

# **Educational White Paper**

**Education for a Changing Society:**

**Human Skills, AI Readiness, and Preparing Learners for  
the Future of Work.**

**White Paper Submitted to the Department for Education  
in Response to the New National Curriculum for 2028.**

**Organisation:** Highfield and Brookham School, Highfield Lane,  
Liphook, Hampshire, GU30 7LQ

**Conference Name:** Raising The Future

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## 1. Executive Summary

The “Raising the Future” conference, hosted by Highfield and Brookham School on 28th April 2026, brought together leaders from the state and independent education sectors, industry representatives, and policymakers to examine the urgent challenges facing UK education ahead of the Government’s proposed 2028 curriculum reforms.

The conference identified several interconnected challenges impacting schools and learners across the UK education system. These included the need to better embed essential life and employability skills within the national curriculum, concerns regarding the continued suitability of GCSE assessment models, the rapid emergence of artificial intelligence in education, evolving employer expectations, and the growing impact of smartphones and social media on children and young people. The discussions highlighted why this is a pivotal moment for education, as schools seek to respond to significant societal and technological change. The themes explored at the conference could not be more relevant, regularly featuring in UK national media coverage, from the impact of AI and changing employer expectations to concerns about graduate employability, children's wellbeing and smartphone use. The conference therefore provided a timely forum to consider how education can respond to these challenges and better prepare young people for the contemporary labour market and wider society.

Evidence supporting these concerns was drawn from the expertise and cross-sector perspectives of senior educational leaders, employers, technology specialists, and former Secretary of State for Education (2022-2024) Gillian Keegan, whose participation reinforced the national significance and policy relevance of the discussions. Delegates consistently highlighted the need for education reform that is both future-focused and grounded in the human and pastoral dimensions of learning, with many arguing that the Government’s proposed reforms due for implementation from 2028 do not go far enough.

Key findings from the conference indicated broad consensus that the current education system risks becoming increasingly disconnected from the realities facing modern learners and employers unless reform is accelerated. Participants stressed that schools require greater flexibility to develop skills such as collaboration, adaptability, communication, digital literacy, and ethical decision-making alongside academic attainment. There was also recognition that artificial intelligence presents both opportunities and risks, requiring a balanced national framework for implementation in teaching and learning.

The implications for schools and learners are significant. Without meaningful curriculum and assessment reform, young people may leave education insufficiently prepared for the demands of the modern workplace, digital citizenship, and rapidly changing technological environments. Schools also face increasing pressure to support pupil wellbeing and resilience in response to social media influence and wider societal change.

The conference generated several headline recommendations for consideration within future government policy and curriculum reform discussions:

- Embed essential transferable skills, including communication, problem-solving, collaboration, and digital literacy, more explicitly within the national curriculum.
- Review and modernise GCSE assessment models to better reflect applied learning, creativity, and real-world competencies.
- Develop clear national guidance for the responsible and effective integration of artificial intelligence in education.
- Strengthen collaboration between educators, employers, and policymakers to ensure education remains aligned with future workforce needs.
- Introduce stronger national strategies to address the impact of smartphones and social media on children’s wellbeing, concentration, and learning outcomes.
- Support ongoing cross-sector dialogue and evidence-sharing through future roundtable discussions and policy engagement.

Overall, the conference demonstrated strong sector-wide support for a more responsive, collaborative, and future-focused education system that equips young people not only for examinations, but for lifelong success and societal contribution.

## **2. Background and Context**

The “Raising the Future” conference was convened at a pivotal moment for UK education policy and reform. Against the backdrop of the Government’s proposed curriculum and assessment changes scheduled for implementation from 2028, the conference sought to create a cross-sector platform for educators, employers, policymakers, and industry leaders to examine how education can better prepare young people for an increasingly complex, digital and rapidly evolving world.

Host:

- Lawrence Deju-Wiseman, Professor-the-field at the University of Connecticut

Keynote Speakers:

- Evelyn Haywood, Director of Education at Skills Builder Partnership
- Darren Coxon, Co-founder and Executive Director, Kopass Education

Specialist Speakers and Panellists:

- Suzannah Cryer, Head of Highfield and Brookham School
- Will Goldsmith, Head of Bedales School
- Sarah Clarke, COO, Media & Entertainment, ITV plc at ITV
- Hannah Oertel, Campaigner, Founder of Delay Smartphones

Guest Panellist:

- Gillian Keegan, former Secretary for State for Education (2022–2024)

The event emerged in response to growing concern that the current education system, while academically rigorous, is not evolving quickly enough to meet the rapidly changing societal, technological, and economic demands. Participants identified a widening disconnect between traditional models of curriculum delivery and assessment, and the competencies increasingly required for future employment, civic participation, wellbeing, and lifelong learning.

The policy environment surrounding the conference is one of significant transition. Speakers referenced the ongoing national Curriculum and Assessment Review, government proposals for curriculum reform, the introduction of enrichment benchmarks, SEND reforms, updated careers guidance, and increasing expectations around digital literacy and artificial intelligence in schools. These reforms collectively signal a shift towards a broader and more inclusive educational framework that combines academic knowledge with essential transferable skills and real-world application.

A key theme throughout the conference was the recognition that education can no longer focus solely on knowledge acquisition and examination performance. Evelyn Haywood of the Skills Builder Partnership argued that schools must deliberately and systematically develop essential skills such as communication, teamwork, critical thinking, adaptability, leadership, and problem-solving alongside subject knowledge. Evidence presented during the conference highlighted strong correlations between these skills and improved literacy and numeracy outcomes, higher employment rates, greater life satisfaction, wage premiums, and increased capacity to engage effectively with emerging technologies including AI.

The conference also highlighted concerns about inequality and access. Speakers noted that essential skills development is too often left to chance, disproportionately benefiting pupils from more advantaged backgrounds who have wider extracurricular opportunities inside and outside school. Without intentional curriculum design and equitable access to enrichment, there is a risk that educational and socioeconomic inequalities will continue to widen.

The rapid emergence of artificial intelligence formed another major contextual driver for the conference. Darren Coxon of Kompass Education described AI as a transformative force that is already reshaping employment, assessment, creativity, and the nature of learning itself. He argued that schools now face a critical “fork in the road”: whether to use AI merely to improve efficiency within existing systems, or to rethink education more fundamentally in response to technological change.

Evidence presented at the conference pointed to accelerating changes in the labour market, including predictions that a significant proportion of job skills will change by 2030, increasing automation of entry-level roles, and growing uncertainty surrounding traditional graduate pathways. Speakers also raised concerns regarding deepfake technology, misinformation, online safety, and the impact of social media and AI-generated content on young people's wellbeing, identity formation, and ability to critically evaluate information.

The implications for schools and learners are substantial. Schools are being asked simultaneously to maintain high academic standards, support mental health and wellbeing, respond to rapid technological change, address widening inequalities, prepare pupils for an uncertain employment landscape, and implement multiple layers of national reform. Learners, meanwhile, require not only academic success but also resilience, ethical judgement, digital literacy, adaptability, and the confidence to navigate increasingly complex social and technological environments.

The rationale for the conference therefore rested on the need for urgent, collaborative, and evidence-informed dialogue. Highfield and Brookham School intentionally brought together voices from across sectors and phases of education to ensure that reform discussions reflected the realities experienced by schools, families, employers, and young people themselves. Conference host Lawrence Deju-Wiseman described education reform not as a search for a "perfect" system, but as identifying "the next step in the evolution of education." The consensus was that future reforms must be increasingly agile and adaptable to respond effectively to a rapidly changing world.

Several clear recommendations and actions emerged from this context:

- Government curriculum reform should explicitly integrate essential transferable skills alongside academic knowledge.
- Schools should be supported to adopt more flexible and innovative approaches to pedagogy, enrichment and assessment.
- AI literacy, ethical technology use, and critical evaluation skills should be embedded throughout the curriculum across all key stages, with consistent policy boundaries established across educational institutions, rather than treated as standalone topics.
- Greater investment is needed in teacher professional development to support curriculum innovation, AI readiness, and cross-sector collaboration.
- Policymakers should strengthen partnerships and a holistic approach between education, employers, and the technology sector to ensure reform aligns with future workforce needs.
- National guidance is needed to support schools in addressing online safety, deepfake technologies, and the broader impact of digital culture on children and young people.

- Future reform should prioritise equity and inclusion, ensuring all learners have access to meaningful skills development, enrichment and personalised support.

Ultimately, the conference reflected a growing national consensus that education reform must move beyond incremental adjustment and towards a more holistic, future-focused model that balances academic excellence with human development, adaptability, ethical understanding, and real-world preparedness.

### **3. Conference Overview**

“Raising the Future” brought together leaders from education, business, policy, technology, safeguarding, and parenting advocacy to explore how schools can better prepare children and young people for a rapidly changing social, technological, and economic landscape.

The central objective of the conference was to move beyond theoretical debate and towards practical, evidence-informed solutions for educational reform. Organisers sought to create a space for honest and cross-sector dialogue focused on the challenges and opportunities facing schools, learners, and society.

#### **Conference Objectives**

The conference was designed around several key objectives:

- To discuss the 2028 government curriculum reforms and evaluate whether they sufficiently address wider societal changes and the evolving demands of the employment landscape.
- To examine how curriculum reform can better integrate essential skills, academic knowledge, wellbeing, and future employability.
- To explore the implications of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies for teaching, assessment, safeguarding, and workforce preparation. And how to integrate into an educational environment.
- To consider alternatives to traditional assessment models, particularly GCSEs, in light of changing learner and employer needs.
- To investigate the impact of smartphones, social media and digital culture on children’s development, wellbeing, learning, and its effects on society.
- To strengthen and reinforce the need for collaboration between educators, employers, policymakers, and wider stakeholders in shaping future reform.
- To generate practical recommendations and evidence for inclusion within a White Paper intended for submission to the UK Government.

The conference theme - “Rethink education. Evolve tradition. Empower future-ready learners.” - reflected the broader ambition to create a more responsive, inclusive and future-focused education system.

### **Participating Stakeholders**

A defining feature of the conference was its deliberately diverse participant base. Delegates included:

- School leaders from both the state and independent sectors
- Teachers and curriculum specialists
- Educational researchers and academics
- Employers and business leaders
- Technology and AI specialists
- Safeguarding and wellbeing advocates
- Parents and community stakeholders
- Policymakers and former government representatives

This cross-sector representation was considered essential to ensuring that discussions reflected the real-world experiences and expectations shaping children’s lives both inside and outside the classroom.

The conference also benefited from the participation of Gillian Keegan, whose contribution provided a national policy perspective and reinforced the significance of the event within wider education reform discussions.

### **Keynote Speakers and Themes**

The conference programme featured a series of keynote presentations and discussions from leading voices across education, industry and technology.

### **Essential Skills and Curriculum Reform**

Evelyn Haywood explored the growing importance of essential transferable skills within education, arguing that communication, teamwork, critical thinking, adaptability, leadership, and problem-solving must be deliberately embedded within curriculum and pedagogy rather than left to chance.

Her presentation outlined how essential skills contribute not only to employability but also to wellbeing, literacy, numeracy and social mobility. She also examined the current policy landscape, including curriculum reform, enrichment entitlements, careers guidance, SEND reforms, and Ofsted developments, positioning essential skills as a connecting framework across all aspects of school life.

“Across four years of national research, stronger transferable skills consistently correlate with higher literacy and numeracy, greater life satisfaction, better employment prospects, a £4,000–£6,000 wage premium, and a greater ability to adopt and use AI effectively.”

“When opportunity is unequal, confidence falls - and the skills gap widens as those who need development most are often least likely to pursue it.”

- Evelyn Haywood, Director of Education at Skills Builder Partnership.

### **Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Learning**

Darren Coxon delivered a keynote focused on the transformative impact of artificial intelligence on education and employment. His presentation framed education as standing at a pivotal point, between simply automating existing systems or fundamentally reimagining learning for an AI-driven world.

Themes included:

- AI literacy and ethical reasoning
- Deepfake technology and misinformation
- Safeguarding and online safety
- Cognitive offloading and dependency
- The changing nature of employment
- Human creativity and collaboration
- The evolving role of teachers

The session emphasised the urgent need for schools to develop governance frameworks, staff training, safeguarding responses, and pupil education relating to AI technologies.

“The world of work is shifting on its axis. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 predicts that 39% of workers' core skills will change by 2030, while entry-level roles are already disappearing, creating an urgent need to prepare young people for an increasingly uncertain future.” \*

“For decades, graduates enjoyed a clear employment advantage. But analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data highlighted by The Atlantic suggests that, since the pandemic and the rise of AI, that advantage has narrowed dramatically - raising important questions about the future value of traditional graduate pathways.” \*\*

- Darren Coxon, Co-founder and Executive Director, Kompass Education

*\*Source: World Economic Forum, Future of Jobs Report 2025. Employers expect 39% of workers' core skills to change by 2030.*

*\*\*Source: Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau employment data reported by The Atlantic (April 2025)*

## **Human-Centred Education and the Purpose of Schooling**

Suzannah Cryer explored the need for education reform that is more human-centred, purposeful and future-focused. Drawing on her experience across both the state and independent sectors, she questioned whether current systems place too much emphasis on performance, compliance and standardisation at the expense of curiosity, creativity, wellbeing, and meaningful learning.

While recognising the importance of academic rigour and knowledge, Mrs Cryer challenged whether existing assessment models genuinely measure understanding or simply a pupil's ability to perform under pressure. She argued for a broader definition of success that values teamwork, communication, agency, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking alongside academic achievement.

Her presentation also highlighted the importance of balancing artificial intelligence with emotional intelligence, ensuring technology enhances rather than diminishes the humanity of education. She concluded by calling for schools to protect a love of learning, relevance and purpose, stewardship, and more humane approaches to assessment as part of future reform.

## **Assessment and GCSE Reform**

Will Goldsmith examined the limitations of the current GCSE system and argued for broader, more flexible assessment approaches.

Key concerns included:

- Overreliance on terminal examinations
- Limited preparation for adult life and university study
- Reduced student agency
- Excessive teaching time devoted to examination preparation
- Lack of alignment with AI-era assessment challenges

Alternative assessment models discussed included project qualifications, oral assessments, portfolios, coursework, and internally moderated programmes designed to broaden both curriculum and skill development.

“When two-thirds of students are left feeling that the system wasn't built for them, it's time to ask whether the system - not the students - needs to change.”

- Will Goldsmith, Head of Bedales School

### **Employer Perspectives and Human Skills**

Sarah Clarke provided an employer perspective on the future workforce, arguing that technical competence alone will no longer be sufficient in an increasingly automated employment market.

She identified several “human edge” capabilities likely to increase in value:

- Storytelling and communication
- Relationship-building
- AI fluency
- Adaptability and resilience
- Creativity and judgement
- Collaboration and “glue work”

“With 39% of employee skills expected to change by 2030, knowledge alone is no longer enough. In a world shaped by AI and rapid technological change, adaptability has become the defining advantage - and 70% of business leaders now say their competitive edge depends on being fast and nimble.”

“The rise of AI is increasing, not diminishing, the value of human-centred skills. As employers place greater emphasis on what candidates can do rather than what they have studied, skills-based hiring is rapidly becoming the norm - 83% of UK employers now prioritise skills over degrees, and 75% of job descriptions focus on demonstrated capabilities.”

- Sarah Clarke, COO, Media & Entertainment, ITV plc at ITV

*Sources: World Economic Forum, Future of Jobs Report 2025 (39% of core skills expected to change by 2030); Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends 2025 (70% of business leaders cite agility and adaptability as a primary competitive strategy).*

The session reinforced the need for schools to nurture authenticity, versatility, curiosity, and interpersonal skills alongside academic achievement.

### **Smartphones, Social Media, and Child Wellbeing**

Hannah Oertel explored the impact of smartphones and social media on children’s physical health, mental wellbeing, academic focus and social development.

Themes included:

- Sleep disruption and physical inactivity
- Anxiety, depression, and loneliness
- Cyberbullying and harmful online content
- Brain development and attention
- Exposure to sexual content and grooming risks
- The role of schools in digital safeguarding and parent education

“Research highlighted by Jonathan Haidt and other social scientists points to a marked rise in anxiety, depression and self-harm among young people since the widespread adoption of smartphone-based social media around 2012. In the UK, hospitalisations for self-harm among girls aged 10–14 have increased by 140%, with significant consequences for young people and their families.”

“Children now spend an average of 35 hours a week on their devices. This is contributing to challenges in sleep, eyesight, mental health and online bullying, against the backdrop of an escalating youth wellbeing crisis.”

- Hannah Oertel, Campaigner and Founder, Delay Smartphones

The presentation also examined policy responses, including school smartphone bans, parent education, online safety legislation, and wider regulation of technology platforms.

### **Attendee Engagement and Collaboration**

A significant strength of the conference was its interactive and collaborative format. Alongside keynote presentations, the programme included live polling, audience participation through Slido, open discussion, and opportunities for cross-sector networking and debate.

Delegates were encouraged to engage critically with questions surrounding:

- The purpose of education
- The balance between knowledge and skills
- The role of technology in learning
- Future employability
- Assessment reform
- Safeguarding and wellbeing
- The evolving responsibilities of schools

Feedback from attendees suggested the conference created a rare opportunity for open, solution-focused dialogue across educational phases and sectors. Delegates described the event

as “engaging and inspiring” and highlighted its role in reframing thinking around innovation while preserving the “human aspect” of education.

The conference concluded with a commitment to continue the conversation through future roundtables and the development of formal recommendations for policymakers, ensuring that the ideas generated evolve into actionable strategies capable of informing national education reform.

## **4. Key Findings**

The “Raising the Future” conference highlighted that education is at a critical point of change. While participants recognised the strengths of the current system, discussions emphasised that the reforms due to be introduced from September 2028 must go further in preparing young people for the realities of technological change, evolving employment needs, wellbeing challenges, and modern childhood. Several principal themes emerged throughout the conference.

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### **4.1 Education Must Balance Knowledge with Essential Human Skills**

One of the strongest themes across the conference was the need to move beyond a narrow focus on knowledge acquisition and examination performance towards a more balanced model combining academic excellence with essential human capabilities.

#### **Evidence and Discussion**

Evelyn Haywood, Director of Education, at Skills Builder Partnership argued that essential skills should be intentionally embedded throughout the curriculum rather than left to chance.

Research presented during the conference demonstrated that stronger essential skills are associated with:

- Better literacy and numeracy outcomes
- Improved life satisfaction
- Increased employability
- Reduced likelihood of becoming NEET (Not in Education, employment or training)
- Higher earnings
- More effective use of AI technologies

The conference also highlighted evidence that schools embedding these skills report improvements in:

- Behaviour
- Attendance
- Engagement
- Wellbeing

A repeated concern was that the deliberate teaching and development of essential skills is currently more consistently embedded within parts of the independent sector and in state schools serving more advantaged demographics, than across the wider education system. Participants highlighted that this inconsistency risks creating unequal opportunities for learners, particularly where schools face greater socioeconomic pressures or are less able to prioritise skills-based learning alongside academic outcomes.

### **Implications for Schools and Learners**

Without deliberate integration of essential skills:

- Learners may leave school academically qualified but insufficiently prepared for employment, relationships, collaboration and real-world problem-solving.
- Educational inequalities may continue to widen.
- Schools may struggle to meet employer expectations around adaptability, communication and resilience.

### **Recommended Actions**

- Embed essential skills frameworks within curriculum planning and assessment across all key stages.
- Increase opportunities for project-based, collaborative, and experiential learning.
- Ensure enrichment and careers provision intentionally develops transferable skills.
- Expand teacher training focused on integrating skills development within subject teaching.
- Promote cross-phase and cross-sector sharing of best practice.

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## **4.2 Artificial Intelligence Is Transforming Education Faster Than Current Systems Can Respond**

AI emerged as one of the most urgent and disruptive themes of the conference.

### **Evidence and Discussion**

Darren Coxon, Co-founder and Executive Director, Kompass Education described education as standing at a “fork in the road”:

- either using AI merely to automate existing systems,
- or fundamentally rethinking education for an AI-driven future.

Evidence presented included:

- Predictions that 40% of job skills may change by 2030
- Increasing automation of entry-level employment
- Rapid improvements in generative AI capability
- Growing concerns around deepfakes, misinformation, and cognitive dependency

A particularly significant finding was the recognition that AI literacy cannot be confined to isolated lessons or policies. Instead, participants argued it must become embedded throughout teaching, safeguarding, curriculum design, and school culture.

The conference also highlighted increasing safeguarding concerns relating to:

- Deepfake abuse
- Cyberbullying
- AI-generated harmful content
- Manipulated media
- Online exploitation risks

### **Implications for Schools and Learners**

Schools face growing pressure to:

- Prepare learners for AI-rich workplaces and societies
- Maintain academic integrity
- Address safeguarding risks linked to emerging technologies
- Prevent overreliance on AI (“cognitive offloading”)
- Support pupils in critically evaluating digital content

Learners increasingly require:

- AI literacy
- Ethical reasoning
- Critical evaluation skills
- Digital resilience

- Human creativity and judgement

### **Recommended Actions**

- Develop a national AI framework for schools (guidelines and policy).
  - Introduce AI literacy across curriculum areas.
  - Strengthen safeguarding guidance relating to AI and deepfake technologies.
  - Provide funded professional development for teachers and school leaders.
  - Review assessment models to reflect AI-era realities.
  - Support schools in auditing and monitoring AI use safely and ethically.
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### **4.3 Current GCSE Assessment Models Are Increasingly Misaligned with Future Needs**

Conference discussions revealed broad concern regarding the suitability of the current GCSE format and assessment structures.

#### **Evidence and Discussion**

Will Goldsmith, Head of Bedales School highlighted several weaknesses within the current GCSE model, including:

- Excessive focus on terminal examinations
- Reduced teaching time due to exam preparation
- Poor preparation for university and adult life
- Limited opportunities for creativity and independent thinking
- Weak alignment with future employment demands

Alternative models discussed included:

- Oral assessments
- Portfolios
- Coursework
- Project qualifications
- Reflective assignments
- Internally moderated qualifications (such as BACs – Bedales Assesed Courses equivalent to a GCSE qualification)

These approaches were presented as more resistant to AI misuse while also promoting deeper learning, agency, communication and real-world application.

### **Implications for Schools and Learners**

The current system risks:

- Narrowing the curriculum
- Increasing stress and disengagement
- Limiting creativity and independent inquiry
- Failing to develop broader competencies valued by employers and universities

### **Recommended Actions**

- Review GCSE assessment structures nationally.
  - Increase the diversity of assessment methods.
  - Expand project-based and oral assessment opportunities.
  - Pilot alternative qualifications and broader learner portfolios.
  - Reduce reliance on high-stakes terminal examinations.
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## **4.4 Human Skills Will Become More Valuable, Not Less**

Despite rapid technological change, employer perspectives strongly reinforced the enduring importance of human capabilities.

### **Evidence and Discussion**

Sarah Clarke, CCO, Media & Entertainment ITV plc at ITV, argued that technical competence alone will not be sufficient for future success.

The conference identified several increasingly valuable capabilities for employers:

- Storytelling
- Relationship-building
- Creativity
- Collaboration
- Judgement
- Adaptability

- Resilience
- AI fluency

Participants repeatedly emphasised that schools must preserve the “human” dimension of education alongside technological advancement.

### **Implications for Schools and Learners**

Schools may need to:

- Rebalance curriculum priorities
- Increase opportunities for discussion, performance, collaboration, and leadership
- Prioritise emotional intelligence and communication

Learners require preparation not only for jobs, but for citizenship, relationships, wellbeing and lifelong adaptability.

### **Recommended Actions**

- Increase opportunities for real-world interaction and collaboration.
  - Embed communication and interpersonal development across school life.
  - Promote resilience, curiosity, and adaptability through curriculum and enrichment.
  - Ensure assessment systems value human capabilities alongside academic knowledge.
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## **4.5 Smartphones and Social Media Are Having Significant Educational and Wellbeing Consequences**

The impact of smartphones and digital culture on children and young people emerged as a major safeguarding and wellbeing concern.

### **Evidence and Discussion**

Hannah Oertel presented evidence linking excessive smartphone and social media use to:

- Sleep disruption
- Anxiety and depression
- Cyberbullying
- Loneliness
- Reduced concentration
- Lower academic performance

- Exposure to harmful and sexualised content

The conference also explored the growing impact of:

- Addictive platform design
- Sextortion and grooming risks
- Reduced outdoor play and social interaction
- Changes in children’s attention and brain development

International examples of school smartphone restrictions and policy interventions were discussed, alongside the role of parent education and wider societal responsibility.

### **Implications for Schools and Learners**

Schools increasingly face:

- Rising safeguarding pressures
- Behaviour and attention challenges
- Mental health concerns
- Greater demand for digital education and parent engagement

Learners may experience:

- Reduced focus and resilience
- Increased anxiety and social comparison
- Greater exposure to harmful online environments

### **Recommended Actions**

- Develop clearer national guidance on smartphone use in schools.
- Strengthen online safety and digital wellbeing education.
- Increase parent education and engagement.
- Support schools in implementing evidence-informed digital policies.
- Review safeguarding frameworks to address emerging online harms.

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## **4.6 Collaboration Across Sectors Is Essential for Sustainable Reform**

A final overarching finding was that educational reform cannot be achieved by schools alone.

### **Evidence and Discussion**

The conference repeatedly highlighted the importance of collaboration between:

- Schools
- Employers
- Policymakers
- Parents
- Technology providers
- Universities
- Safeguarding organisations

Delegates consistently emphasised that education reform must reflect the realities children experience both inside and outside school.

The event itself demonstrated the value of cross-sector dialogue in generating practical and future-focused solutions.

### **Implications for Schools and Learners**

Without stronger collaboration:

- Reform risks becoming fragmented or disconnected from societal realities.
- Schools may struggle to respond effectively to rapid technological and cultural change.

### **Recommended Actions**

- Establish ongoing cross-sector roundtables and consultation groups.
- Involve employers and technology experts further in curriculum discussions.
- Strengthen partnerships between schools, families and policymakers.
- Ensure future reforms are evidence-informed and collaboratively developed.

## **5. Policy Recommendations**

The following recommendations are drawn from the key themes, evidence, and cross-sector discussions emerging from the “Raising the Future” conference. Collectively, they aim to support a more future-focused, equitable, and resilient education system that prepares children and young people for the realities of modern life, work, and citizenship.

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### **5.1 Embed Essential Skills Within the National Curriculum**

## **Rationale**

Conference discussions highlighted growing consensus that essential skills such as communication, critical thinking, collaboration, adaptability, leadership, and problem-solving are increasingly important for employability, wellbeing, and lifelong learning. However, access to deliberate skills development remains inconsistent across the education system.

## **Proposed Action**

- Explicitly integrate essential skills into curriculum guidance across all key stages.
- Develop a national framework that supports schools in embedding skills within subject teaching, enrichment, and assessment.
- Encourage cross-curricular and project-based learning opportunities.

## **Anticipated Impact**

- Greater consistency in learner preparedness across sectors and demographics.
  - Improved employability, engagement, wellbeing, and social mobility outcomes.
  - Better alignment between education and future workforce needs.
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## **5.2 Reform GCSE Assessment to Reflect Modern Learning and Future Skills**

### **Rationale**

Current GCSE structures were widely viewed as overly reliant on high-stakes terminal examinations and insufficiently aligned with the skills, adaptability, and creativity required for higher education, employment and an AI-enabled society.

### **Proposed Action**

- Reduce reliance on terminal examinations at age 16.
- Expand the use of coursework, oral assessments, portfolios, projects and reflective assignments.
- Pilot broader assessment models that value applied learning and independent inquiry.
- Increase opportunities for interdisciplinary and research-based qualifications.

### **Anticipated Impact**

- Increased student agency, engagement, and creativity.
- Better preparation for post-16 education, employment and adult life.
- Reduced exam pressure and improved learner wellbeing.

- Greater resilience against AI misuse within assessment.
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### **5.3 Develop a National AI and Digital Literacy Strategy for Education**

#### **Rationale**

Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping education, employment, communication, and information access. Schools require clear national guidance to ensure AI is used safely, ethically, and effectively.

#### **Proposed Action**

- Introduce a national AI literacy framework spanning primary and secondary education.
- Embed critical evaluation, ethical reasoning, digital resilience, and media literacy across the curriculum.
- Develop guidance for schools on AI governance, safeguarding, assessment and acceptable use.
- Provide funded professional development for teachers and leaders on AI integration.

#### **Anticipated Impact**

- Increased learner preparedness for AI-rich workplaces and societies.
  - Improved digital critical thinking and online safety.
  - Reduced risks associated with misinformation, cognitive dependency, and inappropriate AI use.
  - Greater confidence among educators in managing technological change.
- 

### **5.4 Strengthen Safeguarding and Online Safety Frameworks**

#### **Rationale**

Conference evidence highlighted increasing concerns around deep-fake technologies, cyberbullying, online exploitation, harmful content, and the wider impact of smartphones and social media on children’s wellbeing and development.

#### **Proposed Action**

- Update safeguarding guidance to address emerging AI and deep-fake risks.
- Develop mandatory national guidance on smartphone use and digital wellbeing in schools.

- Provide schools with clear digital communications and online media guidance to safeguard pupils and families.
- Expand parent education initiatives relating to online safety and digital culture.

#### **Anticipated Impact**

- Improved protection for children and young people online.
  - Greater consistency in school safeguarding approaches.
  - Increased parental awareness and engagement.
  - Reduced exposure to harmful digital behaviours and content.
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### **5.5 Increase Investment in Teacher Development and Cross-Sector Collaboration**

#### **Rationale**

Educational reform cannot succeed without sustained investment in teacher expertise, leadership development, and collaboration between education, industry and policymakers.

#### **Proposed Action**

- Expand funded professional development in curriculum innovation, AI literacy, assessment reform, and skills-based pedagogy.
- Encourage cross-phase and cross-sector collaboration through regional networks and national forums.
- Strengthen partnerships between schools, employers, universities, and technology organisations.

#### **Anticipated Impact**

- Greater consistency and confidence in implementing reform.
  - Increased sharing of effective practice.
  - Improved alignment between education and employment sectors.
  - Stronger professional capacity across the system.
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### **5.6 Ensure Future Reform Prioritises Equity and Inclusion**

#### **Rationale**

Participants expressed concern that access to future-focused learning opportunities, skills development, enrichment, and digital literacy remains uneven across sectors and demographics.

#### **Proposed Action**

- Ensure curriculum and enrichment reforms are accessible to all schools and embed essential skills across all key stages regardless of context or funding.
- Expand targeted support for disadvantaged communities and learners with additional needs.
- Promote inclusive models of assessment, enrichment and careers education.

#### **Anticipated Impact**

- Reduced educational inequality.
- More equitable learner outcomes across sectors and communities.
- Increased participation, confidence, and progression opportunities for disadvantaged learners.
- Stronger inclusion across the education system.

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### **5.7 Rebalance Education Towards Human Development and Wellbeing**

#### **Rationale**

A recurring theme throughout the conference was the importance of preserving the “human” dimension of education in an increasingly technological world.

#### **Proposed Action**

- Increase emphasis on communication, creativity, relationships, resilience, and emotional development across school life.
- Protect time for enrichment and creativity - arts, sport, outdoor learning, and personal development.
- Encourage assessment and accountability systems that value wellbeing and personal growth alongside attainment.

#### **Anticipated Impact**

- Improved learner wellbeing, confidence and resilience.
- Stronger interpersonal and communication skills.
- More balanced and sustainable educational experiences.

- Better preparation for employment, citizenship and lifelong learning.
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## **5.8 Establish Ongoing National Dialogue on Education Reform**

### **Rationale**

The pace of social and technological change requires educational policy to remain responsive, collaborative, and evidence-informed.

### **Proposed Action**

- Create ongoing national and regional education roundtables involving schools, employers, researchers, technology experts, parents and policymakers.
- Build structured opportunities for practitioners to contribute to curriculum consultation and policy development.
- Continue gathering evidence from innovative practice across sectors.

### **Anticipated Impact**

- More agile and responsive policymaking.
- Greater trust and collaboration across the education sector.
- Increased likelihood of sustainable and practical reform implementation.
- Stronger alignment between policy and the lived realities of schools and learners.

## **6. Implementation Considerations**

Successful implementation of these recommendations will require a phased and collaborative approach involving government, schools, employers, technology providers, safeguarding organisations, and teacher training bodies. Delegates agreed that reform should align with the Government's proposed 2028 curriculum changes, while also allowing flexibility for schools to pilot innovative approaches in advance of wider national rollout.

Evidence presented throughout the conference highlighted that schools are already managing significant pressures, including curriculum reform, safeguarding demands, staff workload, technological change, and widening learner needs. As a result, participants stressed that reform must be accompanied by appropriate funding, professional development, and practical implementation guidance.

Key implementation priorities identified included:

- Investment in teacher training and professional development, particularly in AI literacy, digital safeguarding, and skills-based pedagogy.
- Development of clear national guidance for curriculum reform, AI governance, online safety, and assessment innovation.
- Increased collaboration between schools, employers, universities, and policymakers to support consistency and evidence-sharing.
- Targeted support for disadvantaged schools and communities to ensure equitable access to future-focused learning opportunities.

Delegates also highlighted several potential risks, including uneven implementation across sectors, increased staff workload, widening digital inequalities, and the pace of technological change outstripping policy development. Concerns were raised that without sufficient support and investment, reforms could unintentionally deepen existing educational inequalities.

To evaluate impact effectively, participants recommended that future reforms should be measured not only through academic attainment, but also through learner wellbeing, engagement, employability skills, digital literacy, safeguarding outcomes, attendance, and long-term progression. Schools should be encouraged to contribute to ongoing evidence-gathering, pilot programmes, and national consultation processes to ensure reform remains responsive and evidence-informed.

## **7. Conclusion**

The “Raising the Future” conference highlighted a growing consensus that UK education is at a pivotal moment. While the proposed Government reforms planned from 2028 represent an important step forward, delegates consistently argued that further change is required to ensure the education system remains relevant, equitable, and responsive to the realities of modern childhood, rapid technological advancement, and evolving workforce demands.

Across all discussions, a common theme emerged: education must balance academic excellence with the development of essential human skills, wellbeing, adaptability, ethical understanding, and digital resilience. Participants stressed that schools can no longer prepare young people solely for examinations, but must equip them to navigate an increasingly complex, AI-driven, and interconnected world.

The conference also reinforced the urgency of addressing the wider societal challenges affecting children and young people, including online safety, mental health, social media influence, digital misinformation, and growing inequalities in access to future-focused learning opportunities. Delegates recognised that these issues cannot be addressed by schools alone and require coordinated national leadership and cross-sector collaboration.

Importantly, the conference demonstrated the value of bringing together voices from education, business, policy, technology, safeguarding, and parenting advocacy to shape practical and evidence-informed solutions. Participants strongly supported continued collaboration between schools, employers, policymakers, universities, technology organisations, and families to ensure future reform remains agile, inclusive, and grounded in the lived experiences of learners.

Ultimately, the conference concluded that educational reform should not simply seek to modernise existing systems, but to reimagine how education prepares young people for life, work, citizenship, and wellbeing in a rapidly changing society. The opportunity now exists for policymakers and educational leaders to work collaboratively in shaping a more human-centred, future-focused, and resilient education system for the next generation.

Mrs Suzannah Cryer, Head of Highfield and Brookham School remains committed to advancing this dialogue through ongoing roundtable discussions, collaborative partnerships, and platforms that promote the sharing of innovative practice across the education sector.

## **8. Appendices**

- Conference agenda
- Questions submitted by delegates
- Speaker and panel biographies
- Delegate attendee feedback
- Conference presentation
- Conference video