

The Essential Skills Advantage



Human Skills
in an Age of AI

Foreword

Skills Builder Partnership works to ensure that one day, everyone builds the essential skills to thrive.

We are focused on how to build the essential transferable skills of speaking and listening; creativity and problem solving; teamwork and leadership; and planning and adapting.

With more than 1,100 partners in forty countries, reaching 2.4 million children and young people, we are united by a shared model of teaching and measuring essential skills - the Skills Builder Universal Framework.

Our partners span education institutions of all ages, NGOs and learning providers, plus employers who use our approach to support education and to develop their own teams.

We have demonstrated that through a structured and rigorous approach to building these skills,

all children and young people can make progress. Doing so opens up new opportunities for their futures.

As our global partnership grows, we have the opportunity to learn from diverse global settings, developing new insights towards our mission. This Insight Paper brings together our learning about how different countries and territories are responding to AI - and how we can mobilise and support individuals' essential transferable skills to meet the challenge.

It has never been more important to invest in the essential skills of children and young people everywhere. We hope you will join us.



Tom Ravenscroft

**Founder & CEO
Skills Builder Partnership**



This report is authored by the Skills Builder Partnership. KPMG International supports this work as a founding partner of Skills Builder Global. The findings and views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of KPMG International or any KPMG firm. KPMG is a global organization of independent member firms affiliated with KPMG International Limited, which does not provide services to clients.

Citation

Ravenscroft, T. (2026) *The Essential Skills Advantage: Human Skills in the Age of AI*. London: Skills Builder Partnership. Available at www.skillsbuilder.org

At KPMG International, we are proud to be a founding partner of Skills Builder Global. This collaboration reflects our commitment to strengthening essential skills worldwide, and supports our ambition, across our global organisation, to help economically empower 10 million disadvantaged young people by 2030, recognising that education is central to helping young people build the skills and confidence to thrive.

As a global organization of more than 275,000 professionals in over 138 countries and territories we see every day how critical skills are enabling individuals to succeed in the workplace and navigate change with confidence. Across the global organisation, our work with clients and communities shows that the full value of AI can only be realised when it is combined with human expertise and judgement.

This report highlights growing importance of the essential human-centric skills in an AI-enabled world. Capabilities such as creativity,

problem solving, communication, teamwork, leadership and adaptability will be fundamental in helping young people prepare for the future world of work and respond to new opportunities and challenges shaped by technological change.

Addressing this requires collective action. By bringing together education, business, government and civil society, we can better equip young people for the future - supporting more resilient communities and sustainable economic growth.



Roisin Murphy

**Head of Global Sustainability
KPMG International**





Executive Summary

The global labour market is experiencing its most profound transformation since the Industrial Revolution.¹ As generative AI and advanced machine learning models move from experimental novelties to operational engines, the architecture of work is being rewritten. Yet, as technologies accelerate, we are seeing something else: the critical competitive advantage in an artificial age is the uniquely human capability to apply judgement, creativity and collaboration alongside technology.²

This paper unpacks the symbiotic relationship between human capability and machine intelligence. It explores extensive data from the *Essential Skills Tracker 2025*,³ primary insights from an international education leader roundtable, and deep-dive explorations across five distinct economies - Colombia, Czechia, Hong Kong SAR (China), Japan, and Nigeria.⁴

As we look to what young people need, technical fluency is essential, but insufficient in isolation. The capacity to use, optimise, and safely manage AI technologies is underpinned by an individual's mastery of essential skills: *leadership, teamwork, listening, speaking, planning, adapting, creativity, and problem solving.*

What is more, to thrive, humans must specialise in what cannot be easily automated: the ability to build human relationships, to draw in contextual understanding, to make unexpected connections and to motivate and lead others. These require those same, very human, essential skills.

Without a concerted, multi-stakeholder effort from education systems, business leaders, NGOs, and governments to build these core human capabilities, technological acceleration could contribute to deepening systemic inequalities for young people and widen the global productivity gap.

As we range across continents, we will see that parts of the solution can be found in unexpected places - but an approach that supports everyone to thrive will be vital to ensure young people reach their full potential.

AI is reshaping pathways into work

The speed with which AI has permeated global employment is striking. The World Economic Forum (WEF) estimates that around 1.1 billion jobs could be transformed by technology over the next decade while AI and information processing will affect 86% of businesses by 2030.⁵ For certain individuals this might mean transitioning into entirely new occupations or mastering unfamiliar skill sets. This is no longer a purely speculative scenario; it has become an operational reality.

This has significant implications for young people in the current education system. How they are prepared will either set them on course for economic empowerment or exacerbate existing inequality traps.

For this paper, we explored how the world is responding to this technological change by looking at a deliberately diverse set of countries and territories: Colombia, Czechia, Hong Kong SAR (China), Japan, and Nigeria. A global roundtable of education leaders also drew in other countries including India, Lebanon, the UK, and the UAE.

These are all countries or territories where Skills Builder Partnership has been working with school systems, governments or NGOs to develop robust approaches to building skills.

The pace of this shift has produced stark regional variations in adoption and perception:

» **The global adoption contrast**

In Nigeria, globally high proportions of the youth population already use AI to master complex topics, bypassing traditional structural deficits in the formal education system.⁶ Conversely, in established European markets like Czechia, employer optimism is met with worker hesitation: only 59% of workers feel confident using these technologies, below the international average of 69%.⁷

» **The Higher Education disruption**

Technical skills and knowledge are changing at a rapid pace. Education leaders in the UAE note that students entering their fourth year of higher education are discovering that technical skills in highly specialised courses can become redundant, automated by generative platforms.⁸

» **The workplace efficiency shock**

Data from the *Essential Skills Tracker 2025* survey in the UK revealed that while only 27% of workers are currently required to use AI as part of their day-to-day employment, they report an average 43% higher level of anxiety.⁹ Across the board, 55% of UK working adults report an immediate need to learn new technologies to perform their current roles.¹⁰

This rapid re-orchestration of work has created new challenges for employers. In 2025, the challenge of upskilling and reskilling employees officially overtook workplace wellbeing to become the most urgent priority for human resource executives globally.¹¹

Through our work, we're seeing that a key question facing corporate boards and policymakers is no longer *how fast* the technology will evolve, but *how effectively* human workforces can adapt to lead it.

The evidence:

Essential skills for unlocking AI opportunity

An intuitive first response to AI might be to target technical proficiency - learning to code, understanding algorithmic structures, or obtaining computer science credentials. But this is an incomplete strategy. As AI automates routine elements of coding, drafting, and data processing, the value of technical expertise lies in how it is applied, governed and combined with human judgement.¹²

Emerging as crucial is the deployment of 'essential skills' as defined by the Skills Builder Universal Framework.¹³ These are the highly transferable skills which are used by almost anyone to do almost any job, and which support the application of technical skills and knowledge.

The Universal Framework works to break down these broad skills into practical teachable, measurable steps allowing for quantitative analysis

of skill levels. The approach itself has been intensively tested with tens of thousands of learners and comprehensively reviewed in 2025¹⁴ as well as being validated in a peer-reviewed journal.¹⁵

It is now widely adopted with official Skills Builder partners in more than fifty countries in 2025, directly reaching 2.4 million children, young people and adults that year.¹⁶ It is used by education institutions, NGOs, businesses and at a governmental level.



The eight skills that it incorporates are:



As this paper argues, these are not separate from AI skills: they are the vital enablers and complements that make AI tools productive, safe, and innovative.

The empirical link: essential skills enable AI use

The *Essential Skills Tracker 2025* established a definitive, statistically significant link between an individual's essential skill level and their frequency of AI use, using a representative sample of UK adults.

Workers who report frequently using AI in professional settings possess an average essential skill score that is 6% higher than non-users, even when strictly controlling for formal education levels, geographic

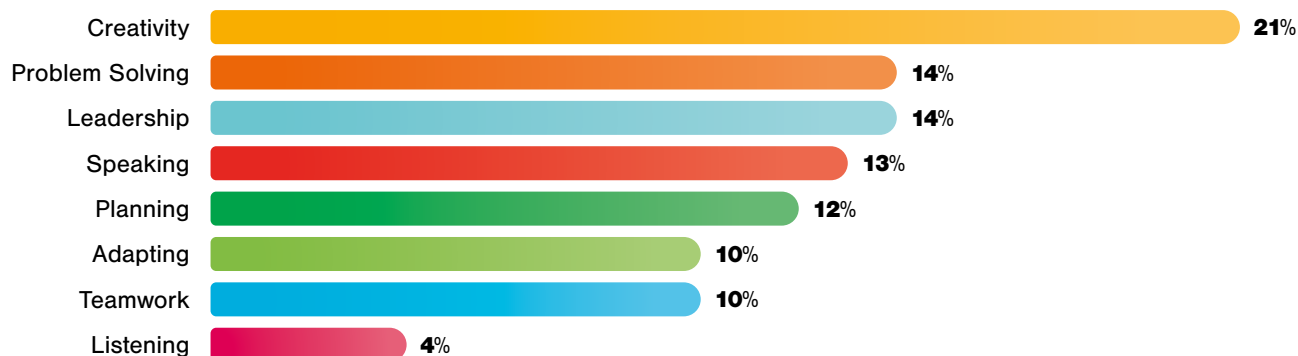
region, and job types.¹⁷ A worker in the upper quartile of essential skill proficiency, on average, uses AI 30% more at work compared to a worker in the lower quartile.¹⁸

There is strong evidence of the benefits of higher levels of essential skills, which has been borne out as a wage premium even when controlling for education levels and other factors. In the UK context, moving from the lower to upper quartile essential

skill score is associated with a wage premium of between 8.9% and 14.6%. In 2025 this equates to a premium of £3,700 to £6,100. Those who report regular usage of AI earn £8,300 more per year than peers.²⁰

The relative increase in average Skill Score for regular AI users compared to AI non-users bears this out:

Relative increase in average Skill Score for regular AI users compared to AI non-users



Source: *Essential Skills Tracker 2025*

Essential skills as vital enablers

This data reveals that effective AI interaction benefits from high-level human oversight and ethical judgement. Basic, low-level prompts can be easy to execute, but the resulting output is frequently generic, inaccurate, or commercially unviable.

To extract value from AI, an employee must possess deeper capabilities to structure and engage. Using the Skills Builder Universal Framework to break these skills down into precise capabilities illustrates why this is the case. For example:



Creativity and prototyping: Regular AI users score 33.6% higher in *Creativity Step 12 (Prototyping: I create quick tests of an idea)*. AI can generate raw concepts at lightning speed, but it should be supported by a creative human mind to structure rapid, iterative experiments and refine algorithmic outputs.²¹



Strategic planning and project management: Advanced AI adoption demands complex cognitive orchestration. Frequent AI users score 34.7% higher in *Planning Step 14 (Project Planning: I use planning tools to organise complex projects)* and 26.4% higher in *Planning Step 15 (Adaptive Planning: I use data to evaluate progress and make adaptations)*.²² The technology makes it easier to implement but the individual must establish the strategic roadmap, evaluate metrics, and pivot resources when anomalies occur.



Critical problem solving as a filter: In an environment flooded with automated information, synthetic data, and hallucinations, *Problem Solving Step 15 (Evaluating Approaches)* is a vital defence mechanism.²³ Individual workers must act as deliberate, critical consumers of digital data, evaluating algorithmic bias and validating machine conclusions before they are operationalised.

This is where the practical design of the Skills Builder Universal Framework matters: by codifying broad human capabilities into measurable steps, it gives educators and employers a shared way to build these skills deliberately. Next, we consider the challenges that may arise when young people enter the workforce without access to structured skills development.

The risk:

AI and the skills trap

AI implementation without investment in human skills creates risks across the journey from education into work. Essential skills need to be built early and reinforced through lifelong learning.



- 1** Slower/Lower Adoption of AI Tools
- 2** Low Essential Skills Profile
- 3** Exclusion from the AI Wage Premium
- 4** Confinement to Low-Wage, High-Automation-Risk Roles
- 5** Deepened Economic and Social Stratification

The skills trap starts early

While the AI wage premium has already been highlighted, the economic consequences of failing to integrate these skill sets will likely increase inequality. The current landscape risks exacerbating what Skills Builder has coined the '*Skills Trap*'.

Historically, individuals from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds have enjoyed fewer opportunities to build transferable essential skills through their formal education or early-career roles. In 2026, this baseline deficit could trigger a damaging domino effect.

Cluster analysis of the working-age population reveals that individuals who successfully pair a high essential skill score with frequent AI usage form an elite economic cluster, commands a mean annual income at least 53% higher than their peers.²⁴

To prevent AI from widening existing inequalities, wider access to essential skills development at every stage of the socio-economic pipeline is key.

The AI wellbeing challenge

The *Essential Skills Tracker 2025* brought to light another challenge: where AI implementation is introduced without sufficient human skills development and support, some workers report higher levels of anxiety - highlighting the importance of pairing AI deployment with human capability building.²⁵

However, this anxiety spike disappears for workers who choose to adopt AI freely rather than feeling it has been imposed. This suggests that autonomy and a sense of preparedness play an important role in how individuals experience these technologies.

Here, essential skills serve as a psychological shock absorber. Shifting a worker from the lower to the upper quartile in Adapting skills is associated with a predicted 9% decrease in workplace anxiety. Similar upskilling in Speaking and Teamwork is linked to a 7% reduction in anxiety.

When an organisation trains their teams with these core communicative and adaptive capacities, it can empower employees to process organisational ambiguity, articulate their technical challenges, and collaborate transparently to use the technology available.

The implication here is clear: that a core part of setting up young people to thrive in the workplace is to ensure they enter it with the essential skills to quickly engage with those tools with confidence.



New challenges in building skills for young people

When education leaders from ten countries including India, Kenya, Lebanon, and the UAE gathered for an international roundtable to support this paper, the conversation moved beyond geographic boundaries, revealing shared experiences and insights around the human element of this technological shift. The discussion highlighted a tension at the heart of this paper: many of the immediate barriers young people face are still practical ones - unequal access to tools, uneven technical confidence and limited support to use AI well.

Four significant themes emerged:



Young people are facing a rapidly changing skills landscape

Educators are exploring how to practically equip learners for a fast-changing world of work, where AI is reshaping job requirements. This means confronting the reality that the life span of a technical skill is quickly changing:



We have fourth-year university students discovering that the highly lucrative career pathways they entered as freshmen have been rendered redundant by AI before graduation. If we are not building highly adaptable, thinking learners in our K-12 systems, we are failing them.

– School Principal, Abu Dhabi, UAE²⁶

2

Young people are not starting from the same place

Challenges in access to technological resources and connectivity can easily become big barriers. In India, while central policy conversations focus on embedding computational thinking and advanced AI models into the national curriculum, the reality on the ground remains highly unequal.

Founders of the Inquilab Foundation noted that the overwhelming majority of public schools in rural areas lack functional computer laboratories and specialised IT educators.²⁷ This reflection is reinforced by compelling OECD research which highlights significant disparities in global education access - and even within countries when considering urban and rural contrasts.²⁸

3

Curricula are struggling to keep pace with change

The pace of change means that in many cases, formal curriculum review processes which tend to be deliberately thoughtful and considered have struggled to keep up. For example, in Hong Kong SAR²⁹ and Japan³⁰ governments have actively encouraged schools to innovate rather than await central direction.

In Lebanon, school networks are stepping in to lead on how to train educators to use AI tools³¹ This means they are able to be more nimble, flexible and responsive to the needs to their learners, although it does place a greater burden on educators.

4

Educators need support to prepare young people well

Education leaders in the roundtable emphasised that AI must be framed not as a teacher replacement, but as an administrative partner.

By automating routine grading and lesson assembly, teachers gain the time needed to double down on their true value proposition: character development, moral direction, and human-to-human empathy. However, this can be a meaningful shift - particularly for educators working in systems that have traditionally focused on memorising knowledge.

This is a conclusion reflected elsewhere, including in OECD reviews of effective use of generative AI in education.³²

Ways different global systems are responding

How are different nations navigating this paradigm shift? Our core case studies, combined with leader roundtable inputs, reveal an international landscape characterised by deep structural variations, regional experiments, and scalable best practices:

Colombia: connecting AI policy to young people's wellbeing and readiness

In Latin America's high-altitude tech hubs, Colombia is attempting an interesting national experiment: binding its ambitious technological roadmap directly to mandatory socio-emotional learning (SEL).³³ Faced with a rapidly growing AI market, yet held back by significant connectivity deficits in rural schools, the state launched the CONPES 4144 National AI Policy, allocating more than \$100 million to human talent development and ethical technological adoption.³⁴

The cornerstone of the Colombian model is structural curriculum integration. Rather than treating essential skills as elective workshops, regional Secretaries of Education have embedded these competencies as core institutional requirements.

Most notably, in 2026, the ICFES Saber 11 state exam - the gatekeeper to higher education - now includes evaluating emotional competencies, empathy, and social skills.³⁵

Concurrently, social enterprise innovations like Coschool are scaling low-resource, AI-powered tools like *Flori* to monitor student wellbeing and deliver Universal Framework-aligned skill development across the public sector, demonstrating that technology can be leveraged to humanise classroom environments rather than automate them.³⁶

Czechia: helping young people move beyond rote learning

For decades, Czechia served as the heavy manufacturing "workshop of Europe", operating an education system traditionally geared toward technical specialization and memorisation. The arrival of generative AI triggered remarkably

swift national change. As recently as 2024, educational institutions largely prohibited AI tools due to academic integrity fears; by 2026, this resistance has dissolved into pragmatic adoption.³⁷

The Czech model focuses heavily on systemic teacher enablement. Through the national AIDIG project (2024–2026), the Ministry of Education has executed a big upskilling push, committing to providing every public school

educator with access to paid, professional-grade AI tools to assist with administrative duties.³⁸

To ensure teachers are not overwhelmed, social enterprises like Schola Empirica have translated and deployed the Skills Builder Universal

Framework locally. Teachers use custom generative AI agents to instantly build classroom activities and learning puzzles directly mapped to the 16 granular steps of the Universal Framework, using the efficiency gains of AI to free up human time for direct, empathetic

student mentorship.³⁹ This means that young people are better supported to build the essential skills too.

Hong Kong SAR (China): encouraging local innovation for young people

East Asia is moving quickly into AI and is willing to invest heavily to make it happen. Under directives from the Chief Executive's Policy Address, the Hong Kong Education Bureau launched the AI for Empowering Learning and Teaching Funding Programme, injecting immediate, direct grants into every publicly funded and Direct Subsidy Scheme school to deploy advanced digital tools.⁴⁰

One of Hong Kong's advantages lies in its decentralised, highly autonomous school ecosystem, where over 70% of schools are managed independently by non-profit School Sponsoring Bodies. These institutions operate with agility.⁴¹

To guide machine usage, the territory leverages its Learning to Learn 2+ blueprint, categorising human capabilities into 'Generic Skills' (Thinking, Personal, and Social

Skills) layered with explicit core values like empathy and perseverance.⁴²

By partnering with Ednovators, a Hong Kong NGO, to map these abstract attributes to the observable steps of the Skills Builder Universal Framework, Hong Kong schools are building cross-disciplinary talent pools where arts students master technical algorithmic logic and engineering students are anchored in deep humanities values.⁴³

Japan: Reframing AI to support young people's economic futures

While some countries focus on AI as a threat to human employment,⁴⁴ Japan's demographic reality has led to a completely different perspective. Projected to face an acute deficit of 11 million workers by 2040, Japan has approached AI as enabler rather than competitor.⁴⁵

Under the 2026 AI Act, the state has established agile governance frameworks to accelerate digital transformation across corporate and civic life.⁴⁶ To supply the talent required for its integrated

'Society 5.0' blueprint, the Ministry of Education is executing a 10-year curriculum review cycle extending to 2037. This framework expands the educational metric from purely academic performance to incorporate self-initiative and dialogue-based learning.⁴⁷

Through the national GIGA School Project, which equips every single student with a personal digital device, and partnerships with organisations like Asknet to localise the Skills Builder Handbook, Japan

is pioneering an educational model where experimenting with AI explicitly serves to enhance higher-order thinking skills, social creativity, and human-to-human collaboration.

Nigeria: turning young people's appetite for AI into opportunity

Nigeria combines two extremes: a traditional education system - where even computer science students often graduate without hands-on access to computers - and a highly adaptable, young population.⁴⁸ With a median age of 18, many young Nigerians use mobile AI tools to teach themselves advanced skills, working around the system's limitations.⁴⁹

To formalise this digital energy, the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation

and Digital Economy (FMCIDE) launched the Digital Nigeria 2026 agenda, systematically connecting public schools to a national data infrastructure.⁵⁰

The state's macro policy recognizes that hardware investments are insufficient without human capability. Through the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (NAIS) review,⁵¹ and on-the-ground interventions by consultancy partners like Concinnity,

Nigeria is working to embed the structured steps of the Universal Framework into its newly revised national curriculum.⁵² The objective is clear: activate Africa's largest youth dividend by ensuring that natural digital curiosity is backed by the structured problem-solving and communication capabilities required to lead the global digital workforce.

UK: aligning behind a shared approach to help young people thrive

Building essential skills is a national priority in the UK to dismantle the persistent 'skills trap' affecting disadvantaged individuals. Rather than treating these capabilities as optional add-ons, the Skills Builder Universal Framework has achieved widespread uptake across England, fuelled by ambitious partnerships with education institutions, businesses, NGOs, and government agencies.

The rapid progress in AI technologies has further motivated the focus on these skills. Recent research reports highlight that the need for essential transferable skills in the workforce is accelerating.⁵³

In response, through collective impact and collaboration with key partners - including the Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) and the Fair Education Alliance - the development of essential skills and the Universal Framework has been recommended in statutory guidance for Careers Education.⁵⁴ More recently, the Universal Framework has been used to develop England's Standard Skills Classification, creating a shared language across the country.

This systemic integration was underpinned by 898 UK partners who delivered 2,370,000 high-quality skills opportunities in 2024-25. The depth of this reach is illustrated

by the CEC tracking 300,000 learners' performance using the framework, and by Accelerator programme participants making an accelerated progress across all eight essential skills.⁵⁶ Moving forward, the Partnership continues to expand local, place-based approaches to democratize essential skills development nationwide.

Educational change: Enabling young people to thrive

To build an education system fit for an AI-enabled future, ministries of education, standard-setting boards, and institutional leaders can play a critical role by moving beyond reactive strategies. Adding 'AI Literacy' or basic coding classes to an already overloaded curriculum will not be enough to set our young people up for success.

These four drivers can inform policymakers, educators and employers as they consider systemic reform:



Build essential skills through the curriculum for every young person

Abstract human attributes should be codified with the same academic rigour applied to mathematics or science so that they can be taught and assessed with the same commitment and high expectations.

Governments can benefit from adopting established, progressive skills taxonomies - such as the Skills Builder Universal Framework - to break down competencies like *Creativity, Problem Solving, and Teamwork* into explicit, measurable steps from early childhood through higher education. In the UK, this is transforming how essential skills are taught and measured - an approach which is being replicated in other settings as diverse as Uganda, Kenya, Czechia and beyond.⁵⁷

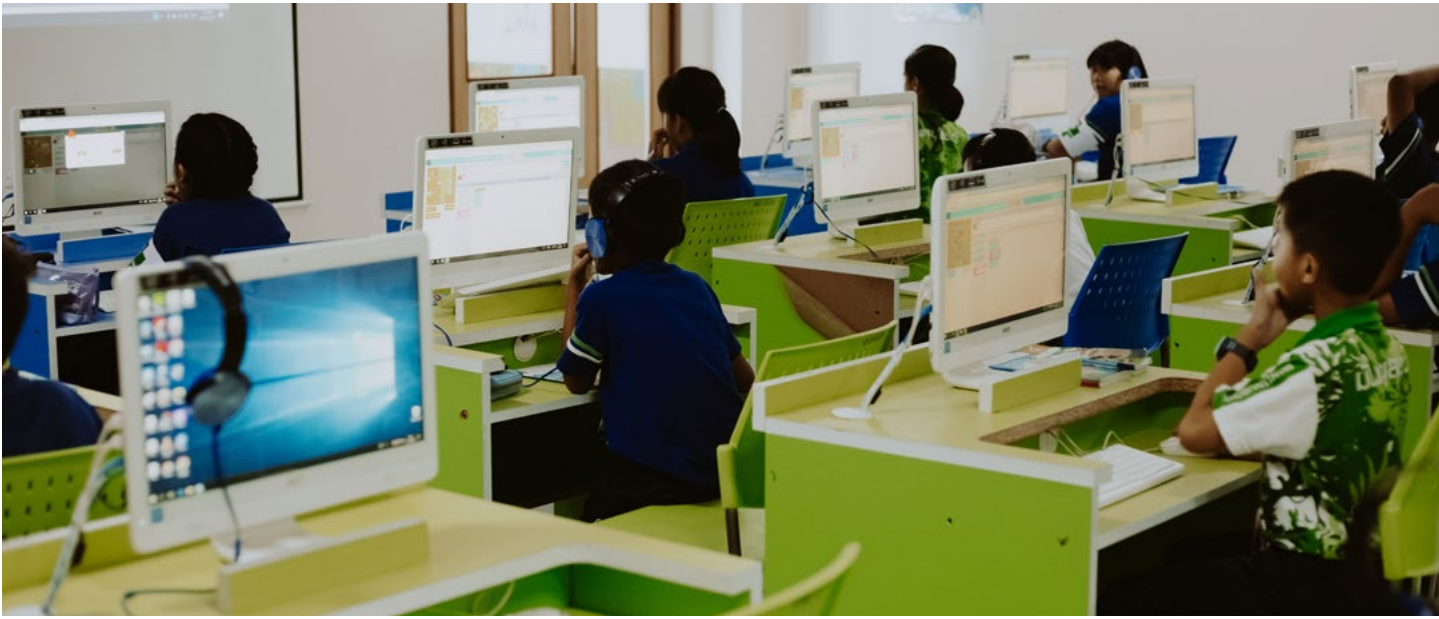


Enable young people to understand their essential skills

If an AI model can achieve a passing grade on a standardized assessment within seconds, that is not measuring everything that humans need to succeed.

Assessment architectures should broaden from content recall toward application-based evaluations, project-based portfolios, and oral presentations to assess essential skills as well as technical competencies.

Colombia's inclusion of emotional competencies in its state higher education gateway serves as a vital model for this transition,⁵⁸ whilst Nigeria is also looking to find robust certification routes for essential skills.⁵⁹



3

Equip educators to teach essential skills

We cannot expect educators to build AI-ready students if they themselves are not AI literate. Governments should consider funding national initiatives - similar to Czechia's AIDIG project - to grant every public school educator access to high quality digital tools and comprehensive professional training.⁶⁰

Crucially, this training should focus on using AI to handle administrative workloads, allowing teachers to redirect their energy toward direct student relationship management and foundational human skill development.

It should be complemented by significant investments in ensuring that teachers are also equipped and confident to teach and assess their learners' essential transferable skills - as the vital complement to AI literacy.

4

Use AI to strengthen thinking and skills, not replace them

When integrating technology into the classroom, educational software can be designed to support, rather than automate, cognitive effort.⁶¹

As advocated at our education leader roundtable, AI tools used by students can be designed to act as Socratic mentors - that is, asking probing questions, offering feedback, and challenging student assertions - rather than simply providing answers. This helps ensure that the technology supports, rather than diminishes, the learner's independent critical thinking capacity.

In this way, AI tools can also contribute to accelerating the development of learners' essential skills by acting as a coach while giving access to the latest information about the workplace.

How businesses can support young people's skills

The responsibility for preparing society for the AI economy does not rest solely with the education sector. The corporate community also has a clear financial and societal interest in supporting this transition. Investment can underpin young people equipped with AI and essential skills joining the workforce ready to drive innovation and organisational success - to the benefit of those organisations and the wider economy.

Conversely, without a highly skilled, adaptable workforce, organisational investments in digital infrastructure will fail to deliver productivity gains.

Business leaders should consider leaning into three key operational areas:



Signal the skills that matters in the labour market

How organisations signal talent requirements is becoming as important as the requirements themselves. Leaning on traditional proxies like degrees can unintentionally narrow the pool.

There's a move toward more skills-led models. In practice, that means using hiring rubrics, job adverts, and recruitment filters to make capabilities - especially essential skills - clear and assessable. If those signals don't evolve, organisations risk narrowing their options at a time when the talent pool is both tighter and more competitive.

For example, some businesses including UK retailer Oliver Bonas have used the Skills Builder Universal Framework to identify the essential skills needed for each job role and level. This information is used to upskill relevant stakeholders internally and inform interview questions



Invest in essential skills and lifelong learning

Organisational training budgets should be reviewed to consider the balance in their allocations. Rather than focusing exclusively on short-lived technical skills, learning and development (L&D) frameworks would benefit from treating essential skills as lifelong professional development requirements.

Providing employees with structured opportunities to build adaptive, communicative, and collaborative capacities is consistently associated with reduced workplace anxiety linked to AI.



For example, Amazon uses the Universal Framework to train its new UK apprentices in essential skills alongside the technical skills which are developed through regular sessions, opportunities to apply those skills, and then reflections to track progress.

3

Work with educators and communities to build future talent

Businesses are increasingly expected to move beyond siloed corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and enter deep, structural partnerships with schools, NGOs, and local government bodies.

Businesses can actively support the deployment of frameworks like Skills Builder into underserved school districts, sponsor regional innovation cohorts, and provide mentors for project-based learning initiatives. By directly supporting the educational ecosystem, business leaders help build a resilient, inclusive talent pipeline capable of thriving in change.

For example, KPMG UK's WorkReady programme contributes to the KPMG global commitment to help economically empower 10 million disadvantaged young people by 2030. WorkReady includes workshops which are hosted in UK schools and provide students with an essential insight into the world of work and technology's impact on the workplace, whilst developing their core transferable skills and exploring innovative technologies.

Conclusion

The AI revolution is fundamentally a human story. The speed with which these technologies are disrupting global employment underscores the need for an immediate, coordinated shift in how we value, develop, and measure human capability.

While the specific technical tools, programming languages, and operational platforms of tomorrow remain volatile and unpredictable, we know the essential human skills required to navigate them.

The international field evidence gathered in this report demonstrates that there is no singular path to readiness. Whether driven by macro demographic deficits as in Japan, strict policy mandates

as in Colombia, or rapid capital orchestration as in Hong Kong, the most successful models are those that reject the false dichotomy of technology versus humanity. Instead, they choose to treat AI as an accelerator of human potential.

Sustainable technological leadership cannot be achieved by optimizing machine efficiency alone. It calls for, and depends on a shared commitment from business, education

systems, NGOs and governments working together. By embedding the practical, structured steps of the Skills Builder Universal Framework into education and employment pathways, we can help ensure that every young person develops the essential skills to adapt and succeed in an AI-enabled future. This is not only vital for individual opportunity; it is also how economies and societies will be better equipped to thrive and prosper.



Skills Builder Universal Framework

The Universal Framework is an open-source tool available to support anyone, anywhere to build and measure essential skills. It is complemented by teaching and assessment tools and training programmes for education institutions, businesses and NGOs.

To see more examples of how the approach is being brought to life, or to join the Skills Builder Partnership, just go to: **www.skillsbuilder.org**

References

General

- **Babashahi, L., Barbosa, C. E., Lima, Y., Lyra, A., Santos, H., Argôlo, M., de Almeida, M. and Souza, J. (2024)** 'AI in the Workplace: A Systematic Review of Skill Transformation in the Industry', *Administrative Sciences*, 14(6), p. 127. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14060127>
- **Bocock, L., Del Pozo, J. and Hillary, J. (2024)** *Rethinking skills gaps and solutions: Essential skills for tomorrow's workforce*. Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)
- **Bocock, L., Scott, M. and Hillary, J. (2025)** *The Skills Imperative 2035: Creating a system of lifelong learning to provide the essential skills for tomorrow's workforce*. Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).
- **Craig, R. and Stewart, G. (2025)** *Essential Skills Tracker 2025: Driving social mobility and growth through the AI transition*. London: Skills Builder Partnership & Edge Foundation. Available at: <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/global/file/essential-skills-tracker-2025>
- **Craig R, Stewart G and Ravenscroft T (2026)** *Assessing the universal framework for essential skills: psychometric properties and predictive validity in the UK labour market*. *Front. Educ.* 11:1791572. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2026.1791572 <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/education/articles/10.3389/feduc.2026.1791572/full#cite>
- **OECD (2026)** *OECD Digital Education Outlook 2026: Exploring Effective Uses of Generative AI in Education*, OECD Publishing, Paris. At <https://doi.org/10.1787/062a7394-en>
- **People Management (15 April 2025)** *Reskilling trumps wellbeing as top HR challenge for 2025, study shows*. Available at: <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1914280/reskilling-trumps-wellbeing-top-hr-challenge-2025-study-shows>
- **Ravenscroft, T. (2025)** *Skills Builder Universal Framework of Essential Skills*. Skills Builder Partnership. Available at: www.skillsbuilder.org/global/framework
- **Ravenscroft, T., Craig, R. and Stewart, G. (2025)** *Universal Framework Review 2025: Final Report*. London: Skills Builder Partnership. Available at: <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/global/file/universal-framework-review-2025-final-report>
- **Skills Builder Partnership (2025)** *Global Impact Report*. Skills Builder Partnership. At <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/global/file/impact-report-2025>
- **Skills Builder Partnership (2026)** *Essential Skills & AI Research International Roundtable Focus Group*. Transcript dated 30 April 2026. Internal Document.
- **Skills Builder Partnership (2026)** *Business Studies Showcase*. Available at: <https://www.skillsbuilder.uk/essential-skills-in-business>
- **Wilson, H.J. and Daugherty, P.R., (2024)** *Embracing Gen AI at Work*. *Harvard Business Review*, 102(5), pp. 151–155. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2024/09/embracing-gen-ai-at-work>
- **World Economic Forum (2026)** *Invest in the workforce for the AI age: A blueprint for scale, skills, and responsible growth*. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2026/01/ai-roadmap-transforming/>

Country-specific:

- **AS Colombia (4 January 2026)**, *Nada será como antes: los importantes cambios en la prueba Icfes que notarán todos los estudiantes*, AS Colombia, viewed 1 June 2026, <https://colombia.as.com/actualidad/nada-sera-como-antes-los-importantes-cambios-en-la-prueba-icfes-que-notaran-todos-los-estudiantes-f202601-n/>.
- **ColombiaOne.com (2025)** *Colombia to Introduce Emotional Education Classes in Schools*. Available at: <https://colombiaone.com/2025/07/14/colombia-emotional-education-schools/> [Accessed 6 May 2026].
- **Fundación Microfinanzas BBVA (2025)** *Artificial Intelligence - National Policy CONPES 4144*. Available at: <https://www.fundacionmicrofinanzasbbva.org/revistaprogreso/en/inteligencia-artificial/> [Accessed 6 May 2026].
- **Hong Kong SAR Government (2025)** *Govt launches \$500m AI scheme*. news.gov.hk, 16 December 2025. Available at: https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2025/12/20251216/20251216_112101_776.html [Accessed 19 May 2026].
- **Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2025)** *Updated Guidelines on the Use of Generative AI in Primary and Secondary Education*. Tokyo: MEXT. Available at: https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20250422-mxt_shuukyo01-000030823_001.pdf [Accessed 22 May 2026]
- **Skills England (2026)** *The UK Standard Skills Classification*. Published 30 April 2026. At: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-standard-skills-classification-development-report/the-uk-standard-skills-classification>
- **UK Government (May 2025)** *Statutory guidance: Careers guidance and access for education and training providers*. Updated 8 May 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-provision-for-young-people-in-schools/careers-guidance-and-access-for-education-and-training-providers>

Endnotes

1. **World Economic Forum (2026)** *Invest in the workforce for the AI age: A blueprint for scale, skills, and responsible growth*. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2026/01/ai-roadmap-transforming/>
2. **Bocock, L., Scott, M. and Hillary, J. (2025)** *The Skills Imperative 2035: Creating a system of lifelong learning to provide the essential skills for tomorrow's workforce*. Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).
3. **Craig, R. and Stewart, G. (2025)** *Essential Skills Tracker 2025: Driving social mobility and growth through the AI transition*. London: Skills Builder Partnership & Edge Foundation. Available at: <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/global/file/essential-skills-tracker-2025>
4. **Skills Builder Partnership (2026)** *Essential Skills & AI Research International Roundtable Focus Group*. Transcript dated 30 April 2026. Internal Document.
5. **World Economic Forum (2026)** *Invest in the workforce for the AI age: A blueprint for scale, skills, and responsible growth*. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2026/01/ai-roadmap-transforming/>
6. **Google & Ipsos (2025)** *Our Life with AI*. Available at: https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2025-10/IpsosGoogle_our-life-with-ai_2025.pdf
7. **Randstad (2026)** *Randstad Workmonitor 2026: Czech Employees More Skeptical of AI Than Most of the World*. Available at: <https://nlchamber.cz/blog-posts/randstad-workmonitor-2026-czech-employees-more-skeptical-of-ai-than-most-of-the-world> [Accessed 6 May 2026].
8. **Skills Builder Partnership (2026)** *Essential Skills & AI Research International Roundtable Focus Group*. Transcript dated 30 April 2026. Internal Document.
9. **Craig, R. and Stewart, G. (2025)** *Essential Skills Tracker 2025: Driving social mobility and growth through the AI transition*. London: Skills Builder Partnership & Edge Foundation. Available at: <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/global/file/essential-skills-tracker-2025>
10. Ibid.
11. **People Management (15 April 2025)** Reskilling trumps wellbeing as top HR challenge for 2025, study shows. Available at: <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1914280/reskilling-trumps-wellbeing-top-hr-challenge-2025-study-shows>
12. **Wilson, H.J. and Daugherty, P.R., (2024)** *Embracing Gen AI at Work*. Harvard Business Review, 102(5), pp. 151–155. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2024/09/embracing-gen-ai-at-work>
13. **Ravenscroft, T. (2025)** *Skills Builder Universal Framework of Essential Skills*. Skills Builder Partnership. Available at: www.skillsbuilder.org/global/framework
14. **Ravenscroft, T., Craig, R. and Stewart, G. (2025)** *Universal Framework Review 2025: Final Report*. London: Skills Builder Partnership. Available at: <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/global/file/universal-framework-review-2025-final-report>
15. **Craig R, Stewart G and Ravenscroft T (2026)** *Assessing the universal framework for essential skills: psychometric properties and predictive validity in the UK labour market*. Front. Educ. 11:1791572. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2026.1791572 <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/education/articles/10.3389/feduc.2026.1791572/full#cite>
16. **Skills Builder Partnership (2025)** *Global Impact Report*. Skills Builder Partnership. At <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/global/file/impact-report-2025>
17. **Craig, R. and Stewart, G. (2025)** *Essential Skills Tracker 2025: Driving social mobility and growth through the AI transition*. London: Skills Builder Partnership & Edge Foundation. Available at: <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/global/file/essential-skills-tracker-2025>
18. Ibid.
19. **Bocock, L., Scott, M. and Hillary, J. (2025)** *The Skills Imperative 2035: Creating a system of lifelong learning to provide the essential skills for tomorrow's workforce*. Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).
20. **Craig, R. and Stewart, G. (2025)** *Essential Skills Tracker 2025: Driving social mobility and growth through the AI transition*. London: Skills Builder Partnership & Edge Foundation. Available at: <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/global/file/essential-skills-tracker-2025>
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. **Skills Builder Partnership (2026)** *Essential Skills & AI Research International Roundtable Focus Group*. Transcript dated 30 April 2026. Internal Document.
27. Ibid.
28. **OECD (2026)** *OECD Digital Education Outlook 2026: Exploring Effective Uses of Generative AI in Education*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/062a7394-en>
29. **Hong Kong SAR Government (2025)** *Govt launches \$500m AI scheme*. news.gov.hk, 16 December 2025. Available at: https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2025/12/20251216/20251216_112101_776.html [Accessed 19 May 2026].
30. **Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2025)** *Updated Guidelines on the Use of Generative AI in Primary and Secondary Education*. Tokyo: MEXT. Available at: https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20250422-mxt_shuukyo01-000030823_001.pdf [Accessed 22 May 2026]
31. **Skills Builder Partnership (2026)** *Essential Skills & AI Research International Roundtable Focus Group*. Transcript dated 30 April 2026. Internal Document.
32. **OECD (2026)** *OECD Digital Education Outlook 2026: Exploring Effective Uses of Generative AI in Education*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/062a7394-en>
33. **ColombiaOne.com (2025)** *Colombia to Introduce Emotional Education Classes in Schools*. Available at: <https://colombiaone.com/2025/07/14/colombia-emotional-education-schools/> [Accessed 6 May 2026].
34. **Fundación Microfinanzas BBVA (2025)** *Artificial Intelligence - National Policy CONPES 4144*. Available at: <https://www.fundacionmicrofinanzasbbva.org/revistaprogreso/en/inteligencia-artificial/> [Accessed 6 May 2026].
35. **AS Colombia (4 January 2026)**, *Nada será como antes: los importantes cambios en la prueba Icfes que notarán todos los estudiantes*, AS Colombia, viewed 1 June 2026, <https://colombia.as.com/actualidad/nada-sera-como-antes-los-importantes-cambios-en-la-prueba-icfes-que-notaran-todos-los-estudiantes-f202601-n/>.
36. **Skills Builder Partnership (2026)** *Impact Directory: Flori by Coschool*. Available at: <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/global/programmes/flori>
37. **Havrdová, E. (2026)** *Interview with Egle Havrdová (Schola Empirica): AI and Essential Skills in Czechia*. [Interview] Interviewed by Tom Ravenscroft, 5 May 2026.
38. **National Pedagogical Institute (NPI) (2026)** *AIDIG project: Support for AI in education and development of teachers' digital skills*. Available at: <https://en.npi.cz/blog/aidig-project-support-for-ai-in-education-and-development-of-teachers-digital-sk> [Accessed 16 May 2026].
39. **Schola Empirica (2026)** *Our Methodologies: Skills Builder* <https://www.scholaempirica.org/en/programs/skills-builder/>
40. **Hong Kong SAR Government (2025)** *Govt launches \$500m AI scheme*. news.gov.hk, 16 December 2025. Available at: https://www.news.gov.hk/eng/2025/12/20251216/20251216_112101_776.html [Accessed 19 May 2026].
41. **Shek, M. (2026)** *Interview with Marco Shek (Ednovators Hong Kong): AI and Generic Skills Integration*. [Interview] Interviewed by Tom Ravenscroft, 19 May 2026.
42. **Education Bureau (EDB) (2024)** *Chapter 3: Addressing Specific Learning Elements of the Curriculum – Curriculum Guide for Special Schools*. Hong Kong SAR Government. Available at: [https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/curriculum-area/special-educational-needs/curriculum_guide_for_special_schools/Chapter%203_CGSS%20\(2024\)_e.pdf](https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/curriculum-area/special-educational-needs/curriculum_guide_for_special_schools/Chapter%203_CGSS%20(2024)_e.pdf) [Accessed 19 May 2026].
43. **Ednovators (2026)** available at www.ednovators.org

44. **Skills Builder Partnership (2026)** *Essential Skills & AI Research International Roundtable Focus Group*. Transcript dated 30 April 2026. Internal Document.
45. **Recruit Works Institute (2023)** *Future Forecast 2040: The 11 Million Worker Shortage*. Tokyo: Recruit Holdings. Available at https://recruit-holdings.com/en/blog/post_20230926_0001/ [Accessed 22 May 2026]
46. **Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2025)** *Updated Guidelines on the Use of Generative AI in Primary and Secondary Education*. Tokyo: MEXT. Available at: https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20250422-mxt_shuukyo01-000030823_001.pdf
47. **Asknet (2026)** *Interview with Kazuo Yamamoto, Naho Kawashima and colleagues (Asknet Japan): AI Readiness and Essential Skills*. [Interview] Interviewed by Tom Ravenscroft, 28 April 2026.
48. **Jegede, O. (2026)** *Interview with Professor Olugbemiro Jegede: National Coordination and Skill Certification in Nigeria*. [Interview] Interviewed by Tom Ravenscroft, 9 June 2026.
49. **Google & Ipsos (2025)** *Our Life with AI*. Available at: https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2025-10/IpsosGoogle_our-life-with-ai_2025.pdf
50. **Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy (FMCIDE) (2026)** *WeekInReview: Unveiling NAIS at 2 - Dr 'Bosun Tijani*. Vol. 124/125. Available at: <https://fmcide.gov.ng/weekinreview-full-week-recap-of-activities-of-the-honourable-minister-dr-bosun-tijani-vol-124-125/> [Accessed 6 May 2026].
51. **PolicyVault Africa (2024)** *National Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2024 - Nigeria*. Available at: <https://www.policyvault.africa/policy/national-artificial-intelligence-strategy-2024/> [Accessed 6 May 2026].
52. **Concinnity (2026)** *Interview with Vivienne Bamgboye: AI Readiness and Essential Skills in Nigeria*. [Interview] Interviewed by Tom Ravenscroft, 30 April 2026.
53. **Bocock, L., Scott, M. and Hillary, J. (2025)** *The Skills Imperative 2035: Creating a system of lifelong learning to provide the essential skills for tomorrow's workforce*. Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).
54. **UK Government (May 2025)** *Statutory guidance: Careers guidance and access for education and training providers*. Updated 8 May 2025. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/careers-guidance-provision-for-young-people-in-schools/careers-guidance-and-access-for-education-and-training-providers>
55. **Skills England (2026)** *The UK Standard Skills Classification*. Published 30 April 2026. At: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-standard-skills-classification-development-report/the-uk-standard-skills-classification>
56. **Skills Builder Partnership (2025)** *UK Impact Report 2025*. Skills Builder Partnership. Available at: <https://www.skillsbuilder.uk/file/impact-report-2025>
57. **Skills Builder Partnership (2025)** *Global Impact Report 2025*. Available at: <https://www.skillsbuilder.org/global/file/impact-report-2025>
58. **AS Colombia (4 January 2026)**, *Nada será como antes: los importantes cambios en la prueba Icfes que notarán todos los estudiantes*, AS Colombia, viewed 1 June 2026, <https://colombia.as.com/actualidad/nada-sera-como-antes-los-importantes-cambios-en-la-prueba-icfes-que-notaran-todos-los-estudiantes-f202601-n/>
59. **Jegede, O. (2026)** *Interview with Professor Olugbemiro Jegede: National Coordination and Skill Certification in Nigeria*. [Interview] Interviewed by Tom Ravenscroft, 9 June 2026.
60. **National Pedagogical Institute (NPI) (2026)** *AIDIG project: Support for AI in education and development of teachers' digital skills*. Available at: <https://en.npi.cz/blog/aidig-project-support-for-ai-in-education-and-development-of-teachers-digital-sk> [Accessed 16 May 2026].
61. **OECD (2026)** *OECD Digital Education Outlook 2026: Exploring Effective Uses of Generative AI in Education*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/062a7394-en>.



© Enabling Enterprise CIC, trading as Skills Builder Partnership

A Community Interest Company, registered in England and Wales, 244-254 Cambridge Heath Road, London, E2 9DA

www.skillsbuilder.org