strengths and qualities are identified, nurtured and *lead out* – that is what the word 'education' means.

Schools should be safe, joyful and stimulating, where the young are exposed to the best that humans have been, said and done. Places where creativity, social interaction, challenge, curiosity, independent thought, scholarship and originality are all nurtured, alongside

practical and social skills. Schools should be where pupils learn who they are, and how they can help others and society.

Schools should affirm their pupils and help their character formation so they leave equipped to face whatever life throws at them, whether further or higher education, work and society. They should emerge robust, resilient, ambitious and adaptable, with a deep understanding of ethical conduct.

Schools should be attracting the very brightest, most committed and capable people of all ages into the teaching

profession, ensuring they experience great satisfaction and happiness so they want to remain in education throughout their careers.

Humanity though is under greater threat than at any previous point in history. An exaggeration? Think about it. 2025 saw higher numbers killed in war than in any previous year this century, with even higher numbers possible in 2026, poor harvests and heat may kill record numbers in 2027, rogue states and capricious leaders bully weaker nations, while AI poses threats to jobs, mental health and even the very continuation of human life in a recognisable form.

This uncertainty is an added reason why Human Flourishing needs to be implanted at the very heart of schools. Remarkable progress has been made in education this century, with many outstanding schools and groups, displaying an impressive determination to stretch every young person academically regardless of background.

The Human Flourishing model builds on all that is the best in schools currently. But it goes beyond it, prioritising deep understanding over passive knowledge acquisition, an appreciation of nature, of other people, of sports and the arts, and an understanding of how to act ethically rather than insensitively or robotically. It will ensure that all young people, not just 2/3 as at present, will leave school proud of what they have achieved, ready to contribute positively to building the good society we all want to inhabit.

Wellington College is working closely with our partner state schools to develop the best way to teach and assess Human Flourishing with rigour, precision and passion. Wellington has never seen itself as standing alone, but always working in partnership with state schools in this country and with our schools internationally, about which you will be hearing more today.



James Dahl

Master, Wellington College.

“Education systems have always prepared young people for a world which does not yet exist, but the future facing children today is evolving more radically than ever, and the frameworks which served the 20th century so well are not coping with the complexity of the 21st.

As school leaders, it is our moral responsibility to equip students with both the fundamental knowledge and skills to adapt to this changing world, and also the character and competencies to flourish in every aspect of adult life. Never has this mission been more important.

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert founded Wellington College to pioneer, to serve, to prepare students for the future, and to help shape a better world for all. Education for Human Flourishing provides the radical and transformative answer to the fundamental questions facing the world of education. This partnership, this innovative work is fundamental and we are wholly committed.”



Paula O'Reilly

Headteacher, Falinge Park High School.

“As Headteacher, every decision rests on one question: are we enabling young people to truly thrive, to live well and navigate an increasingly complex world?

All too often, policymakers perpetuate a false and inefficient divide through prioritising academic performance measures over the development of complex human competencies, when both endeavours are as critical. Academic success gives young people the tools to navigate life; core human competencies provide the dispositions and ethical grounding to stand tall within it.

Moreover, as rapid technological advances reshape society, we must intentionally embrace our creativity, empathy and moral judgement. We must teach pupils not just what to learn, but how to think deeply, care deeply and act purposefully.

By committing to Human Flourishing, we can fundamentally rebalance the purpose of schooling, looking beyond narrow metrics to equip all young people to shape their futures for personal and common good. We are in changed times and our collective civic duty is to fundamentally redefine how we prepare our young people to flourish and contribute.”

Our Manifesto

Foreword

Schools and universities are at an inflection point internationally as we enter the second quarter of the twenty-first century. AI is the principal not the only catalyst. Britain should be responding decisively yet is stuck in the slow lane. It is not providing leadership on AI and the future of education. Inertia, lack of imagination and vested interests are all responsible.

Education paradigms have seen periodic reimagining throughout history. The ecclesiastical-rich curriculum of the mediaeval years gave way to a classics-rich education from the fifteenth century and to a scientific, mathematical and modern language curriculum from the nineteenth. These earlier revolutions built on the best of the systems they replaced and that is exactly what we are proposing now. The present knowledge-rich focus on science, mathematics and language has powered the development of the modern world and will continue to lie at the heart of the Human Flourishing model we propose. If Britain is to retain and build on its position as the fifth biggest economy in the world, it needs to adapt its education system – and rapidly.

The Problem

The current education system has become unfit for purpose. It no longer equips young people for either work or life:

Work

The model is a rigid one designed to prepare young people for manual and cognitive jobs that are rapidly evolving and often disappearing. Merit is assessed by written examinations in a narrow range of subjects testing a limited range of human attributes. Employers want to see traditional mathematical, scientific and language skills, but with a wider range of qualities, including entrepreneurial, social, creative, problem-solving, presentational and resilience.

Life

Young people should leave school capable of conducting themselves with self-awareness, able to look after themselves mentally, physically, practically and emotionally, and to stand independently on their own feet. A successful school system requires young people by the time they leave school age to have become active thinkers and learners, to understand themselves and the world which they inhabit and be prepared to play a positive and productive role in society. The current model, based primarily on individual success or failure, passive thinking and the development of the intellect alone with little space for the arts, sport or team activity, is a major contributor to the crisis in mental health.

Why Now?

Changes in employment and the growing crisis in mental health constitute a powerful case for education change. The NEETS challenge and the advent of Artificial Intelligence make it unanswerable.



In Britain, the number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) has been rising inexorably. One in eight between 16-24 are NEET: young people who went to school for at least 12 years but are now unable to find meaningful occupation. Across Europe, only Romania has a higher proportion of NEETS than Britain. As Alan Milburn's interim report of May 2026 says, the education system must focus less heavily on qualifications and do more to prepare the young for transitions into the world of work. This is exactly the issue the Prime Minister aims to address, with a greater emphasis on pupil work experience in priority areas for local economies.

Artificial Intelligence is 10 times bigger than the industrial revolution and is happening 10 times quicker, as Demis Hassibis tells us. AI changes every aspect of school life, from teaching, learning and assessment to lesson preparation and delivery, investigation and research, from organisation of the classroom, the school day and curriculum to procurement, accounting and finance, from pupil wellbeing and safeguarding to transport, school security, leadership, governance and more. Rapid developments in AI mean that the integrity of tests and exams can no longer be trusted as it becomes progressively more difficult to assess whether assignments produced are genuinely the work of students: indeed, the current system is actively discriminating against those who do not game the system.

If AI presents a challenge to education processes, it presents a still greater challenge to education purposes. On an optimistic view, AI may one day unlock solutions to humanity's greatest problems. But what about today? Its incursion into every aspect of our lives is already undermining human meaning, identity and jobs. With the latest AI programmes able to invent and design their own successors, with little prospect that systems can be developed to stop rogue AI acting independently and possibly harmfully, and with claims that AI can already at least match humans in every single cognitive task, AI represents a threat to humanity itself. Peter Hyman puts the challenge well, ***"As machines become more capable, we need to lift our sights as educators and do all we can to maximise human capacity so that the next generation can shape what comes next."*** (Human Maxxing, RSA, September 2026)

The key questions are: what kind of education do we need to allow our young to optimise their talents and contributions when AI is taking over so many of the roles traditionally performed by human beings? What kind of education can restore human meaning for young people? What kind of education can help them control AI for human ends?

Young people in the UK need and deserve a new education direction.

The time is now.

The Vision

That future direction has been thankfully already produced for us with the Education for Human Flourishing framework published in November 2025 by the OECD. Through PISA, the OECD has become the most influential organisation in world education. PISA assesses 15-year-olds in Mathematics, Science and Reading (the foundational literacies). This new paradigm, developed with seven high-performing education systems and grounded in two decades of OECD research, calls for new competencies that build on foundational literacies but allow young people to flourish as individuals and contribute to flourishing communities and societies.

Education for Human Flourishing is about equipping young people for the mid-twenty-first century world. It will be true to the Latin derivation of the word 'education', meaning leading out what lies within. It will help the young discover their signature gifts and will nurture and develop them. It will provide deep intellectual challenge for young people, while also enriching them creatively with the arts, with sport and team exercise. It will help the young find fulfilment, meaning and accomplishment, through individual and group endeavour. It will prepare them for life and work – for indeed their whole lives. It will help them address the central questions that humans have asked since earliest times. Who am I? Where am I? What am I for?

The goal is to nurture the five competencies in every child. They go to the heart of what it means to be human in the age of AI.

- **Adaptive Problem-Solving** is about helping the young confront novel, complex challenges where routine solutions fail. It combines problem-solving processes (identifying problems, searching for information, exploring and implementing solutions) with planning and resilience. Adaptive problem-solving is vital to restoring a productive and competitive economy.

- **Ethical Competence** helps the young identify and respond to others' needs and interests, and to learn about responsibilities and duties as well as respecting other species and caring for the planet itself. It involves perceiving situations ethically, reasoning ethically, making ethical judgements, making ethical decisions and acting ethically. It combines acquiring self-knowledge and intellectual humility, the ability to balance diverse viewpoints and acting in the common good. Ethical competence is the key to cohesive and sustainable communities.

- **Understanding the World** balances the acquisition of knowledge with what that knowledge actually means and how it relates to other fields. It helps the young navigate complexity, restore meaning and combat prejudice. It enables them to recognise and reconcile major worldviews, often co-existing in a single classroom: from the indigenous (tribe, myth, integration with nature) to the pre-modern (religious and community norms), the modern (science, democracy and education itself) and the post-modern (critique without replacement). Understanding the world means escaping our social media bubbles. It allows us to re-connect to our fellow human beings.

- **Appreciating the World** is about seeing and responding to beauty both in nature and the arts. The philosopher Roger Scruton argued that a focus on beauty is essential in schools, as it responds to deep need in each human being, educates moral perception, provides the young with a sense of wonder and awe, and points them to worlds beyond their own experience. Engaging with beauty across cultures helps us value other perspectives and remain open-minded. It puts depth and joy into human lives.

- **Acting in the World** is the primary competency. It is about developing human agency: identifying purpose, building intention and shaping what you do to achieve it, in work and life. Without purpose, it's hard to find passion, interest or fulfilment. It's why opening young people's eyes to wider opportunities is so important, through arts, design, sports, volunteering and work experience.

Every one of these competencies can be methodically taught and rigorously assessed. They draw on the knowledge and skills acquired in studying the traditional curriculum: mathematics and science, as well as language and the social sciences. **The flourishing competencies are not 'instead'. They 'build upon'.**

Education for Human Flourishing: a direct response to UK challenges and opportunities

Economy and employment

Education should energise and inspire. And there are teachers everywhere making sure it does just that. But UK education policy isn't helping them. Focused on maximising performance in a narrow range of subjects, with a crusade for knowledge and a mantra of what works, it has forgotten the joy of learning. Too many children are disaffected and plain bored.

The NEETS crisis has many causes. But it is self-evident that if you are young, no longer in education, not engaged in training and without a job, then you have not been inspired and energised by school. Education for Human Flourishing is a direct response to the Gradgrind tendency in UK schooling. Helping not just the one in eight NEETS but every young person to discover understanding, meaning and purpose. Finding the right way to engage each pupil, in the classroom, in wider school activities and in opportunities to learn and grow out of school.

But the flourishing competencies have a hard edge. Acting in the world and adaptive problem solving are the building blocks of renewed productivity and growth. They value and nurture design, systems thinking and expertise in digital and AI technologies. They turbocharge innovation and entrepreneurship. They build resilience and restore wellbeing. But this is not growth on any terms. The space for future work lies between a floor beneath which no-one should fall and a ceiling above which the Earth will be further degraded. Understanding the world, appreciating the world and ethical competence can keep us honest.

AI

The goal of Education for Human Flourishing is to develop better humans, not inferior robots. Today's schools focus on cognitive learning, but that's exactly where AI is so powerful. The flourishing competencies together engage head, heart and hand. That combination will remain uniquely human. Heart stands for empathy and compassion. Hand stands for agency, action, creativity and craftsmanship.

The challenges that humanity faces are daunting. We need the next generation to lead the search for solutions. They in turn will need to use AI, harnessing its problem-solving power to amplify human capacities. Embedding the use of AI in teaching and learning, as a component of each flourishing competency, will equip them to do so.

And AI will only become more powerful. Currently, AI addresses the problems humans give it, but it is on the verge of solving the problems AI itself decides to solve. We face a choice between two futures: one where young people are shaped by AI systems, the other where young people learn to shape those systems themselves. Education for Human Flourishing holds the key to how the AI age unfolds.



How this Model will be Introduced at Wellington

Wellington College is a large independent school in Berkshire, providing education for children aged 3-18. It has a record for innovation and working with state school partners, since Prince Albert set it up, with that intention, in 1859.

Since September 2025, Wellington has been leading on an Education for Human Flourishing proof of concept, based on the OECD framework. In September 2026, we began to embed the competencies in our pupils' learning experience, across the academic curriculum, the co-curriculum and the pastoral curriculum. We will introduce further change incrementally over the next 12 months. We have started working with a group of schools, across the North East, the North West and the Midlands, to explore what Education for Human Flourishing can look like across the country.

Four major initiatives are central to the proof of concept.

- **Curriculum**

Ensuring that the knowledge, skills and values that make up each of the flourishing competencies are embedded in traditional subject teaching. Complemented by signature actions for every competency, at each key stage.

- **Coaching**

Equipping every teacher with the repertoire of approaches they need to nurture the flourishing competencies. We aim for teaching that emphasises coaching – not instead of examinations but alongside them. We value teachers and pupils working together to reflect on progress, plug gaps and seize opportunities, to bring out the best in every child.

- **New courses**

Ensuring that every child from the age of seven understands the origins and development of humanity, the multi-dimensionality of AI and how to differentiate truth from falsehood, the real from the virtual, and the good from the bad.

- **Technology**

How can AI support our staff to balance coaching with other forms of teaching? How can it underpin a new learning arc, from personal study through to group dialogue and making sure the learning sticks?

AI in schools to support Human Flourishing

AI brings new risks for schools, but also presents an unrivalled opportunity to improve schools and education for Human Flourishing.



Chris Rothwell
Director, Institute of AI,
Wellington College Education
Previously Director of Education at Microsoft

AI must be used to create space for the things that are uniquely human, rather than simply making existing processes more efficient. To do that, our principles are to use AI in ways that elevate people, enhance learning, prioritise human relationships while respecting individual rights.

This begins with a bedrock of strong governance. Not just writing an AI policy, but setting a strategy and direction for the role that AI will play in your school, understanding where AI necessitates changes in existing policies, such as safeguarding or assessment, and ensuring that appropriate IT monitoring and blocking is in place.

As we work with AI at Wellington College, there are four primary lenses.

1 How can AI improve learning?

We are optimistic about the ability for AI to improve learning for all pupils; making learning more inclusive and accessible, adapting learning to an appropriate level, generating insight for teachers and providing feedback to pupils.

The path is not yet set, but the direction is clear. We want to use AI to give the best possible learning experience to pupils, to increase their understanding and appreciation of the subject and develop the Human Flourishing competencies. This cannot mean isolated digital-only learning. We want our teachers to be ‘architects of learning’, able to draw on the richest and widest set of tools and options to enable them to have capacity to teach, know, coach and motivate them. This will mean that the teacher role will change, but always retain the agency and responsibility to do what is best for their pupils.

2 Integrated data and insight

School data is typically siloed in specific applications, and often difficult for staff to find the right information at the right time. We are investing in bringing multiple parts of our data together to create a holistic view of pupils and making it much simpler and faster for teachers to find relevant information when they need it.

3 Staff and pupil AI fluency

Everyone needs to build the capability to work with AI and apply it to their own work or learning. Every teacher has a set of mandatory basic training, with a broad range of training, coaching and mentoring available to help them use AI effectively. As pupils join our senior school they go through an AI induction, giving practical advice and expectations on how to use AI well to support them within and beyond their studies. Our AI curriculum is integrated across the curriculum from Reception to Year 13, integrated learning about AI in the context of their existing learning in order to make it practical and relevant.

4 School operations

Schools are complex places and staff work extremely hard to give the best possible education to pupils. Alongside improving the direct learning experience for pupils, we want to use AI to make our schools great places to work, and to make administrative work simpler so that staff can spend more time coaching and building positive relationships with pupils.

Building systems is not enough. Change means supporting people with adoption, listening to staff and pupil input and feedback, and being willing and able to adapt. Education for Human Flourishing provides a clear direction to the experience we want to provide pupils, and AI has the potential to enable its delivery.

Endorsements



Damon Buffini

Chair of Royal National Theatre, Chair of Government's Culture Recovery Fund, Dept Chair of the BBC Board and Chair of the BBC Commercial Board.

"Creative education matters because it teaches young people how to make choices, collaborate with others, interpret complexity and have judgement – inherently human qualities that cannot be developed by knowledge acquisition alone."



Rachel Corp

Business Woman of the Year 2025, Strategic leader and Media CEO, Board Chair Women in Journalism, former CEO ITN.

"We need creativity in all its forms in schools. It's thinking laterally or around a challenge, it's critical decision making, it's being able to tell a story and explain what you think, to reason for yourself and challenge constructively."



Tim Davie

Chairman of the Creative Industries Council, Former Director-General of the BBC.

"We've been talking about Human Flourishing for a while, but as I look at what we need out of humanity, but also in business, what we need from schools are helping young people become kind, empathetic and creative. We're more than just machines. We are living, breathing, empathetic, caring, gentle people, full of love. Let's bring that out."



Tom Fletcher

UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

"To put the human back in humanitarian, to preserve what makes us human and is at the core of our humanity. We need a generation to be kind, curious and brave. This work is utterly life saving work and more important today than ever. I so admire what OECD and Wellington are doing."



Andy Haldane

Former Chief Economist at the Bank of England, Former CEO of the Royal Society for Arts, Chancellor of University of Sheffield.

"If we are to achieve NEET Zero, we need first and foremost a root and branch rethink and reframing of our model of education. A model that smooths, rather than stunts the passage of young people into work. It's about ensuring that both our people and our economy can grow in lockstep."



Olli-Pekka Heinonen

Director General of the International Baccalaureate.

"Our global reality right now is shaking the foundations of education. Therefore, it's important to go to the roots, to the purpose of education and human and planetary flourishing is the system goal that IB has set for each young person's education."



Peter Hyman

Co-Founder of School 21, Senior Advisor to Tony Blair and Keir Starmer.

“This is the time that we must rethink schools in an Age of AI. In an age of rapid change we have got to build up our human capacities. We have got to have a three dimensional education system: the head, heart and hand.”



Dame Prue Leith

Chef and TV presenter.

“If we teach young people to like healthy good food, they will not only get to be healthier themselves, but they will gradually teach their families to cook and to love good food.”



Michael Morpurgo

Author, poet, playwright and librettist.

“I welcome this move to Human Flourishing. We work towards helping to create young people to put a positive take on their world, to give them all the information and all the education we can with its depth and with its sensitivity.”



Gus O'Donnell

Former Cabinet Secretary and Head of British Civil Service (2005–2011).

“In the AI age more than ever we need to educate our children to have flourishing lives based on an understanding of what really makes for a good life.”



Joy Qiao

Founder and Chair of Wellington College Education in China.

“I strongly support Human Flourishing. When young people can connect with others who are different from themselves, they don't just become more open-minded and adaptable, they actually become more deeply human.”



Andreas Schleicher

Director for Education and Skills at the OECD.

“The rise of AI should sharpen education's focus on human capabilities that cannot be reduced to code; our capacity to navigate complex social relationships, to exercise ethical judgement in uncertainty, to create something genuinely new.”



Gillian Tett

Member of Editorial Board for the FT,
Provost of King's College, Cambridge.

“We live in a world where AI is advancing very rapidly. We also live in a world where we know it can deliver extraordinary benefits for humanity, including in education. This must be a priority. The time has come for a greater focus on the human in schools.”



Simon Wessely

Regius Professor of Psychiatry, at the Institute of Psychiatry, KCL, Director of the King's Centre for Military Health Research, on the board of NHS England.

“We are almost at the bottom of the league table when it comes to belonging. That is so important if we are to flourish and live more satisfying lives. I think that the Human Flourishing model is one of the best ways we can approach this to try and reverse that trend in the future.”



Stella Zhou

Master, HIBA Academy Shanghai,
Wellington's bilingual school in Shanghai.

“Human Flourishing has given us a shared language to talk about what really matters and is helping young people to develop into the changemakers that the world really needs.”



Tim Smit

Creator of the Lost Gardens of Heligan
and the Eden Project.

“Schools need to have nature at their heart. Seeing young people and their parents rekindled in their excitement, just wild about nature, provides the missing link which enables all those silos within education to be brought together in a holistic sense.”

Education for Human Flourishing in the age of AI

Michael Stevenson

Founding Director
Institute of Human Flourishing
Wellington College Education

Human Capital Theory

The model we've had since 1945

- Sorting young people by cognitive examination in a narrow range of subjects for jobs in yesterday's economy.
- Contributing to a crisis of mental health.
- Inadequate to the future.

Education for Human Flourishing

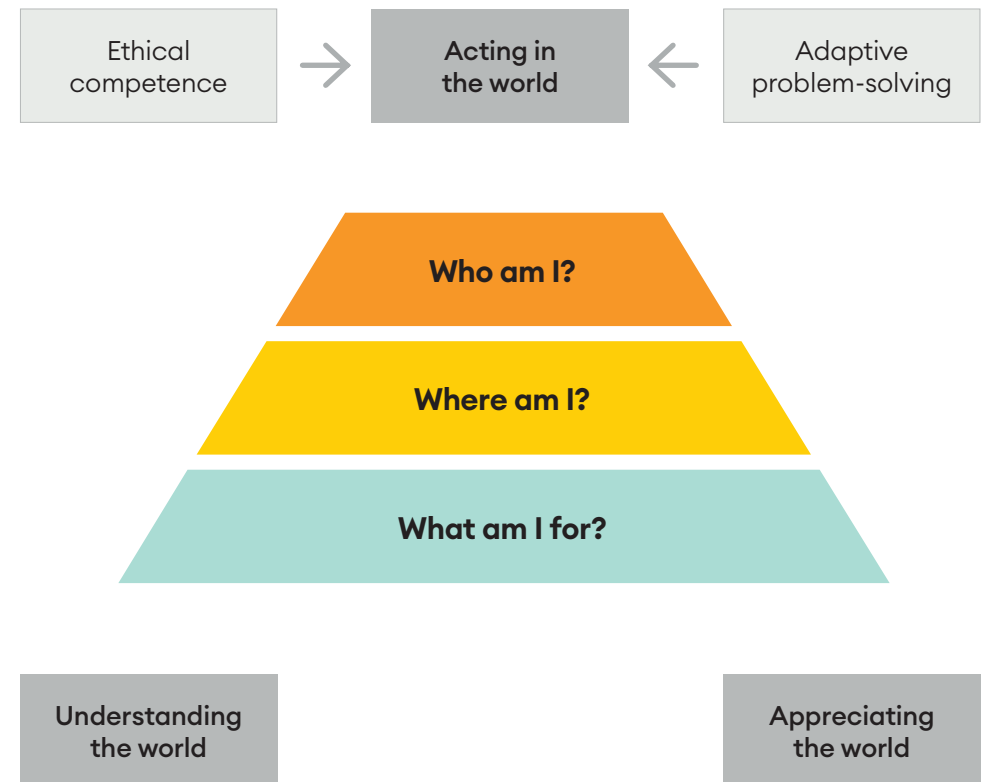
The model we need

- **Opportunity**
Education should provide fulfilment for everyone, nurturing a broader range of strengths, including dispositions for caring and creativity.
- **Understanding**
Education should reconcile competing beliefs, restore meaning and build wellbeing.
- **Agency**
Education should equip people to design and establish the next set of economic, societal and organisational models.

Human Flourishing in the age of AI

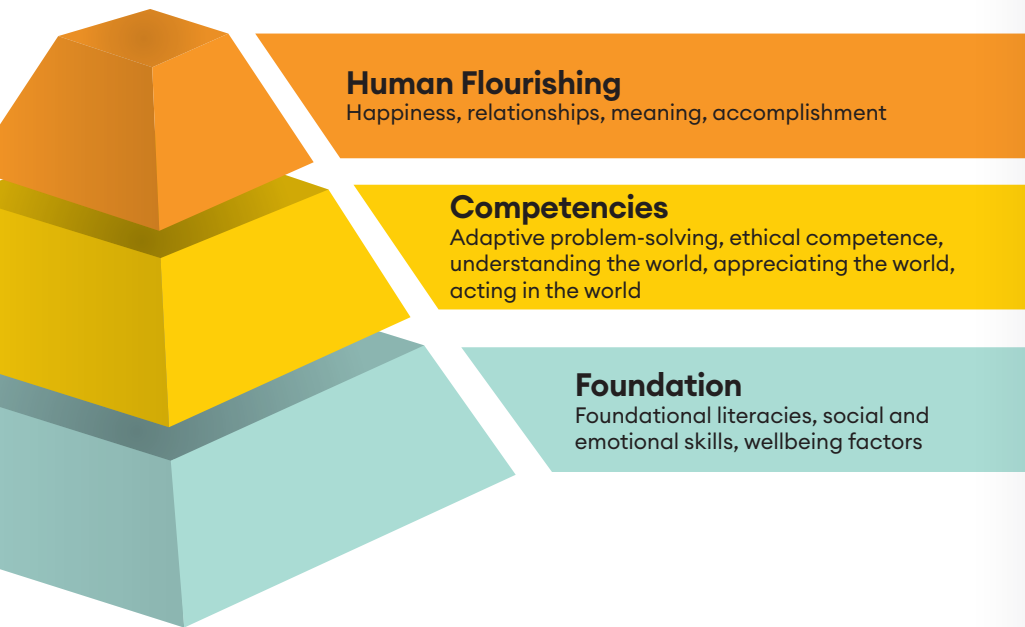
- AI is already undermining human understanding, agency and meaning.
- We face a choice between two futures: one where young people are shaped by AI systems, the other where young people learn to shape those systems themselves, supporting human goals.
- AI presents an opportunity to strengthen education processes (teaching, learning and assessment).

Education for Human Flourishing Competencies



Education for Human Flourishing Competencies

Education for Human Flourishing Architecture



Findings

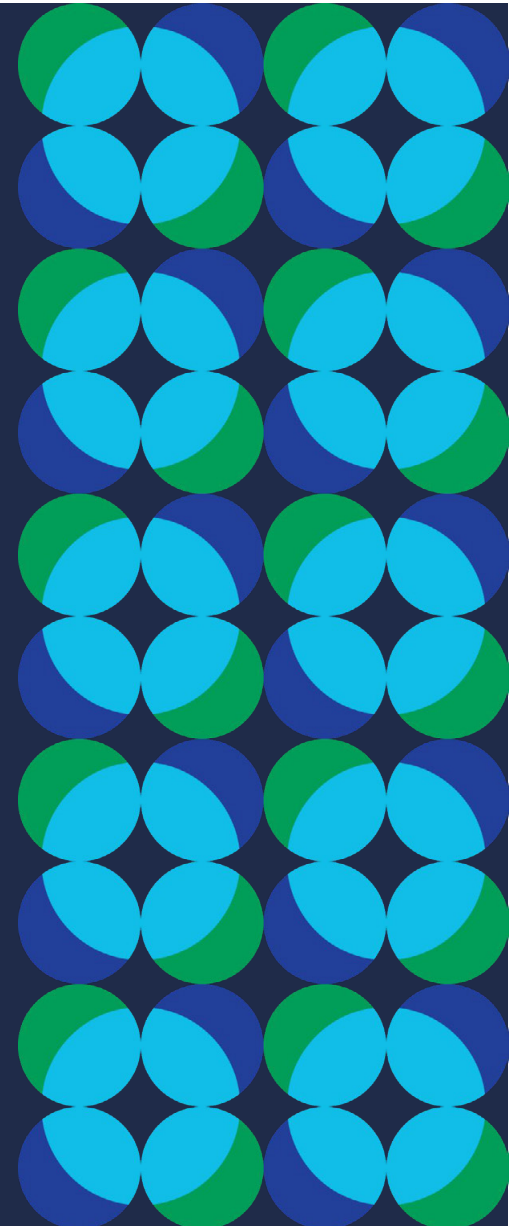
Luke Tryl
Executive Director
More in Common



More in
Common

AI and human flourishing in education

September 2026



About the research

Young people

Nationally representative online survey of 1,033 UK 18–22 year olds.

Fieldwork 5–23 August 2026.
Weighted by region, age and gender interlocked, and ethnicity.

Parents

Nationally representative online survey of 1,251 UK parents of children aged 18 or under.

Fieldwork 5–11 August 2026.
Weighted by age and gender interlocked, region, ethnicity and degree.

Teachers

Two online focus groups with secondary and FE teachers of Years 10–13, held 8 September 2026.

One group with under 10 years in the classroom, one with 10 or more.

Executive summary

Young people are unprepared for adulthood

Asked what school prepared them for the least, students point to looking after their mental health (37 per cent) and understanding the world (36 per cent).

Students feel anxious, but aren't despairing about the future

More than half of 18–22s felt anxious about their future in the past year, but overall lean optimistic when thinking about their own lives overall.

Uncertainty on the value of university

Two in five 18–22s think that a university degree is not worth as much as it used to be, but just as many think that it's now worth more.

AI is everywhere in education

Four in five young people tell us they have used AI for study, but only a fifth were taught in school how to use it well.

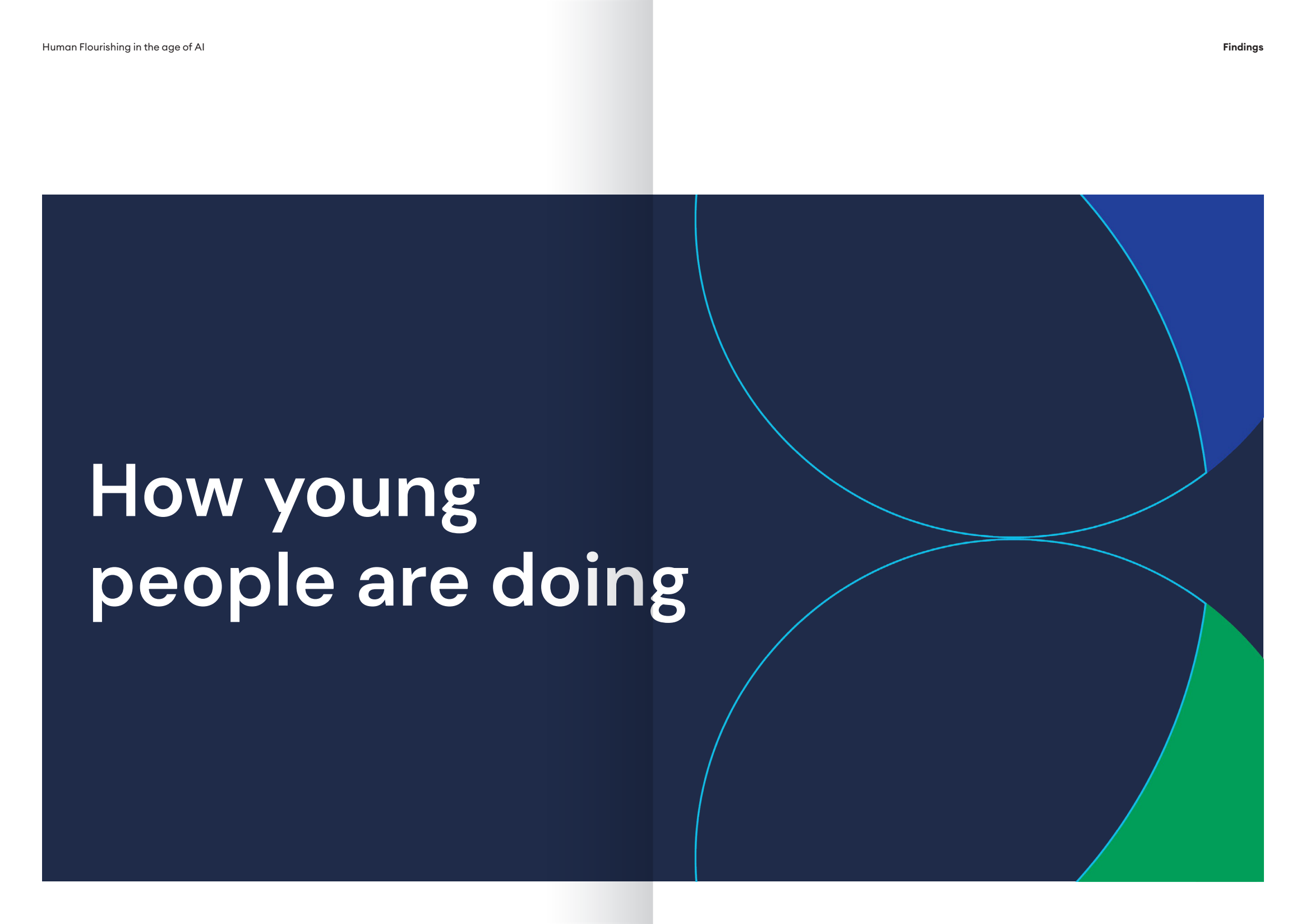
A generational split on AI in learning

A slight majority of students who use AI say it helps them learn more, while parents tend to think it makes children learn less than they otherwise would.

Appetite for national rules

Majorities of both parents and 18–22s want the Government to set national guidelines on AI in schools and universities.

How young people are doing

The background of the slide features a vertical gradient bar on the left side, transitioning from white at the top to dark blue at the bottom. The main area is a dark blue rectangle. On the right side of this rectangle, there are two large, overlapping circles. The top circle is dark blue, and the bottom circle is a lighter shade of blue. The area where the two circles overlap is a vibrant green. The text 'How young people are doing' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font, positioned on the left side of the dark blue rectangle.

Young people are upbeat about themselves but are more pessimistic about Britain as a whole

72 per cent of 18–22s feel optimistic about their own life over the next ten years.

That falls to 52 per cent for the rest of their generation, and 42 per cent for the country as a whole.

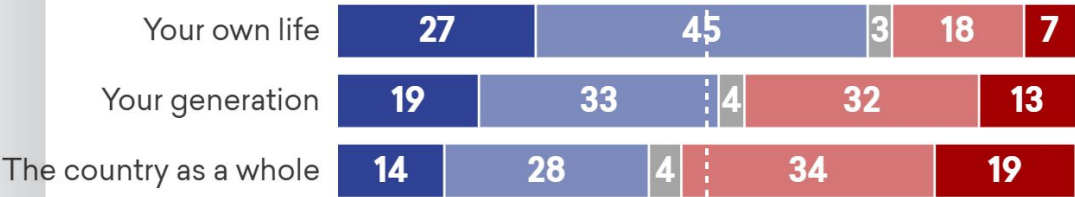
But at the same time there is a sense of strain. 56 per cent have felt anxious about their future in the past year, 44 per cent that they were falling behind others their age and 37 per cent reported feeling lonely.

Young women are far more likely to report anxiety: 69 per cent, against 44 per cent of young men.

Young people are upbeat about their own lives, less so about the country

Thinking about the next ten years, how optimistic or pessimistic do you feel about each of the following?

- Very optimistic ● Fairly optimistic ● Don't know
● Fairly pessimistic ● Very pessimistic





Students generally feel confident in their abilities but are less sure about their own mental health

Half of young people say that they *definitely* think they have a clear sense of right and wrong

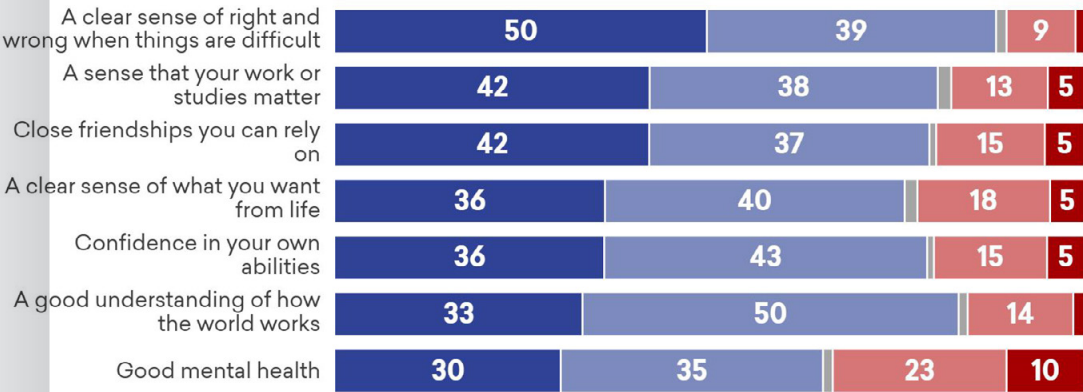
Despite loneliness also being a salient issue with young people, a majority still say that they have close friendships which they can rely on.

Good mental health however, is more uncertain. A third (34 per cent) say they don't really have good mental health, or not at all.

Only three in ten 18-22s are confident in their mental health

For the following, state whether you feel you have it in your life at the moment:

● Definitely ● Slightly ● Not sure ● Not really ● Not at all



Young people leave school feeling unequipped to look after their mental health

Asked what they felt school doesn't prepare them for, young people cite looking after their mental health as the top shortcoming (37 per cent). Three in ten also chose "coping with change and uncertainty".

In school, teachers described a seeing loss of resilience in their students, leaving them unprepared for life as independent adults.

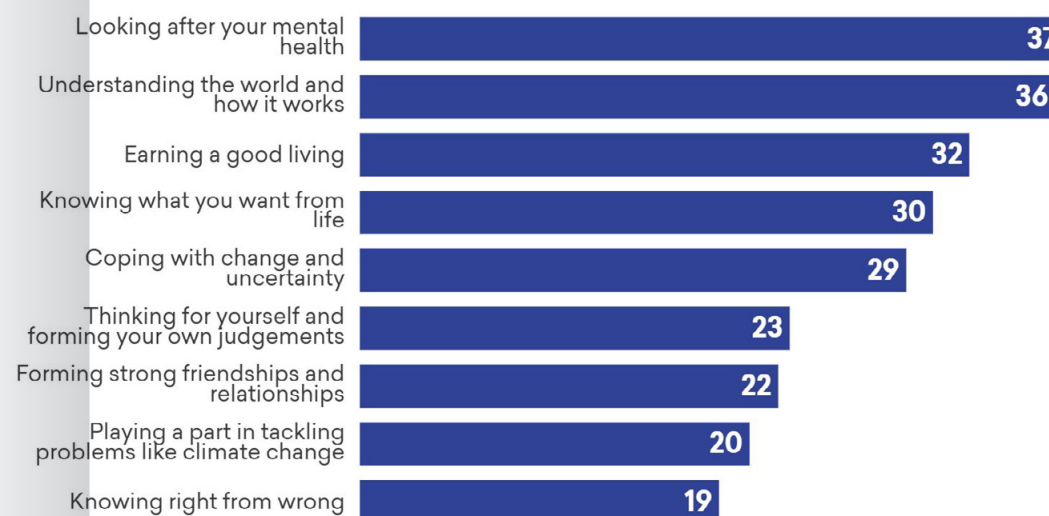


Students struggle to push through the hard bits... I'm just seeing more of a trend that they get more frustrated now than they did before.

Francesca, Biology, under 10 years teaching

Looking after their mental health is the thing young people say that school didn't prepare them for

Thinking about your time in school, which of the following did it **prepare you for the least**? Select up to three



The route to work





The value of a degree is still contested

40 per cent of 18–22s think a degree is worth more than it was five years ago; 39 per cent think it is worth less.

Around half of current students (48 per cent) and graduates (51 per cent) say it is worth more, compared to just 23 per cent among those who never went to university themselves.

69 per cent of parents call technical education as good as academic, but 42 per cent would choose it for their own child.



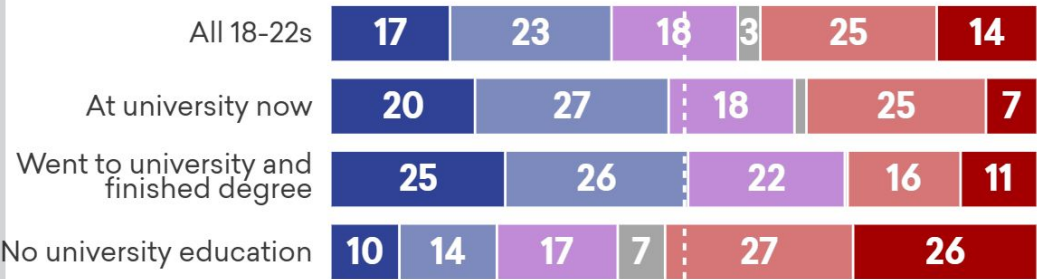
...they're like, 'Well, I'm torn between going into law or doing plumbing', because the students are so petrified that they want to be 'AI proof'.

Natasha, PE, 10+ years teaching

Young people are split on the value of a degree

Do you think a university degree is worth more or less now than it was five years ago?

- Worth much more
- Worth a little more
- About the same
- Don't know
- Worth a little less
- Worth much less



AI in education

The graphic features a dark navy blue background. On the left, the text 'AI in education' is written in a large, white, sans-serif font. To the right of the text, there are two large, overlapping circles outlined in a light blue color. The top-right portion of the upper circle is filled with a medium blue color, and the bottom-right portion of the lower circle is filled with a vibrant green color. The overall design is clean and modern.

AI is everywhere in education but few feel prepared for it

81 per cent of young people used AI for their schoolwork or studies, and 54 per cent do so at least a few times a week.

At the same time, parents often report being unaware of how much AI their child is using. 23 per cent of parents of 17–18 year olds do not know how often their child uses it.

Teachers, meanwhile, feel unequipped to handle its effects in the classroom, often having to decide policy ad-hoc by themselves.

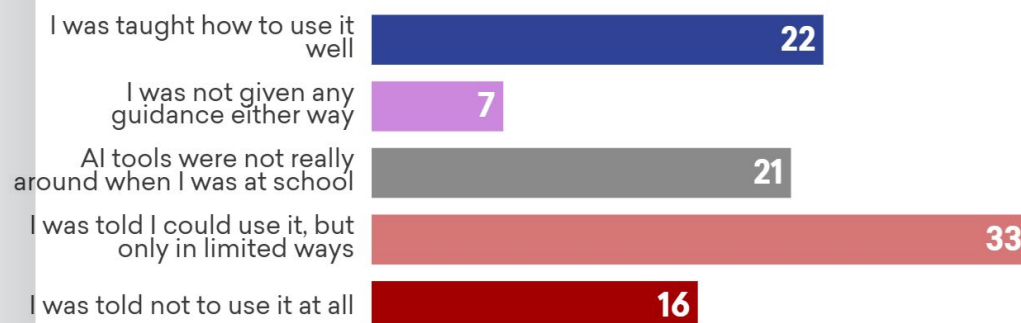


It seems like it's just rolled in and there's been no real response from a policymaking level. It's just we've just got to put up with it.

Joe, Art, under 10 years teaching

Few young people say they were taught in school how to use AI well

When you were at school, what were you told about using AI for your work?



AI and human flourishing in education



Students think AI helps them learn, but parents disagree

Among 18–22s, 56 per cent say it helps them learn more and go further in their education than they otherwise would.

Parents tend to take the opposite view; that AI helps their child get homework done but that they learn less in the process.

Parents' attitudes towards their child and AI vary with how much the parent uses AI themselves. 49 per cent of daily-plus users say children learn more, compared to just 8 per cent among those who never use AI.



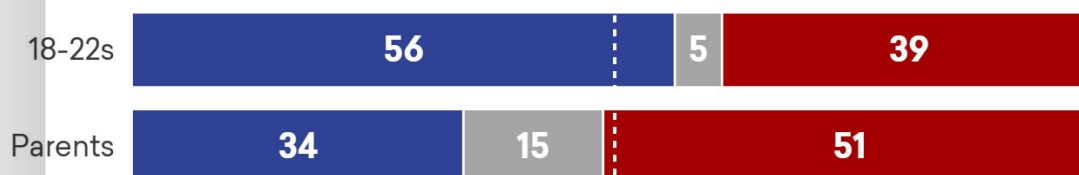
Some of those children will actually use that platform to be like, 'I get that now'... but you also have the children that just shove it in there to get it done... So it could be a useful tool, but it's the reliance on it.

Sophie, Maths, under 10 years teaching

Young people tend to think that AI helps them learn, while parents are more likely to think it hampers their education

Which of the following comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?

- It helps them learn more, and go further than they could on their own
- Don't know
- It helps them get things done, but they learn less than they would have



More in Common • August 2026

Giving students guidance could mitigate some risks of AI in the classroom.

54 per cent of 18–22s who use AI say their confidence in their own abilities has grown since they started

This rises to 74 per cent among those taught at school how to use AI well, and falls to less than half among those who were instructed not to use it at all.

Teachers noted that AI could be more effective for learning if children were given clearer guidance.



We can maybe use that time to teach kids how to use AI productively. It could be a really useful tool, but like anything, they need to be taught how to use it rather than just used in a bit of a lazy way, I guess, as a shortcut rather than really trying to get the most out of that technology.

Jack, Art, less than 10 years in the classroom

Being taught how to use AI makes young people more likely to feel confident in their own abilities

Since you started using AI, has your confidence in your own abilities...?

● Increased a lot ● Increased a little ● Stayed the same ● Don't know
● Decreased a little ● Decreased a lot



AI is replacing working things out, not friendships

Two thirds of student users say AI has at least partly replaced working something out for themselves.

Their anxieties about AI follow the same line. Half of parents (50 per cent) identify their child no longer thinking for themselves as a top worry about AI. Students worry most about telling what is true from what is not (32 per cent).

Teachers discussed AI as a classroom and assessment problem, but not as much one of meaning or identity.

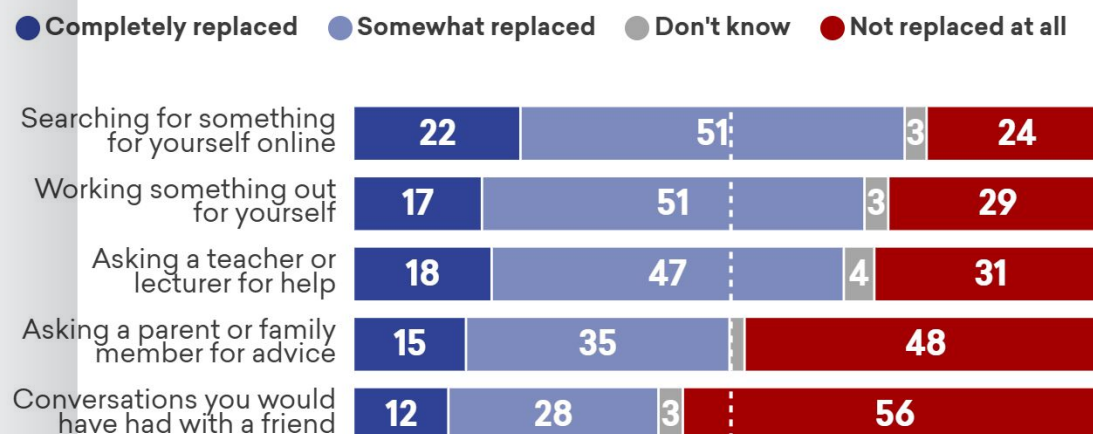


It's absolutely killed, I think, the notion of a research project... They've not engaged, they've not read a single thing.

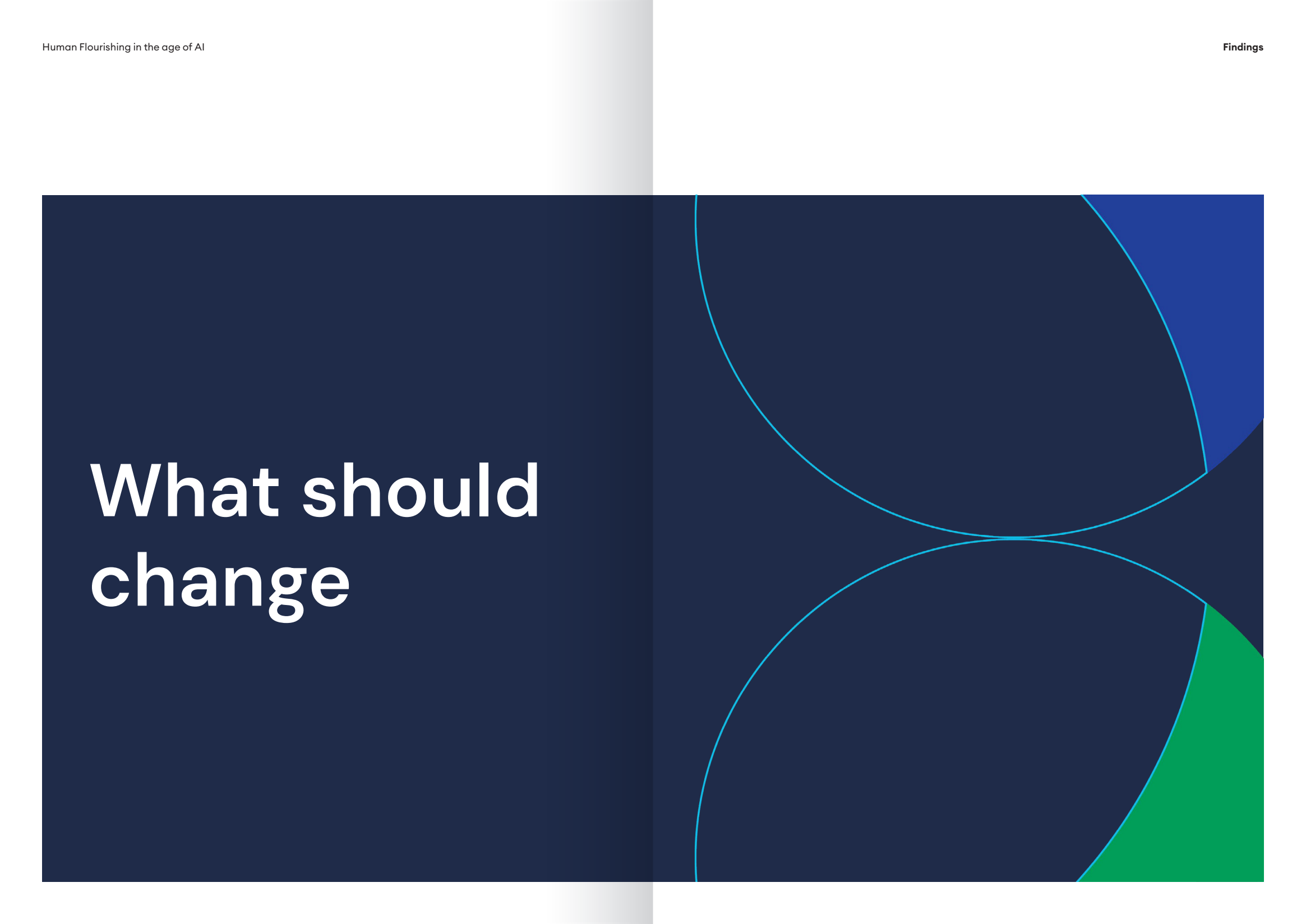
John, Drama, 10+ years teaching

Two thirds of young people say that AI has completely or somewhat replaced them asking a teacher/lecturer for help

For each of the following, state whether or not AI has replaced them for you:



What should change

The background of the slide features a dark blue gradient. On the right side, there is an abstract graphic consisting of two large, overlapping circles. The top circle is a lighter shade of blue, and the bottom circle is a darker shade of blue. The overlapping area between the two circles is a vibrant green. The circles are positioned such that they appear to be part of a larger, unseen circle.

AI and human flourishing in education

Practical/vocational education, and support for mental health, enjoy broad support

For parents and young people alike, practical and job-related skills top the list for what they would like to see the education system prioritise more.

The changes they want to see reflect a desire for students leave school better-prepared for the world they enter into: mental health, thinking for themselves, planning for the future.



For years we've been saying school isn't right for all the children... Everybody doesn't want to go down the academic route. It's not one size fits all, so please don't treat them like that."

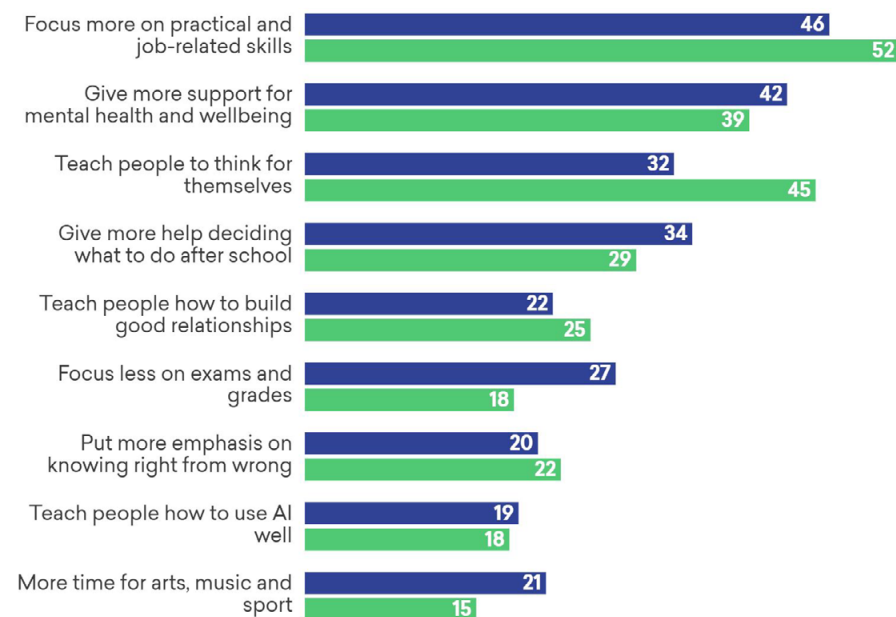
Helen, Business & IT, less than 10 years teaching



Parents and young people alike want education to focus more on practical skills

If education in this country were to change, which of the following would you most want it to do? Select up to three

● 18-22s ● Parents



More in Common • August 2026

AI and human flourishing in education



The majority want national rules on AI in education

Teachers especially expressed a feeling that they were having to figure out AI policy on their own, leading to students being given incoherent instructions class-to-class, and heightened inequalities between well and poorly-resourced schools.



It's all a bit of a free for all, and some schools don't have people who understand it. Some big trusts have somebody; my school has me, because my side role is head of digital learning, and I've spent a lot of time working out how to risk assess this, but not all schools can afford that. So yeah, I think we really do need some kind of national guidance on what should be covered, how it could be used, etc.

Ben, Computer Science, 10+ years teaching

Majorities of parents and young people want national rules on AI in education

Which comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?

- The government should set clear national rules
- Don't know
- Schools and universities should each decide for themselves



More in Common • August 2026

What's Next

The case for building on the current education model to establish an education more attuned to the modern world is unanswerable. The future we propose is Education for Human Flourishing.

The next generation of students deserves a more thoughtful, challenging and robust education – offering the chance for all young people to become ethical problem-solvers who understand the world, appreciate it and act in it.

This is the direction that Wellington College and Wellington College Prep will take this academic year and beyond. Our approach will be inclusive and collaborative. We will work with partner state schools across England and the Wellington College Education Family of Schools around the world. The question is no longer should we put the human back into the heart and soul of education? It is how we achieve it.

We have already initiated delivery in key areas, including curriculum mapping, assessment design, teaching and learning innovation and professional development, working with some of the best universities in the world including Harvard, Melbourne and Oxford.

At the same time, we want to hear from you: from parents, current and former pupils, past and present teachers, educators and thought leaders about what an education reimagined for Human Flourishing might look like.

A first step might be to visit our microsite and sign up for regular communications and updates. It is a mine of information about Human Flourishing and the five competencies which underpin our approach. You can read there too more about the work the OECD has produced.

At the Wellington College Festival of Education in July 2027, we will bring together a digest of all that you have told us with an unveiling of our own detailed plans, for discussion, exploration and evaluation with you, the education sector at large, ed tech, business, government and other stakeholders.

Meanwhile, we welcome wider reflection and debate. This is the moment for a national conversation about what it means to be an educated person in the second quarter of the twenty first century. A moment to establish the basis for the long-awaited next phase in UK education.

How can schools balance excellence in maths, science and reading with the skills, attitudes and values needed for a complex AI world?

How can education better prepare young people to contribute to communities and society?

How should student progress be assessed and demonstrated?

How should schools be redesigned so that students can learn in new ways and teachers have time for individual coaching?

We welcome you on the journey!

Call to Action

If you agree and share our concern that the current education system is no longer fit for purpose, and no longer equipping people for either work or life, then we hope that you will join the national conversation we aim to start with the launch of this manifesto. We want to hear from parents, current and former pupils, past and present teachers, educators, politicians and thought leaders.

The first step is to visit our microsite and sign up for regular communications and updates. The site is also a source of information about Human Flourishing and the five competences which underpin our approach. You can read more about the work the OECD has produced.

We believe we have diagnosed the core problem and challenge to education in the UK, but we are also aware that any major changes have to be in partnership and collaboration with all stakeholders involved in the future of our education system.

We are hoping that this national conversation will in time lead to a campaign for educational reform, built on the evidence we have gathered and guided by our clear plan for change, to create an education system which will benefit not just today's generation of pupils but future generations as well.

Please join our conversation today.

Join the conversation

Scan the QR code to sign up for regular communications and updates





Wellington College Education
Wellington College
Duke's Ride
Crowthorne
Berkshire
RG45 7PU
United Kingdom

wellingtoncollegeeducation.com