The logo for 'uk dai' is displayed in a bold, sans-serif font. The letters 'uk' are white, 'dai' is yellow, and the dot above the 'i' is a small teal circle. The background features a teal-to-yellow gradient with white curved lines that create a sense of motion and depth.

uk dai

Leading the Future

**Developing the UK's
AI-ready Workforce**

Contents

About UKAI.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Foreword	5
The Roundtable.....	6
Part 1: Summary of the Major Themes Discussed.....	13
Part 2: Principles to Build an AI-ready Workforce.....	38
Part 3: How Can We Build an AI-ready Workforce?.....	41
Conclusion	47
Join the Discussion	48
Appendix	49



About UKAI



UKAI is the UK's only trade association representing the entire AI sector, providing a unified voice for tech and non-tech businesses that are harnessing AI to drive economic growth. UKAI brings together a thriving ecosystem of businesses, investors, and government – driving collaboration to secure Britain's position as a global AI leader.

Executive Summary

UKAI invited businesses, third-sector organisations, academia and policymakers to join a roundtable discussion chaired by Matt Warman. The objective was to identify what the UK needs in order to remain globally competitive in the future. The conversation centred around skills.

Large and small businesses set out their needs and requirements and shared some of the challenges they have faced in finding talent and developing the skills that they need to grow. A recurring theme was the importance of everyday AI literacy – this enables the workforce but also empowers consumers. Attendees shared a sense of urgency to avoid the UK being left behind and overtaken by countries that are investing in their children's future.

The first section of this report summarises the key topics discussed in the roundtable. Topics ranged from practical points around how to increase AI literacy and improve AI education in schools to broader societal concerns such as workforce displacement and addressing the digital divide. Attendees also covered the important role of leadership in building AI-ready workforces, and they looked at why public trust in AI is essential to increase adoption and productivity.

The second section sets out some principles to build an AI-ready workforce. These include: broader, earlier, better, faster.

The third section presents UKAI's recommendations. These recommendations are informed by the roundtable and UKAI's policies, reflecting the interests of its members across the AI sector in the UK. Recommendations include reiterating the importance of maths education, building more partnerships between businesses and schools, and how we can create regional areas of expertise to on-shore skills around the UK. Further recommendations included setting out industry standards that reflect the skills that businesses actually need. Alongside this, UKAI recommends developing an industry-led campaign to increase public understanding and trust in AI, increasing consumer and employee adoption.

UKAI concludes that basic AI literacy is the essential catalyst for growth – not just for the AI sector but for productivity across the entire UK economy. The skills required are constantly evolving and are often very specific to industry sectors and individuals. This report sets out a starting position and an approach for a nationwide campaign to measure and improve AI literacy across the workforce. UKAI looks forward to working with our members and partners to further develop this campaign.

Foreword

If you run an artificial intelligence business in the UK, you need a workforce that understands AI. If you work in a company that wants to use AI to grow, it needs the staff to make that happen. And if you're an employee worried that AI will render you redundant, your best insurance policy is to be AI-ready. In short, whatever you do, you probably want Britain to ensure its people are best placed to make sure the AI revolution happens with them and for them – not to them.

So, if there's one single thing that could hamper Britain getting the most out of artificial intelligence's potential, it's failing to do everything possible to prepare the workforce for the coming revolution. That's why this latest report from UKAI is so important.

Building AI literacy means making sure that students and workers have access to vital development opportunities at every stage of their careers – because adoption, reskilling, and impact will be a process rather than an event. And because if Britain does not build AI literacy, other countries will still do so.

Indeed, the roundtable that this report stems from covered how leaders can make sure their workforces are able to develop, and also how to make sure those leaders learn quickly themselves. Knowing what we don't know will be essential, not least for ensuring that AI helps to lessen society's inequalities rather than widen them. And with so-called digital poverty already an issue that has proved stubbornly hard to tackle, failing to seize the opportunity AI provides would be as foolish as it would be unforgivable.

We need to make sure that policymakers think broader in terms of how workforces will be impacted by AI, that they think about it earlier in education, that they look to do better when it comes to educational standards, and above all, that they seek to go faster. Never has a race been more global.

All of this is vital, but it risks being undermined if the trust of an already sceptical public is compromised. For that reason and a host of others, communication will be vital. UKAI stands ready to play a key part in that – be it marketing the work of the industry or allaying misplaced fears. Workers, taxpayers, and businesses deserve nothing less.

Matt Warman

UKAI Advisor and former AI Minister



The Roundtable



Context

The roundtable discussion was held on Monday the 20th of January, a week after the launch of the Government's AI Opportunities Action Plan.

UKAI supports the bold ambition set out by the Government in the action plan; it is a unifying call to action that has the potential to bring UK businesses together. The plan covers all the critical areas that AI businesses in the UK require: skills, economy, regulation, innovation, and society. However, UKAI felt that the definition of the 'AI sector' was too narrow, and therefore, the types of skills and the impact across the entire UK were not adequately covered in the plan.

This report summarises the priorities of the UK AI businesses that met to discuss the skills the UK will need to lead in the future. UKAI sees these issues through the lens of business but also believes that by addressing these issues, businesses can better serve individual employees and consumers and unlock wider benefits to society.

UKAI has analysed these topics and has also shared several recommendations for what the Government and the UK AI industry should do to ensure we have the skills, talent, and knowledge required to lead the world in AI.

Objectives

UKAI engaged with a representative group of AI businesses and stakeholders to discover which areas of regulation are most important. The roundtable was designed to enable stakeholders to share their concerns, priorities, and best practice with their peers to surface the most important issues. It provides a snapshot of the current priorities, risks, and opportunities.

The topic of the discussion was, 'How do we develop the UK's AI-ready workforce?'

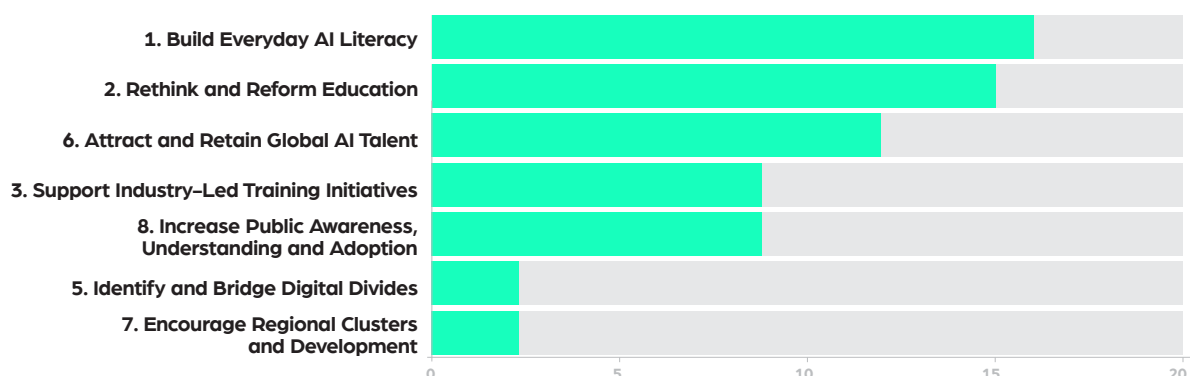
This report answers that question based on the information collated in the roundtable discussion.



Process

Step 1: Selecting Priorities

All respondents were sent a voting form with nine discussion topics to choose from. Each respondent had three votes. The results were then compiled as shown in the table below.



Further detail for each of the nine discussion topics was provided to the respondents and is included in Appendix I at the end of this report.

Step 2: Roundtable Discussion

UKAI invited 60 stakeholders to participate in a roundtable discussion, held in the House of Commons, kindly hosted by Bradley Thomas, MP. The roundtable was chaired by Matt Warman, former AI minister and previously the technology editor at the Daily Telegraph.

The event was recorded digitally, and the transcript and individual notes were analysed. The key points are summarised, and additional recommendations have been put forward.

The information gathered was then collated into this report by the team of policy researchers from Chamber UK, with subject matter expertise from the UKAI advisory board and management team.

Hosted by Bradley Thomas, MP

“Artificial intelligence will change how we all work, how we interact with government, and how the public services we all rely on function. It matters to all of us, from my constituents in Bromsgrove to people in the remotest parts of the United Kingdom.

Today, Britain has an opportunity to make sure we capitalise on the leading place we have set in AI development and to ensure that, through widespread adoption of this new technology, we are able to see real, essential improvements in growth and productivity.

None of that can happen without developing an AI-ready workforce. I was pleased to sponsor UKAI’s roundtable in Parliament on this vital topic. Understanding the themes discussed there, and in this report, will be vital to the UK economy for decades to come.”

Bradley Thomas

Member of Parliament for Bromsgrove



Roundtable Attendees

The attendees consisted of UKAI members and their guests – drawn from a range of different industries, including tech, non-tech, third sector, academic, consultancies, investors, and startups.

The event was conducted under Chatham House Rules, so consequently, comments have been anonymised and are not attributed to individuals or companies.

AI Technology Businesses



Global Businesses



Third Sector Organisations



SMEs & Startups



Paradigm
Junction

PLMR

rational.



Academia



Investors



CVC CAPITAL PARTNERS

dawn.

osb Group

What is AI Literacy?

AI literacy means the familiarity with basic AI tools and the ability to use these tools confidently on a regular basis for both work and home life. UKAI's definition of AI literacy includes the five Cs.

Context	High level understanding of the different types of AI tools available and what GenAI tools and LLMs are. Recognition of the importance and inevitability of GenAI tools in the workplace.
Curiosity	Recognition that GenAI tools are constantly evolving and that part of learning to use them involves a willingness to learn and adapt. A change in mindset is required, where people recognise that it's necessary to be constantly curious and to seek new information, new solutions, and new tools to test.
Competency	The ability to use generative AI tools (such as LLMs) with confidence to perform a series of basic tasks. Individuals must reach a minimum standard and have the ability to teach others.
Commitment	Daily use of GenAI tools, initially by design, but eventually becoming part of the individual's daily habit. They use GenAI tools to accelerate, augment and automate daily tasks.
Confidence	Individuals should feel empowered to use GenAI tools in their everyday lives. They should recognise what they don't know and be comfortable with the knowledge that there is another level of technical skills that is now open to them but is not necessary.

We call this AI literacy because it is a skill that will have the same transformative effect on human societies, families, and businesses as literacy has had. It is the first and fundamental skill upon which many other deeper and more specific sets of knowledge can be acquired. Those with literacy can acquire more knowledge, those who remain illiterate will not have access to this knowledge and will be at a disadvantage. The UK should strive to increase AI literacy in the same way we aim to increase basic adult literacy across society.

Part 1

Summary of the Major Themes Discussed

1. AI Literacy and Confidence

Increasing AI literacy across the UK is critically important because a lack of understanding poses a significant barrier to the adoption of AI tools by workers and engagement with AI businesses. Schools are particularly ill-prepared, with wide inconsistencies in how AI is taught and many teachers lacking the training to incorporate AI into their lessons effectively. This gap extends to teacher training programmes, where basic AI competency is neither standardised nor prioritised.

“When we talk about AI literacy, we have to make sure that we are giving the widest context possible... the young people need to see today, tomorrow and beyond.”

Participants highlighted the need to embed AI education as a multidisciplinary subject across all levels, from primary to higher education. Concerns were raised about delays in curriculum updates, which risk creating a generation unprepared for AI's impact on the workplace. The urgency of addressing these gaps was underscored by the rapid pace of AI advancements and the pressing need to ensure education systems evolve in step with technological progress.

Teach Skills Not Tools

“We need to teach people how to figure out how to use it themselves.”

An important distinction was made between teaching skills and teaching tools. Skills are long-lasting capabilities and competencies. However, learning how to use a tool involves learning specific knowledge with a narrow application. The focus needs to be on identifying and teaching the fundamental skills that will empower people to keep learning, rather than on teaching specific tools. Moreover, due to the pace of change, attempting to teach specific tools would quickly become redundant.

AI Transformation is a Process Not a Stage.

Many businesses are looking at how to harness AI tools across their organisation, often referred to as AI transformation. It is important to recognise that this is an ongoing process, it is not a one-off event.

As one attendee noted, “Some businesses talk about AI transformation like it is a stage to get to. Instead, teach skills that will allow them to adapt to change.”

Digital Transformation Starts With People

Digital transformation has been a business priority for over a decade. The companies that have already successfully started their digital transformation journey are the ones that will now be in the best position to implement AI transformation successfully.

A successful transformation starts with people, not tools. It requires the development and adoption of a new mindset and attitude towards professional learning. Learning must be continual to reflect the evolving nature of digital and AI technologies.

Mindset and Attitude, Adaptability and Resilience

The focus on adaptability and resilience is seen as critical in preparing the workforce for AI-driven change and the likelihood that they will constantly have to learn new skills.

“We need to teach people how to figure out how to use AI themselves.”

Building adaptability into education and retraining can help people not only use current AI tools but also give them the confidence to adapt to future development.

Not only are there many different, constantly evolving tools, but the way these tools are used varies massively between individuals, businesses, and sectors. It would be impossible to teach for every individual circumstance. Instead, people should be taught the principles they can apply to their individual circumstances, giving them the confidence to keep learning and teaching themselves as technology inevitably evolves and changes.

Businesses Make Technology Simpler

The group discussed some of the factors accelerating public adoption of AI technologies. Attendees felt that businesses have a key role to play in providing services and building tools that make AI simpler and easy to use. The point was made that electronics goods manufacturers (mobile phones, TVs, cars) have already integrated AI technology into their products. This will be where the adoption of AI technology will happen fastest. As people use these technologies regularly, AI will become part of their everyday skillset. In particular, technologies such as Edge computing, faster chips, and 5G will make our mobile phones and laptops capable of delivering much more advanced AI services.

Is AI Relevant? People Need a Reason to Learn

The group discussed the current perception that many people have that AI is not relevant to their lives. Because it is not seen as being relevant, it is not something people are willing to invest time and money in, even if their employer is providing the training and tools.

***“We don’t need to understand the engine...
We need to understand how to drive the car.”***

Having a driving licence is seen by many as an essential skill that provides significant benefits (getting from A to B), it is highly relevant. However, people do not need to be mechanical engineers to be able to drive a car.

The AI Driving Licence

While discussing the difference between everyday AI literacy and technical AI skills, a useful analogy was made.

A mechanical engineer can understand how to build an engine. They know how all the parts of the engine work and can identify any problems. They are also able to modify the engine to go faster or to be more fuel efficient. When the first cars were developed, their drivers had to know how the engine worked. A simple journey would require quite advanced mechanical knowledge, and the controls were designed around an engine, rather than the driver.

Henry Ford, and others who followed, shifted the focus by making cars for everyone. The car still had an engine, but it was more reliable and made from standard parts that could be replaced easily without advanced technical knowledge. Anyone, who could afford it, could then drive a car. The skills they required were not those of an engineer, they were the skills to be a competent and responsible driver.

In the same way, we are moving from the age of AI being something only for technical engineers and into the age where AI is for everyone. The skills that will be required will be very different. We will need people to have more driving licences (everyday AI skills), rather than deep technical knowledge. Although, as with cars, technical knowledge is still required by manufacturers and specialists.

2. Teaching AI in Schools

Schools are fundamentally important to produce the future workforce, talent, and leaders. AI technology can empower both teachers and students, but there is currently much confusion and a lack of clear guidelines. The result is that many schools and teachers focus on the negative aspects of AI technology, resulting in prohibition rather than an exploration of how AI technologies can be used responsibly. Young people are growing up in a world where AI will be integral to all aspects of their lives, and schools should be preparing them for this future.

Several attendees told us they had previously worked as teachers, some were governors at schools, and we also had a number of third-sector organisations who regularly spent time working with schools, teachers, and the Department for Education (DfE). Alongside these professional insights, a number of attendees also have children who are currently in education.

Perception of AI in Schools

Attendees noted that for the majority of schools and teachers, AI is still associated with cheating. It is often seen as entirely negative and something that should be banned.

It would be more productive for teachers to engage with pupils and help them understand how to use AI tools responsibly. It was felt that this approach would be more effective and give teachers the ability to highlight responsible behaviour, whereas prohibition removes the opportunity to have this discussion.

An analogy was given with the introduction of the digital calculator to the classroom. It is better for teachers to engage with pupils and show them how to use the calculator, and when not to use it, rather than just banning it completely. At the time, many people believed that the calculator would reduce pupils' mathematical abilities. In fact, what has happened is that children, and the adult workers they have become, no longer need to spend so much time on mental arithmetic and are able to focus more time on the application of those calculations in their work.

Consistent Standards in Schools

Attendees told us that the way AI is being used and taught in schools varies considerably between schools and individual teachers, and there are few materials available. Schools lack clear guidance and standardised approaches to teaching AI. Without clarity or resources, it is very hard for schools to develop AI plans.

“We need to ensure that there is consistency and general guidance for schools on how to teach AI.”

What Should be Taught About AI?

Firstly, we need to establish what types of AI need to be taught in schools. Should it be more of a general introduction to principles, guidance on using GenAI responsibly, a focus on analytics skills (maths), or a deeper dive into the technical skills? Many teachers do not feel equipped to teach AI effectively, and the lack of clarity over what should be taught exacerbates this challenge.

“Teachers are not born with innate knowledge of how to use AI... It’s also not taught within teacher training.”

Teacher Training and Support

Teachers require specific training and resources to integrate AI into their teaching. Clarity needs to be provided by both the Department for Education (including AI across the syllabus and within standards) and within teacher training for both newly qualified teachers and reskilling for existing teachers. It was suggested that engaging established teachers in this programme might be challenging, but that this is an important area to address.

Supporting Enthusiastic Teachers to Innovate

Guidance on AI from the Department for Education is out of date, and one of our contributors felt that this directly inhibited the enthusiasm of proactive teachers who want to teach AI because their head teachers are reluctant to go beyond the DfE guidelines. It is vital that heads be encouraged to innovate and support enthusiastic teachers. Schools should be provided with up-to-date guidance that empowers their staff to be innovative and forward-thinking in how they approach the subject, which is much the same challenge that we see with teaching adults about a subject that is constantly evolving.

Incorporating AI Across the Curriculum

“AI should not be confined to computer science, it’s not a domain of ICT, it’s a domain of everything.”

It was noted that AI should not just be limited to one subject but should be integrated as a multidisciplinary subject in primary, secondary, and higher education. Some attendees also suggested that AI should be made compulsory across the curriculum, noting that other countries have started to do this, such as South Korea (see section 5 below).

“We could learn from places like California, Singapore and Estonia where AI education is compulsory.”

Highlight the Importance of Maths: a Quick Win

A number of attendees, particularly those involved in both AI and education, made the point that greater emphasis should be placed on maths. Schools have a unique position to signpost the connection between maths and AI and reinforce the message that AI relies most heavily upon maths. Some would argue that AI models are applied mathematics. Maths is already a critical part of the curriculum and does not require a new syllabus, saving time and resources. We should use the interest that pupils have around AI to engage them in maths – this is the foundation for building a future AI-ready workforce. It is a quick solution that will have significant impact.

“Maths can change the world. But we’re not teaching maths in an exciting way... if there’s one thing you can do to help this education system, it is to transform maths education. And, of course, maths is the foundation of AI machine learning.”

Dynamic Skills Development

Attendees highlighted how GenAI tools can be used to transform education processes – improving preparation, helping create engaging resources, and accelerating marking. In particular, GenAI tools can be used to deliver training that is dynamically personalised to the needs and learning style of the learner.

“We need to create dynamic skills curriculums around the personal transition that every individual needs to go through.”

Informal Education

Attendees pointed out that a lot of education happens outside of school, particularly through voluntary organisations. Voluntary organisations, such as the Scouts and Girl Guides, have an important role to play in developing a positive perception of AI. It is important that we consider how we engage with these organisations to ensure they also understand the positive potential of AI technology, and that we provide them with the knowledge and training they need to instil confidence in the young people they engage with.

Urgency of Implementation

A major concern, particularly from large businesses, was the current lack of urgency in addressing these needs. Attendees highlighted that changing the curriculum or issuing new guidelines takes years, but that this is too slow when the technology, and the way that businesses use it, is changing weekly.

“If it takes us four or five years to implement AI into the curriculum, we’ll have lost a generation.”

Businesses have a commercial imperative to ensure the UK has a future workforce with the AI skills the country needs.

3. Workforce Transformation

A recurring theme was the transformative impact of AI on the workforce, with a significant focus on job displacement and the potential loss of roles in manual and repetitive tasks. Participants stressed the need to mitigate this disruption through retraining and upskilling initiatives that equip workers with the skills and confidence required to adapt, highlighting the importance of making retraining programmes accessible to all demographics.

Plan for Job Displacement

*“It’s believed that 30 per cent of current UK jobs will be disrupted by AI.”**

The group addressed the fact that the adoption of AI technology is displacing human jobs, especially in repetitive and manual roles. While automation of repetitive tasks was seen as inevitable, participants highlighted the responsibility of businesses to provide alternative roles and retraining for displaced workers.

Reskill Quickly with Relevant Skills

“We need to reskill people faster to match the speed of AI’s evolution.”

The pace and scale of change requires reskilling and retraining that can happen quickly and remain up-to-date. Attendees also highlighted the need for this reskilling to reflect the skills that businesses actually need. This means that businesses will need to be an active partner in setting out the skills that are required, as well as supporting the implementation of the training.

(By 2030. Based on a report by [McKinsey](#))

“Businesses must step up, but they also need the conditions to enable them to do more... like ecosystems to support upskilling.”

The group discussed the need for dynamic and personalised reskilling and training programmes that use GenAI technology as part of the solution.

Incentives for Business-led Reskilling

Having outlined the urgency of finding solutions to reskill displaced workers, the group discussed whose responsibility it should be and, specifically, the role of the Government. Attendees asked whether the Government could provide financial incentives and tax breaks for businesses to provide reskilling and further education.

Apprenticeships Could Play an Important Role

One of our attendees reminded the group of the importance of apprenticeships to provide reskilling for workers of all ages, particularly those who are looking to retrain. They also highlighted their concerns that apprenticeships are not being included or prioritised within conversations about building AI skills in the UK.

Activate the Potential of Experienced Workers

“Older people have the knowledge and experience to leverage AI effectively.”

Within the discussion around AI skills, a couple of attendees pointed out that we should highlight the advantages of reskilling older workers. Older workers bring lots of practical experience, acquired in real businesses, that can be amplified and augmented by AI tools. Older workers are uniquely positioned to transfer knowledge using AI tools. Relatively little attention has been paid to how to empower older workers, but it was felt that there is significant potential to “activate” older workers to help retrain and reskill communities and organisations.

Leading Hybrid Teams

The emergence of AI agents was highlighted as something that will have a significant effect on how businesses are organised. Humans will collaborate with AI agents in hybrid teams, requiring new approaches to management and collaboration.

4. Addressing the Digital Divide

The societal impacts of AI were a major area of discussion, particularly the risks of exacerbating existing inequalities. Digital poverty was identified as a significant barrier to equitable access to AI's benefits, with millions in the UK lacking the digital skills necessary to participate in an AI-driven economy. Participants highlighted the broader implications of AI on democracy, social structures, and life chances, emphasising the need for inclusive policies that ensure all demographics benefit from AI advancements.

Will AI Deepen the Digital Divide?

It is often the individuals who could most benefit from these transformative technologies that are the least able to access and use them. Bridging the digital divide is essential to ensuring the benefits of AI are accessible to all demographics, particularly marginalised communities.

“There are 19 million people in the UK on the wrong side of the digital divide.”

Businesses have a responsibility to ensure they address this imbalance and make sure the tools and services they are creating are accessible and available for these underserved communities. Further, it is in the commercial interests of businesses to ensure that their workers and customers are equipped with basic AI skills.

Distribute AI Skills Across the Entire UK

“AI could divide society in ways that have consequences far beyond economics.”

There is a significant geographical imbalance across the UK. The South East has very well-established resources for the development and provision of AI skills, including top universities, science parks, accelerators, and research institutions. Skills and training resources, particularly retraining displaced workers, should be focused outside of London and the South East in order to redress this imbalance.

Address the Gender Balance in AI

There is already a significant gender imbalance in the AI sector, which reflects the tech sector as a whole, with men outnumbering women in leadership, management, and junior roles. It was noted that job displacement will affect part-time and low-skilled jobs, sectors of the economy that have a very high proportion of female workers. Consequently, job displacement is likely to cause greater gender imbalance and have a disproportionate effect on female workers.

5. Attracting and Retaining Talent

The group discussed how to ensure that the UK has the right workforce in place. In addition to developing new workers and retraining displaced workers, it is also important to attract new international workers. There is now a global marketplace for talent, with many different countries competing to attract the top AI workers. So, the UK must also think about how to retain its existing talent, as well as attract new talent. The discussion emphasised the need to foster the right conditions for long-term workforce development alongside other initiatives to make the UK an attractive location for AI talent.

Graduate Talent is Choosing to Leave

“A lot of our graduates are looking to leave for better conditions abroad.”

The group highlighted the problem of skilled graduates being recruited to more lucrative roles in other countries — we are paying to develop the pipeline of future talent for those other countries.

The UK Should Lead, Not Follow

“It’s critical to make sure the UK is set up to innovate and not just consume.”

Part of the challenge is that many of the leading AI businesses are headquartered in the US. The group felt that the UK must avoid becoming solely a consumer of foreign innovations and focus on the development of its own AI products and workforce.

Benefit from the UK’s Global Authority in Education

The UK has always been a world leader in education; this remains one of our most successful exports. UK universities attract thousands of overseas students each year. Many of the UK’s most successful AI and tech businesses have been spun out of post-graduate research teams at leading UK universities. Yet, it appears that once these businesses reach a certain size, they inevitably move their HQ and executive teams to the US or other countries.

The group acknowledged that the reason talent is leaving the UK might be for a range of reasons beyond just the provision of skills, for example, the tax regime, quality of life, availability of investment, and access to larger global markets. All of these issues will be explored in a future roundtable and report that looks at AI investment.

Learn From Global Competitors

Attendees suggested that in order to understand how competitor countries develop, attract and retain talent, businesses in the UK must keep an eye on what these countries are doing. By analysing these incentives, the UK should be able to develop its own initiatives to retain talent. Businesses should put pressure on the Government to ensure that the UK's education and skills programmes are globally competitive.

Business Academies

Investing in employees can often be a very effective way to retain them, as well as develop future leaders. Many businesses now create their own AI training courses (e.g. AI Hubs or Internal Academies), often blending sector- and company-specific knowledge with general AI training. The investment in training programmes pays dividends by ensuring the employees will stay with the business, whilst also increasing their productivity, effectiveness, and confidence.

Case Study: Incorporating AI Into the National Curriculum in South Korea

South Korea has put maths at the centre of its secondary syllabus, alongside a national programme of AI skills. All secondary pupils must now study maths and AI till the age of 18. In the 2022 PISA tables, South Korea was ranked as the fifth highest-performing country in mathematics.

Introduction of AI Courses in 2021

South Korea introduced two elective subjects in high schools, “Introductory AI” and “Mathematics of AI”. These courses provide students with foundational knowledge in AI concepts and applications.

Expansion to Earlier Years by 2025

The South Korean Government plans to extend AI education to elementary and middle schools by 2025. The curriculum will cover programming, basic AI principles, applications, and AI ethics.

AI-Powered Digital Textbooks Enable Personalised Learning

South Korea is set to implement AI-enabled digital textbooks in mathematics and a handful of other core subjects in March 2025. These textbooks will personalise learning by adjusting content to each student’s level and pace, providing real-time feedback and assisting teachers in tailoring materials to each student.

Training Teachers in AI

Recognising the pivotal role of educators, the Government aims to train approximately 5,000 incumbent teachers in AI competencies by 2025. This initiative includes integrating AI-related content across teaching courses.

Investing in Digital Tutors

To facilitate the transition to AI-powered education, the Ministry of Education plans to introduce 1,200 digital tutors to support technical aspects, alleviating the burden on teachers.

Enhancing Digital Infrastructure

The Government has allocated approximately \$70 million to improve digital infrastructure in state schools. This investment focuses on upgrading network conditions, ensuring adequate Internet speed, and providing the necessary digital devices to support AI-based learning. Schools will also have access to technical support.

<https://world-education-blog.org/2025/01/03/ai-textbooks-to-arrive-in-korea-the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly/>

<https://www.verdict.co.uk/ai-powered-tablets-south-korea/>

<https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/education/teachers-are-leading-an-ai-revolution-in-korean-classrooms>

6. Developing Ethical Skills

Conversations around AI skills tend to focus on teaching basic literacy and technical skills, however, it is also important to teach a responsible and ethical framework for AI and ensure that all citizens understand the risks around data privacy and security. These topics are rarely included in education or training courses, but they should be seen as essential. Businesses have an important role in society to act responsibly, supporting both their employees and customers and the wider communities that they serve.

Highlight the Need for Transparency

In the discussion, the attendees outlined the importance of transparency within GenAI tools. People should understand the basic principles of how GenAI works so that they can see where the training data is coming from and how decisions are being made. Greater transparency will enable people to understand the risks, challenges, and unintended consequences of systems that rely upon AI technology.

Carefully Consider Data Privacy

A number of examples were given where people may not be aware of the privacy and security risks when they put their personal information into a GenAI tool. Some attendees shared stories of how they, or family members, are using GenAI tools to help with everyday tasks. Other attendees pointed out the risks in sharing information and urged caution.

At a more technical level, the point was also made that information shared with GenAI tools may risk further data breaches and non-compliance with GDPR, since people do not think about what will happen to the information they share with GenAI tools. Further concerns were made about where the data is being stored and the implications for GDPR compliance.

“Using ChatGPT might put organisations in breach of GDPR.”

Increase Understanding of the Impact on the Creative Industries

The creative industries are one of the largest sectors in the UK, employing thousands of people and contributing £125 billion to the UK economy. The group felt that the workforce should understand how GenAI tools use creative materials as training data and should be aware of the impact of GenAI on the livelihood of people who work in this sector.

“Who owns the copyright to something created using an AI platform?”

At the same time, it is important for workers to be clear about who owns the copyright for content they have created with the help of Generative AI, especially if they then go on to use these new materials in their businesses.

Ethical AI

Participants stressed the need for the workforce to be given a basic appreciation of ethical AI practices and an awareness of systemic biases that could perpetuate inequality. These topics should be included alongside the risks when people are taught about how AI can be used.

“AI literacy is not just technical — it’s about understanding biases and ensuring inclusivity.”

7. AI Leadership Skills

Business leaders face significant challenges in planning the adoption of AI into their organisations. The results of integrating AI technologies into an organisation can be significant gains in productivity, efficiency, and quality, however, there are also considerable risks. The transformation process for every organisation is going to be different and will require leaders with particular skills and experience. Participants highlighted the need for simplified, actionable guidance to support leaders in these organisations to integrate AI responsibly and effectively.

Management Skills Need to Evolve

Management training needs to be updated to provide managers with the additional management skills that they will require to lead AI-integrated teams effectively. There are practical challenges, such as how to manage hybrid teams that combine humans and AI agents, alongside the challenge of how to coach and motivate a team to constantly develop up-to-date skills with the latest AI tools.

AI Agents Will Change the Nature of Work

Participants explored the concept of hybrid teams, where AI agents and humans collaborate.

“We are all going to be managers of AI agents... creating hybrid teams where AI agents work alongside people.”

The discussion noted that businesses must prepare for this shift by training employees to work effectively with AI agents, treating them as both tools and collaborators. It will require changes to how objectives are set and how tasks are allocated. It could also have an impact on the type of work that humans do and potentially on how they are remunerated. These changes will have an effect on the entire organisation.

Leaders Must be Fully Engaged

Leaders across the entire organisation will be critical to the success of an AI adoption and transformation programme. Leaders must demonstrate the same adaptability and commitment that they will require from their teams, combined with humility and a willingness to identify gaps in their own knowledge and skills.

“How can we better incentivise leaders to reskill themselves?”

It is very easy for senior leaders to exclude themselves from the training programme, believing they are “too old to learn” or that they will be able to rely upon others. Anecdotally, this is something that is particularly problematic with partnership firms with senior partners who have little incentive to want to upskill. If senior leaders are not aligned and committed, this can often cause friction that indirectly ‘sabotages’ the effectiveness of the programme.

Being Prepared to Make Decisions, Faster

“One of the things that we see slowing down adoption on a desk-by-desk level is the organisations themselves... We were working with one organisation and they said, we want to make sure we’re secure. They came back three months later and said, it’s absolutely fine.”

Whilst everyone recognised the need to ensure that any technology project is secure, attendees noted that it is often the ‘inertia’ of the organisation that slows down AI adoption. Leaders should be empowered to iterate quicker, testing on smaller subsets of data, or working within secure ‘sandboxes’ to be able to test and learn.

SMEs Require Particular Support

*“99 per cent of organisations in the UK are under 49 employees...
They need actionable guidance.”*

Small and medium enterprises often lack the resources and expertise needed to implement AI training, reskilling, or transformation projects. The group highlighted the importance of ensuring that any recommendations for driving greater AI skills in the UK workforce also address how this will be implemented across SMEs.

8. Public Engagement, Education and Trust

The recent Government tracker on Attitudes to Data and AI showed that while levels of trust in AI technologies are increasing, there are still major concerns around safety and privacy.* Public understanding of AI technology is key to driving greater adoption of AI within the workplace and of AI services and tools in daily life, and both benefit AI businesses.

Lack of Engagement Causes Friction

When businesses invest in new AI tools and systems, they also need to invest in engaging their workforce. It is very easy for employees to be sceptical and unengaged, meaning the new AI tools are not used to their full potential. A participant from a large organisation gave the example of senior, well-educated leaders ignoring the new AI-powered tools that their companies invested in. This happens across all organisations and at all levels. This ‘quiet sabotage’ can only be addressed by engaging with those workers, changing their perception and highlighting how these AI-powered tools and systems can benefit them individually.

* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-attitudes-to-data-and-ai-tracker-survey-wave-4/public-attitudes-to-data-and-ai-tracker-survey-wave-4-report#executive-summary>

Championing the AI Industry

“AI was seen as a threat, but now we focus more on the opportunities.”

The group underlined the importance of changing the perception of AI from one of fear to opportunity. Education will accelerate the understanding and adoption of AI in the UK. Participants advocated a public education campaign to increase understanding and foster a more optimistic and informed view of AI’s potential. It was felt that this is something that should be done by the industry body, on behalf of its members. Attendees suggested that this could be done by showcasing examples of how AI is already delivering results that are relevant to people’s lives, for example, within healthcare or education.

9. Urgency

The rapid pace of AI’s evolution was a recurring theme, with participants warning of the difficulties in keeping education, policy, and business practices aligned with technological developments. There were calls for strategic planning to address the long-term implications of automation. The discussion also touched on the importance of preparing for a future where AI plays a central role in all aspects of life, requiring proactive policies and initiatives that balance innovation with social responsibility. Participants noted that without immediate and sustained action, the UK risks falling behind in harnessing AI’s transformative potential.

Rapid Pace of Change

The fast evolution of AI tools demands agile responses from education and businesses. This pace of change needs to be built into any training programme or business plan.

“The half-life of skills is months, maybe a year or two. Unless we reskill faster, we’ll struggle to keep up.”

Legislation Cannot Keep Up

New legislation takes years to enact; even the simplest amendment to an existing bill can take months. Yet, as we have seen, GenAI models are accelerating in complexity, scale, and accuracy every day. So, how can we expect to create new laws and regulations that will be relevant when they come into effect? New regulation should be based around ‘principles’ that are flexible enough to adapt, rather than rigid frameworks.

“The technology is outpacing the ethics and regulation of AI.”

The Window of Opportunity is Closing

Attendees highlighted the risk that if UK businesses and government do not move quickly enough, there is a very high risk that other countries will seize the opportunity. Our competitors are just as eager to find ways to attract investment and talent to their markets, and they are working on their own plans. We have a number of competitive advantages in the UK, but the longer we wait to maximise these advantages, the more likely our competitors will have caught us up or even overtaken us. The window of opportunity is closing.

Part 2

Principles to Build an AI-ready Workforce

Broader

AI technologies are affecting every industry sector and every part of people's lives, work, and education. AI is part of everyday life; it is not just a technical discipline. Any discussion of skills should address the broader needs of society.

Firstly, we need to recognise this change. We should be clear that non-technical, everyday AI literacy will have a greater economic and social impact than just technical skills alone.

Secondly, we need to ensure we are supporting and equipping people equally across the UK – irrespective of background and location – to acquire AI literacy, giving them the confidence to fully participate in the AI economy of the future.

Earlier

AI is being used by children from a very early age, but it is not being taught consistently within the school curriculum. Young children should be introduced to simple concepts, and basic AI literacy should be taught in primary schools.

Currently, AI is a subject that people can only study from age 18. UKAI advocates for the provision of an AI syllabus, starting in primary school, that offers a pragmatic and responsible approach to the use of GenAI – preparing today's young people to be tomorrow's business leaders.

The lack of clarity and guidance over what should be taught often results in all GenAI tools being prohibited altogether, creating the perception that AI is a risk to education, rather than an opportunity. UKAI argues that schools should engage with this powerful and transformative technology and educate children on how to use these tools responsibly and ethically from an early age. These are the same tools that workers, including their parents, are now using on a daily basis.

Better

Businesses have specific skill requirements that should be built upon the existing academic curriculum and leverage the UK's world-leading schools and universities. The UK should establish the standard for AI education within schools that can lead the world, balancing everyday AI literacy with technical skills and ethical considerations.

Businesses know the skills they require from their workforce. They are constantly involved in hiring and retaining employees with these specific skills, giving them first-hand experience and knowledge of the skills that are required and how this changes.

At the moment, this knowledge is siloed and fragmented across businesses. UKAI is championing a programme to engage with businesses to gather this information into one common business 'AI Skills Standard'. This can then be mapped to the existing school curriculum to identify gaps and enable the development of a curriculum that aligns with what businesses need.

Faster

The UK is a world leader in AI technologies, but we face global competitors who are actively trying to attract our business, skilled workers, and investment. Building the right skills today will secure the UK's opportunities tomorrow, but the longer this takes, the more opportunities we will lose.

Investors are evaluating the opportunities in the UK and comparing them against other countries. Many of those other countries are investing in AI education and skills programs to make them more competitive. These programs take time to set up and to deliver results. Speed of execution will be critical to who wins this competition. Countries that can move quickly will grow on inward investment, whilst those countries that are slow to respond will miss out on the opportunities. Investment in core infrastructure is often a zero-sum game, with only one winner taking everything. The window of opportunity is closing, and in order for the UK to be able to harness the opportunity, it must move quickly.

UK businesses in the AI sector, many of which are scale-ups, are used to making decisions quickly and moving fast. There is a growing sense of frustration that the Government is not moving quickly enough and that the changes required are not happening. Meanwhile, we see our biggest competitors moving forward, not least Trump's announcement of the \$500bn Stargate initiative and the US AI Action Plan, which dwarfs the UK.

UKAI believes that AI businesses can and must come together to drive some of these initiatives ourselves, attracting investment to build the solutions the UK needs.

Part 3

How Can We Build an AI-ready Workforce?

1. Maths Education is A Quick Win: Upweight in the Existing Syllabus

Most fields of artificial intelligence rely upon mathematical principles. The more technical fields, such as data science and machine learning, are advanced maths. Algorithms are mathematical formulae. Yet, this connection is rarely made. Young people who show an interest in AI are not interested in studying mathematics. Even mathematics teachers rarely make the connection, nor do they highlight the importance of maths to AI.

For the UK to lead in AI, we first need to lead in maths. UKAI believes that the AI industry should make the case very clearly and very loudly that studying maths will give our young people the best opportunities to be future leaders in AI.

This proposal can be achieved quickly and with minimal extra investment required, since this does not require the development of any new syllabus or materials, just a repositioning of the existing maths curriculum.

2. Access the Full Potential: Improve Gender Equality in the AI Sector

Women are unrepresented across the AI sector, which reflects a broader lack of representation across the tech sector. As AI becomes an essential everyday skill in the workplace and at home, we need to ensure that women are not just involved as consumers, but also as leaders of AI businesses and producers of AI technology.

By attracting more women into the industry, not only does the industry benefit from access to a much broader pool of talent, but we also benefit from a more diverse set of perspectives and experiences. This will enable the AI industry to identify and address some of the biases that have been unconsciously built into algorithms and models, which are causing unintended consequences. Further, it will ensure that future consumer-facing tools and services better reflect the needs and interests of all consumers.

By opening up the industry to more female leaders, we can also encourage more women and girls to consider a career in the AI industry. At the same time, the AI industry should be looking at how we can support girls and women to have more confidence with everyday AI tools and to gain basic AI literacy.

UKAI believes that companies that are proactively encouraging women into the industry, as well as supporting girls' education, should be recognised with an employer's mark, see point 6 below.

3. On-Shore AI Work: Champion Regional Centres of Expertise

Create a UK online marketplace (like Upwork) to enable UK businesses to find and book value-for-money, skilled workers across the UK. The platform charges fees, which, along with any profit, are then invested in programmes to upskill and train workers across the UK.

Combine this initiative with regional specialisation across the UK, building upon expertise developed within particular cities to develop further AI-specific expertise. For example, Guildford for gaming, Manchester for media, and Bristol for fintech. These cities become centres of AI specialisation, which other UK businesses can then access instead of offshoring.

4. Business Inspiration for Schools:

Partnering to Inspire and Educate

Businesses across the UK are using AI technologies in a number of fascinating and very different ways to provide solutions for different industries. Not only do these businesses have the passion for AI technology but they also have the expertise, and often already have some skills programmes for their own teams. Additionally, there are many more non-tech businesses that are successfully adopting AI into their businesses.

There is an opportunity to bring these businesses into schools to share their knowledge with teachers and pupils, providing unique inspiration and greater understanding. This could be encouraged immediately, through an informal programme. In the longer term, this could form part of any future curriculum. This could be delivered in partnership with existing third-sector organisations (e.g. Young Enterprise or Peter Jones Enterprise Academy) or through government bodies such as Oak National Academy.

As the industry body, UKAI would help facilitate this process, working with business partners, local education authorities, and central government.

Taking part in this scheme should be recognised as a key part of what it means to be a responsible AI business (see point 6).

5. Business AI Skills Standards:

Identify the Skills Businesses Actually Need

Businesses across the UK have deep and frequent experience of searching for and hiring employees with the talent required to grow. These requirements should be collated and distilled into a 'Business AI Skills Standard' that can then be used to ensure that education and training are providing the skills businesses actually need.

UKAI proposes bringing together a small group of expert organisations that represent business interests and academic expertise. UKAI would develop a national programme to collate the relevant information from businesses across the UK, which would be used as input data to develop the 'Business AI Skills Standard'.

This standard would be regularly updated by UKAI and its partners to ensure that it is always relevant to the changing needs of the AI industry. The standard would then be made publicly available for educators and training providers to use to design courses and syllabuses.

What Role Does the AI Industry Have?

6. An Ethical Kitemark: Responsible AI Business

UKAI believes that the AI sector requires an industry kitemark for businesses that demonstrate responsible and ethical behaviour in their daily business operations. This should also recognise businesses that take a responsible approach to skills development, both within their own organisation and supporting their local communities and wider society.

To achieve the overall kitemark, businesses would need to demonstrate responsible activity across a number of areas. For example, they could show the work that they are doing within their organisation, and throughout their supply chain, to support and champion the inclusion of women into the industry (Recommendation #2 above). Businesses could also demonstrate that they are responsible AI businesses through their involvement in education partnership with schools (Recommendation #4 above).

Organisations that meet the standards would then be able to display the kitemark as an ethical AI business, similar to how businesses currently display the 'Living Wage Mark' or 'B-Corp'.

7. The AI Marketing Board: Public Awareness Campaign

The AI sector is a relatively new industry that has benefited from a lot of news coverage. However, much of the news has been negative, sensationalistic, or misleading. As a result, many people believe that AI will take their job, and some are worried that it will lead to human extinction. Levels of trust in AI businesses remain low and people across the UK remain uninterested in learning more about AI.

UKAI believes that by working together, the AI industry can address these concerns. This can be done by increasing basic AI literacy and public understanding, as well as increasing the awareness of how AI businesses are delivering positive results that benefit society. To do this, we need to showcase and highlight the good news stories and work as an industry to build a greater understanding of the AI sector and how it is a force for good in society. This will be underpinned by the work that UKAI is doing in skills, regulation, and establishing the kitemark (above).

In this way, the industry can encourage greater trust in the AI sector – enabling AI businesses to flourish, driving economic growth and social progress across the UK.

Conclusion

UKAI convened this roundtable to identify what the UK needs to lead in the future. As the tectonic plates of geopolitics are shifting, it is more important than ever to think about the UK's position and how we not only keep up with global competitors but how we can remain a world leader.

The AI sector is an emerging industry. What started as a new technology is now universally relevant to people in their everyday lives and work. While technical skills are important, basic AI skills are required more broadly across every community in the UK. Businesses need workers and employees to not only have these basic skills but also have the confidence to use them and the trust in the companies that provide the services and tools – trust that comes from understanding and familiarity.

Attendees in this roundtable echoed UKAI's belief that it is the responsibility of the industry to set out the skills that are required and then identify and help deliver the solutions. Industry should apply pressure on the Government, as well as offer its resources and expertise to support the Government in implementing these solutions.

Transformation starts with people. Skills are the catalyst that can transform individuals and, therefore, the businesses, communities, and societies to which they belong. As such, skills must be the number one priority in order for the UK to lead the future, not just in AI.

This report sets out a starting point and several recommendations that UKAI will champion, bringing our members and the wider industry together to drive forward. An ongoing and dynamic programme will be required as the technology, skills, and industry evolve. UKAI invites further input and participation.



Join the Discussion

UKAI is a membership organisation that brings together businesses, academia, and government to identify, discuss and debate how we can make the UK a world leader in AI.

UKAI regularly organises member-only events and industry conferences around the UK, covering our core policy areas of:

- Skills
- Economy
- Regulation
- Innovation
- Society

Find out more at www.ukai.co/policy

Future events will be exploring:

- Taking Responsibility for Diversity & Bias in AI
- Healthcare & AI
- AI Investment
- Regional Development
- Building AI Infrastructure

Find out more about our work and apply for membership on our website

www.ukai.co or email contact@ukai.co

Appendix I: Discussion Topics

As part of the process to identify the priorities for our roundtable, we asked our participants to review these 8x sub-topics.

<p>1. Build Everyday AI Literacy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increased Confidence: ensure UK businesses remain competitive through the widespread adoption of everyday AI tools to increase workplace productivity. ■ Non-technical AI: highlight the importance of simple AI tools and services in non-technical roles, and in non-tech companies.
<p>2. Rethink and Reform Education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Earlier and Deeper: integrate digital and analytical skills into primary and secondary school curricula. ■ Continuous Education: develop lifelong learning frameworks to reskill workers for AI-enabled roles and automation transitions. ■ Engage With Teachers: build confidence, understanding, and skills for new and established teachers.
<p>3. Support Industry-led Training Initiatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Industry Aligned Priorities: involve businesses in setting out the skills they actually need and then support partnerships that involve businesses in the delivery of up-to-date training. ■ Ever Evolving: ensure qualifications frameworks are flexible enough to allow for the fast-changing nature of AI. ■ Future-ready Apprenticeships: expand apprenticeships to include hands-on AI training for young people and career changers.
<p>4. Address Workforce Transition and Job Displacement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reskilling: support the workers displaced by automation through reskilling and career transition services. ■ Job Adaptation: identify roles at risk and create targeted pathways for workers to transition into AI-enabled positions. ■ On-shore Key Skills: reverse the off-shoring trends by upskilling workers across the UK to provide more cost-effective home-grown talent.

<p>5. Identify and Bridge Digital Divides</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Breaking the Cycle: leverage technology skills to lift individuals and communities out of digital poverty. ■ Regional Inequality: ensure geographic inclusivity across all parts of the UK nations and regions. ■ Equity in Access: promote fair work practices and ensure equal access to training programs for all communities, particularly those most affected by automation, such as female workers.
<p>6. Attract and Retain Global AI Talent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Global Appeal: position the UK as a leading destination for AI professionals. ■ Immigration Reform: simplify visa processes to attract and retain top international talent. ■ Regional Benefits: ensure that regional areas, not just London, benefit from global talent inflow.
<p>7. Encourage Regional Clusters and Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knowledge Towns: create regional AI hubs that foster knowledge-sharing and collaboration between communities. ■ Social Infrastructure: expand partnerships between businesses, universities, and local government to develop and fund initiatives that benefit the wider community. ■ Diffusion by Design: plan for knowledge transfer of everyday and technical skills from new data centres and research hubs into the local eco-system.
<p>8. Increase Public Awareness, Understanding and Adoption</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Combating Misinformation: Addressing public concerns about job displacement and existential AI risks with more information. ■ Highlight and Champion AI for Good: Highlight the many positive ways that AI based tools and services are already helping society.

Appendix II: How GenAI tools were used in this report.

The roundtable discussion was recorded and transcribed into text using Grain.

The full transcript was then analysed using ChatGPT to identify the key themes that were discussed. Humans then edited these themes (removing, adding, and merging).

The rest of the report was written by humans.

ChatGPT was used as a starting point for additional research, for example, to give a summary of South Korean AI education policies. Any facts were cross-referenced and if they are included in this report, the original source has been cited in the footnotes.

Several of the images were created using Midjourney.

UKAI
Golden Cross House
8 Duncannon Street
London WC2N 4JF

www.ukai.co
contact@ukai.co