



Human Flourishing in the age of AI **Manifesto**



WELLINGTON
COLLEGE
EDUCATION

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?

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.

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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