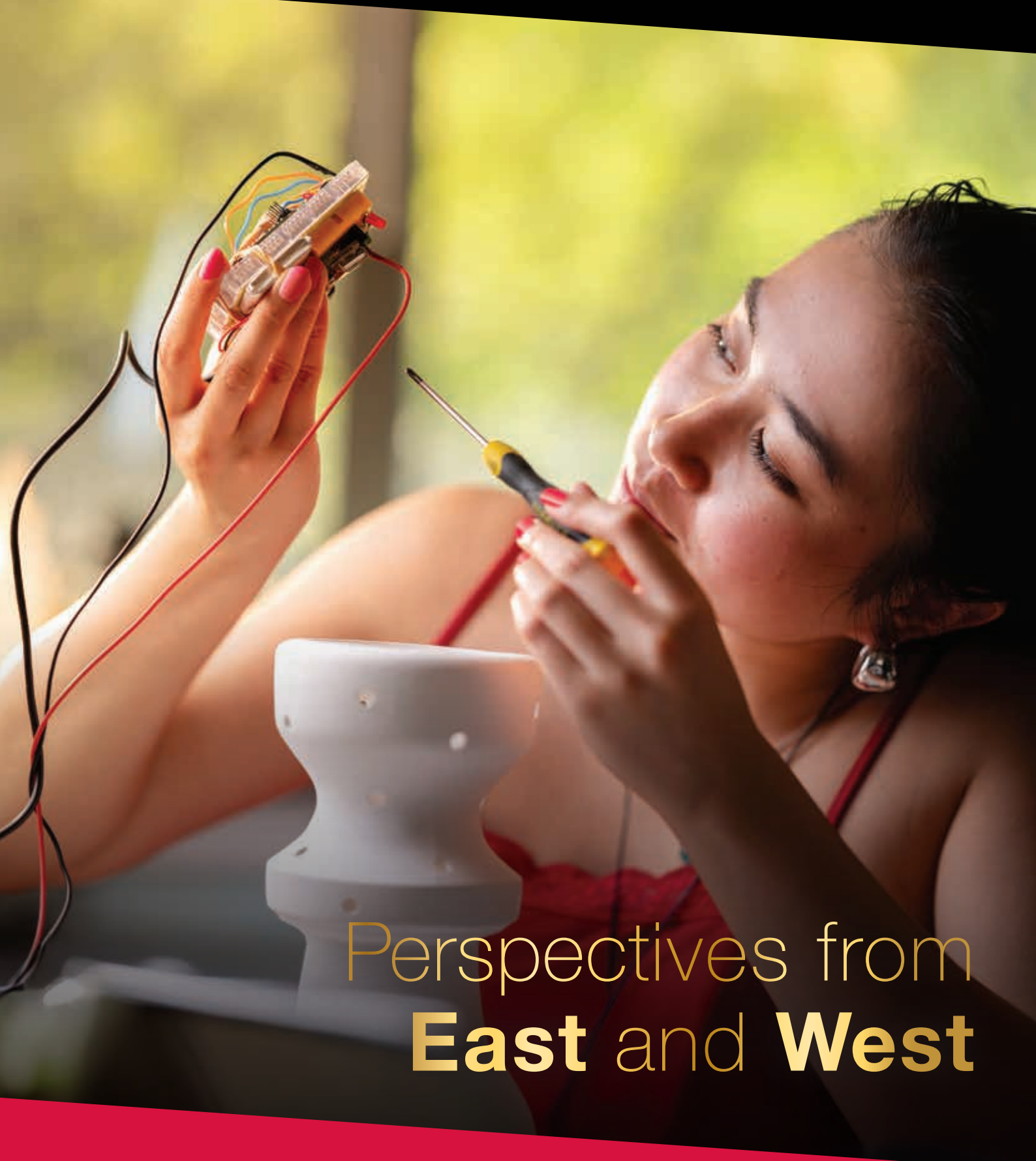


Future Skills 2025



Perspectives from
East and West



**Maria Alexe,
second year
architecture student**

The main difference Future Skills has made for me is being able to enter the world of work with an open mind. Everything is not set in stone. In the future, I might not be an architect, so I need to adapt.





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Introduction:

President and Vice-Chancellor Professor Steven Spier

Our new report, Future Skills - Perspectives from East and West, builds on our three previous Future Skills League Tables. From 2021, in conjunction with YouGov, we have regularly surveyed 2,000 business leaders to identify the skills businesses most value. **Future Skills are the essential skills which industry identifies as being vital both to drive innovation and boost economic growth. This regular research confirms that, amid rapid technological and global change, UK employers continue to value human-centric skills that will allow the workforce of the future to adapt and thrive through whatever challenges and changes arise.**

Our first Future Skills report, in 2021, sparked a national conversation about the skills employers are seeking to ensure their future competitiveness. The second report furthered the debate, examining students' perspectives on the skills they will need for their future pathways, alongside the workforce requirements of UK employers. Our third report examined emerging challenges posed by the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and revealed the Kingston Approach – our sector-leading Future Skills framework which we started embedding across our undergraduate curriculum at pace in September 2023.

Future Skills has not only driven our external conversations with UK government, higher education sector and employers, but also our ethos and unique selling point (USP) at Kingston University London. The early campaign laid the foundation of the University's Town House Strategy – shaping our institutional mission, vision and values. **Since September 2023, we have been fully embedding these skills into our entire undergraduate curriculum as a core part of every degree programme and we are the only university in the UK doing so.** In an increasingly competitive sector, we have established ourselves as the UK's leading university for Future Skills.

Since its inception, our pioneering Future Skills framework has attracted international attention and has started to be recognised as an example of best practice by policymakers, think tanks and educators across East Asia. This includes the Republic of Korea and Singapore, who have shown interest in our approach in the context of their own educational and economic challenges.



These international collaborations underscore the importance of a global perspective in shaping the future of higher education and workforce development.

AI has dominated the narrative about the future of work in recent years and has perhaps overtaken the perceived threat of global competitors. Interestingly, the 2025 polling shows that the overall **skills valued by employers remain broadly the same – well-rounded individuals who can adapt to ongoing change and can bring human-centric skills to evolving technologies. You could say the advent of AI has reinforced the need for Future Skills; those skills that are uniquely human.**

So as we expand our thought leadership globally – where better to start than with the world leaders for AI, digital transformation and advanced manufacturing? This led us to discussions with colleagues in Singapore, long recognised for valuing higher education and on industry collaboration.

We are therefore very pleased to invite the renowned Nanyang Technological University (NTU) to collaborate with us for this year's report comparing skills demands across Singapore, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan, and the UK. I would like to thank NTU for their contributions and insights. It's fascinating to see how national skills frameworks in these countries engage diverse stakeholders to shape their future economies and wellbeing. **While the differences in approach and prioritisation are enlightening, both the UK and East Asian nations agree that technical skills should not be taught in isolation but alongside human-centric competencies to meet the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. We're preparing our graduates for that future, alongside our partners in industry, and invite you to join us.**



Professor Steven Spier
President and Vice-Chancellor
Kingston University



Deenesh Santheeswaran,
third year business
management student

The experience of working on the live brief will not only deepen my understanding of the retail sector, but also give me extra confidence to put the Future Skills I'm acquiring during my degree into practice when I graduate.





Adobe: Empowering talent

As a leading provider of digital solutions in higher education, Adobe is proud to support Kingston University's Future Skills campaign, as an Adobe Creative Campus. Through the partnership with Adobe, we have jointly identified how we help and support students to gain critical Future Skills including problem solving, communication skills, critical thinking, digital and analytical skills, initiative, and creativity that are essential for the modern workplace.

Adobe recognises the importance of these Future Skills in preparing students for the ever-evolving technological landscape. With the pace of technological and societal change increasing, graduates must be equipped to navigate a workplace transformed by advancements such as AI.

Adobe's digital tools empower students to develop these critical skills, ensuring they are ready to tackle the challenges of tomorrow. Adobe is committed to supporting this initiative by providing innovative tools and solutions that enhance digital literacy and creativity among students.

Adobe's partnership with Kingston University on Future Skills briefs has been immensely rewarding, as we jointly prepare students for the modern workplace. We encourage other businesses to join us in this endeavour, as it provides an opportunity to showcase forward-thinking approaches to resolving skills gaps and investing in future talent.





Future Skills – the journey so far

Since 2021, Kingston University has been driving a major skills revolution in higher education, shaping the skills agenda in the UK and now internationally. Future Skills is informed by extensive research on the skills for future success that thousands of businesses want graduates to have, which are also skills that serve individuals throughout their lives, in education, work and life.

Our new report, **Future Skills – Perspectives from East and West**, builds on our Future Skills League Tables, published in 2021, 2022 and 2023-24. Each year, in conjunction with YouGov, we have surveyed more than 2,000 business leaders to identify the skills businesses most value and putting that in different contexts. Future Skills are the essential skills industry identifies as being vital to both drive innovation and boost economic growth.

Since September 2023, our sector-leading Future Skills programme is being embedded across the University – for every undergraduate student, on every course, in every year – as a core part of their degree programme. No matter whether a student is pursuing a degree in engineering or cyber security, fashion or nursing – all our students are being taught and assessed on the essential skills most valued by employers to prepare them for success in both their professional and personal lives.

Through Kingston University's Town House Strategy, we're cementing our position as the UK's leading university for Future Skills, ensuring every undergraduate student will acquire these key graduate attributes. These have been identified as **creative problem solving, digital competency, being enterprising, having a questioning mindset, adaptability, empathy, collaboration, resilience and self-awareness**.

Following extensive empirical research, testing and piloting, our innovative Future Skills programme is being embedded in each year of every undergraduate course through our **Navigate, Explore and Apply** phases.



Navigate

YEAR 1

Navigate helps students transition to university and introduces them to Future Skills and helps them understand the skills they currently have.

First introduced in September 2023.

Explore

YEAR 2

Explore provides industry-relevant and experiential-based learning that explicitly develops their graduate attributes. Students work directly with employers through mock assessment centres, live projects, placements or site visits to businesses to build their skills and knowledge through experience.

First introduced in September 2024.

Apply

YEAR 3

Apply builds on the learnings gained from Navigate and Explore, providing an opportunity for students to refine and tailor their skills personally, preparing them for the first step of their career after graduation and life beyond university.

Will be introduced in September 2025.

From September 2025, every student on every undergraduate course in every year will benefit from our sector-leading Future Skills approach as a core, taught and assessed part of their degree. This is a significant milestone for the University, helping cement our position as the UK's leading university for Future Skills.



8%

Digital skills and **financial literacy** showed the highest growth, **each rising by 8 per cent.**



10%

Since 2023, there has been a **10 per cent increase** in businesses believing **AI and emerging technologies will have a fundamental change** on their business model in the next 5 years.



Future Skills leading the way internationally

Our last report, Future Skills: The Kingston Approach, emphasised the economic imperative for embedding Future Skills across the higher education sector to provide employers with the adaptable and highly skilled workforce they need and to prepare graduates for career success in a continuously changing, digital-first world.

Kingston University's recognition as being at the forefront of this movement has reached an international audience. In 2024, Future Skills expanded its global reach when the University was invited to represent the UK at a global education conference in the Republic of Korea.

Our radical approach to skills education has garnered support from an increasing international audience with think tanks, educators and political leaders in the Republic of Korea and Singapore who are starting to recognise the programme as an example of best global practice. Kingston University has already started a programme of CPD with Daejeon in the Republic of Korea on integrating AI into teaching practices in schools. This international support for Future Skills brings opportunities for global strategic partnerships spanning education, research and economic investment.

For this year's report, Kingston University is pleased to collaborate on international Future Skills research with the highly regarded **Nanyang Technical University (NTU), Singapore** who is ranked 15th by QS World University Rankings. Their Asia-focused research on Future Skills provides a provocative comparison on perspectives from East and West.

NTU's research, through its **Centre for Cross Economy**, has conducted a literature review of surveys that cover thousands of businesses across Asia – including **Singapore, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan and Japan**.

These countries are leading the world with their expertise in technology and advanced manufacturing, and are at the cutting-edge of digital and AI innovation.



Top Future Skills for 2025

To inform and guide the University-wide roll-out of Future Skills, Kingston University draws on its annual survey conducted in collaboration with YouGov.

Surveying more than 2,000 leading UK businesses of varying sizes and sectors, the research directly informs how we shape our curriculum to ensure graduates are equipped with the capabilities most relevant for the rapidly evolving job market.

Capturing perspectives from such a wide pool provides a comprehensive view of the evolving skills landscape across the UK economy. Conducting this annual survey allows us to highlight key trends and areas of change, such as the attitude towards AI and its impact on the wider job market.



56%

56 per cent of businesses are likely to consider a more skills-based approach as an optimal way to modify their hiring practices.

2025 League Table

- 1 Problem solving/
process skills
- 2 Communication
skills
- 3 Digital skills
- 4 Critical thinking
- 5 Analytical skills
- 6 Adaptability
Financial literacy
- 7 Initiative
Resilience
Creativity
- 8 Ability to build
relationships



Comparing the 2023 survey results reveals that the top skills sought by employers have remained remarkably consistent. This empirically justifies and amplifies the need for taught core competencies and suggests that while the world of work evolves, the need for human-centric skills remain constant and essential.

While the positions stayed virtually the same, every skill featured in the league table saw an increase in perceived importance since the 2023 survey. This upward trend across all skills indicates a growing emphasis on well-rounded, adaptable talent in the modern workforce – reinforcing the need for Future Skills.

Perceived importance in the workplace

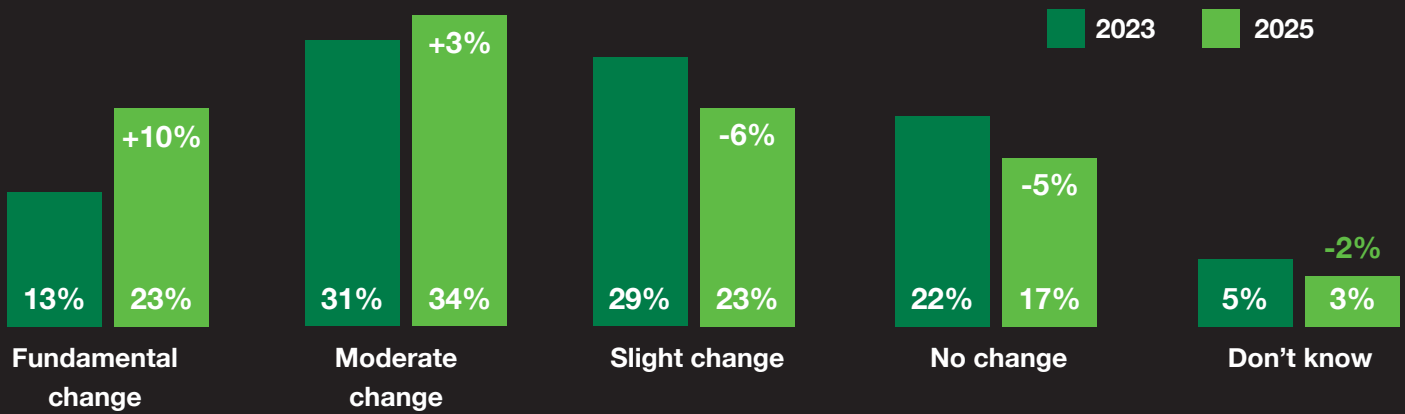
Skill	2025 (%)	% Change
Problem Solving/Process Skills	73%	+4%
Communication Skills	71%	+5%
Digital Skills	69%	+8%
Critical Thinking	64%	+4%
Analytical Skills	62%	+5%
Adaptability	58%	+2%
Financial Literacy	58%	+8%
Initiative	57%	+3%
Resilience	57%	+4%
Creativity	57%	+5%
Ability to Build Relationships	54%	+1%

The impact of AI

Today's job market is experiencing rapid, unprecedented change, driven in part by the increasing importance of digital skills and the growing influence of AI. Since the 2023 survey, there has been a notable shift in employer sentiment, from uncertainty to a clearer recognition of AI's transformative impact. Businesses are now acknowledging AI as a disruptive force and are preparing for significant changes to their business models and practices. This trend underscores the urgent need for graduates to possess both human-centric and digital skills, and adaptability to thrive in a fast-changing professional landscape.



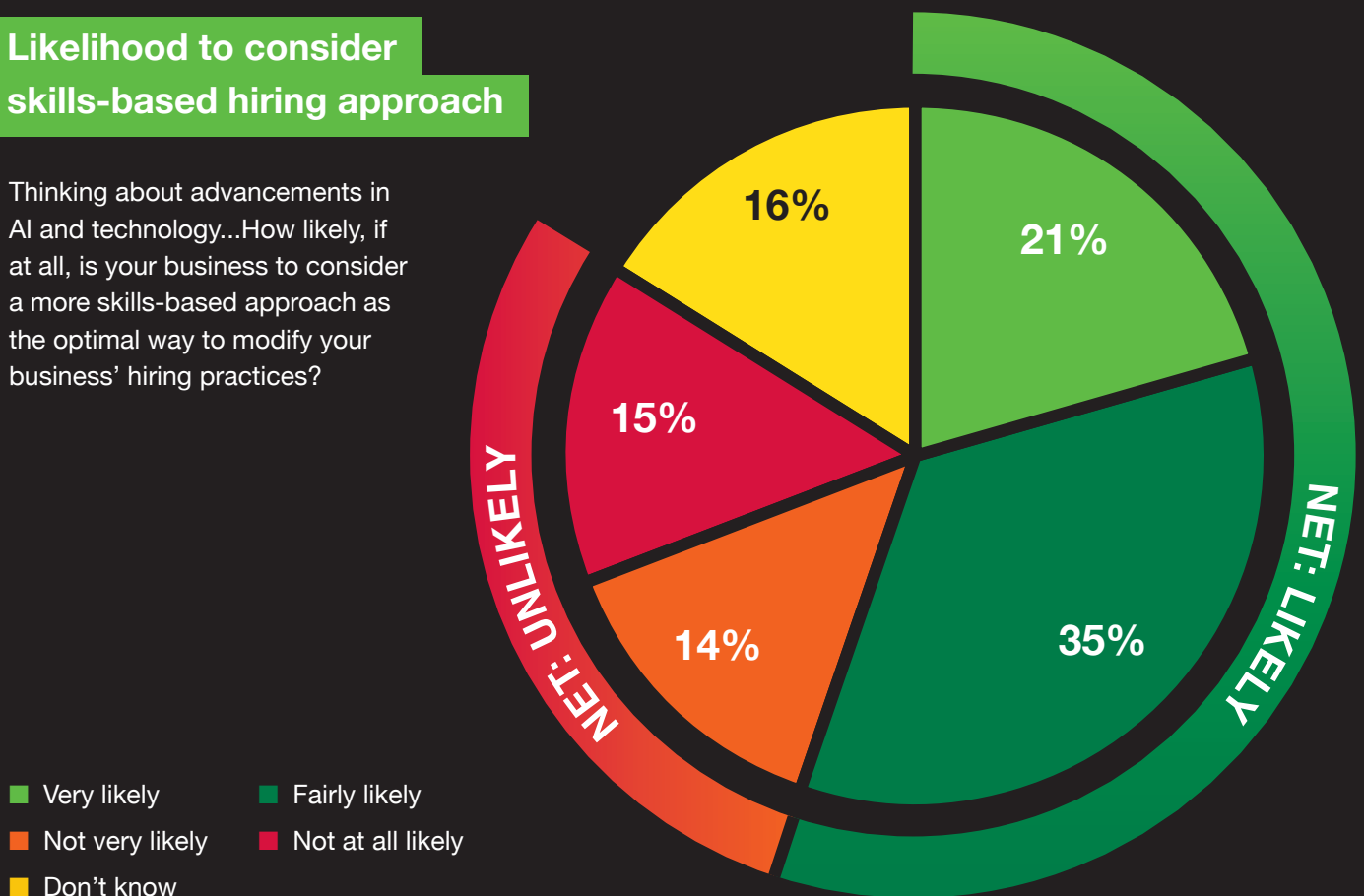
To what extent, if at all, do you believe AI and emerging technologies will change your business model?



AI is already influencing employers' recruitment and hiring practices. **65 per cent of respondents believe that AI will influence how they hire** to some degree. **56 per cent of employers see skills-based recruitment as the way forward.** The candidates of the future will be **evaluated by their competencies**, reinforcing the importance of a **skills-focused approach** in education and training.

Likelihood to consider skills-based hiring approach

Thinking about advancements in AI and technology...How likely, if at all, is your business to consider a more skills-based approach as the optimal way to modify your business' hiring practices?



Publicis Media: Prioritising skills

The advertising industry is moving at an incredible pace. With rapid advancements in technology, data and AI, developing future-ready skills has never been more important.

At Publicis, we're passionate about the opportunities this change creates. We're focused on helping individuals build the right skills for the future, opening doors to better jobs, more fulfilling careers, and greater confidence in navigating change. For example, in 2024, we made 378 early career hires and had 1,700 students join us at our insight and discovery days.

It's not just about digital capabilities. It's also about nurturing creativity, problem solving and communication – skills that are vital across all industries, not just advertising.

By prioritising skills development today, we're setting people and the UK economy up for long-term success. A more skilled and adaptable workforce means we can compete globally, attract investment and drive innovation.

We're looking forward to deepening our partnership with Kingston University this year. Future Skills is a fantastic opportunity to strengthen career pathways and grow the next generation of talent.



Paulina Lipiec, first year forensic psychology student

Future Skills has been integrated so well into my different modules and all my different modules really highlight the importance of these skills. It has reignited the passion I came to university with, by enabling me to reflect on why I started my forensic psychology course and giving me a deeper insight into the career I want in the future.



John Lewis Partnership: Driving innovation

John Lewis Partnership has been collaborating on a major project with Kingston University second-year students completing the Explore phase of the Future Skills programme.

As part of a live brief – the largest of its kind at the University with an industry partner – more than 600 undergraduates across two Faculties and multiple disciplines have been tasked with creating innovative business solutions for the leading retail brand.

Our collaboration involves students applying their critical thinking to support the retailer's nationwide supermarket chain, Waitrose & Partners. Students are helping to address key business priorities, including AI adoption, data-driven supply chain optimisation, and climate risk resilience.

Computer science, cybersecurity, digital media technology, geography and geology students have been developing approaches to better understand and respond to shifts in soil health, crop cycles and weather patterns. Groups of students have taken their Future Skills learning out of the classroom and into the fields of Leckford Estate, the Waitrose & Partners farm in Hampshire.

Some students have been devising a system to make it easier for the brand to capture and interpret data from its extensive list of suppliers, from small regional producers such as farmers, bakeries and fresh fruit and vegetable growers to larger nationwide outlets. Other students have been developing a model using historical data to help the supermarket anticipate and respond to changes affecting its suppliers.

Marketing and advertising students have been working on a business-to-business strategic marketing communications plan that Waitrose will be able to use to encourage its suppliers to adopt appropriate use of AI to support data insight.

This impactful partnership with John Lewis Partnership exemplifies how business challenges can be embedded into education, enhancing student learning, developing skills and driving innovation for industry.

JOHN LEWIS
PARTNERSHIP



Ophelia Bevilacqua,
second year environmental
science student

Instead of being in a classroom, we're out on the farm speaking to people who do this as a job – we're completely in their world. Future Skills has taught me how important critical thinking is – it's helped me understand some of the challenges facing industry and given me the confidence to communicate with professionals in the field.





Foreword:

Professor Nam-Joon Cho

Director, Centre for Cross Economy President's Chair in Materials Science and Engineering Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

At Nanyang Technological University (NTU), we recognise that the ability to anticipate and adapt to technological, environmental, and social change is essential for the next generation of learners and leaders. As Director of the Centre for Cross Economy (CCE) at NTU, I am pleased to support Kingston University's Future Skills campaign and this timely comparative report examining East-West perspectives on skills for the future.

The Centre for Cross Economy explores value transformation across domains—reimagining waste as wealth, knowledge as currency, and learning as a lifelong civic asset. Future Skills are central to this vision. They enable individuals to thrive in uncertainty, build transdisciplinary bridges, and create regenerative value systems in both advanced and emerging economies.

This report demonstrates the strategic clarity of Asia's state-led skills frameworks—exemplified by Singapore's Critical Core Skills and Korea's National Competency Standards—alongside the institutional innovation of Kingston University's university-led model. Despite differences in governance and delivery, both approaches share a commitment to fusing digital competence with human-centric capabilities such as ethics, leadership, and global perspective.

These comparative insights are crucial. As we prepare for the disruptions of generative AI, green transitions, and demographic shifts, we must embrace mutual learning across regions. CCE NTU is proud to contribute to this global dialogue and to support a future where skills are not merely economic levers, but catalysts for collective resilience and the co-creation of inclusive, sustainable prosperity.

Professor Nam-Joon Cho
Director, Centre for Cross Economy
Nanyang Technological University,
Singapore

Future Skills – Eastern perspectives

Singapore

Singapore's strategy: Government-led **workforce reskilling initiatives** through public-private partnerships and mandatory upskilling programmes.

SkillsFuture Singapore, a statutory board under the Ministry of Education, developed **Critical Core Skills**, identifying 16 essential skills for individuals, employers, and training providers. All 16 skills are considered “critically core” to employability and lifelong career progression and are categorised into three clusters of ‘Interacting with Others’, ‘Staying Relevant’ and ‘Thinking Critically’. Recent research from NTU indicates a shift in priorities toward digital skills due to global technological advancement.

2025 high priority skills:



Analytical thinking and innovation



Cross-disciplinary collaboration



Entrepreneurship and business agility



Digital skills



Green economy skills



Japan

Japan's strategy: Integration of **AI education in primary, secondary and higher education**, focusing on lifelong learning.

Japan lacks a centralised Future Skills framework, yet its Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has defined core workplace competencies promoted through various partnerships. A 2023 Economist Impact survey revealed Japanese employees prioritise digital skills as most critical for the future, alongside self-management skills, while entrepreneurial skills were deemed less important. NTU research confirms this emphasis on digital skills with further focus on global literacy and AI.

2025 high priority skills:



Advanced AI and robotics expertise



Data science and computational thinking



Bilingual communication



Problem solving in complex systems



Nanyang Technological University (NTU) was invited by Kingston University to conduct a comprehensive literature review examining East Asia's approach to future skills development. Through analysis of extensive polls, surveys and studies across the technologically-advanced nations of Singapore, Republic of Korea, Japan and Taiwan, the research identifies employer-prioritised skills and evaluates existing curricular structures for integrating career development competencies.

Republic of Korea

Republic of Korea's strategy: Heavy investment in **AI research and development and public-private innovation hubs**, with government-funded AI upskilling programmes.

Republic of Korea's National Competency Standards outline a set of Basic Vocational Competencies, comprising 34 competencies across 10 domains. Basic Vocational Competencies were made mandatory in public hiring in 2017. A modernisation study began in 2020 to update standards for digitalisation, demographic shifts and new forms of work. A 2024 survey identified gaps in basic foreign language skills, career development and oral expression. NTU research indicates policy shifts toward emphasising global fluency and digital skills.

2025 high priority skills:



AI-driven innovation in manufacturing



Global trade and cross border business skills



Cyber security and quantum computing



Resilience and adaptability



Taiwan

Taiwan's strategy: Strengthening university-industry collaboration to align higher education with tech sector demands.

Since 2001, Taiwan's Ministry of Education has shifted from examination-focused education to focus on core competencies and was significantly updated in the 2019 108 Curriculum reform. This shift replaces the concept of “néng lì (能力, technical abilities)” with the more comprehensive “sù yǎng (素養, cultivated literacy),” organising learning around nine transferable skills across three key areas: personal development, communication, and social engagement. Studies have shown that youth unemployment in Taiwan is still common, with employers highlighting the lack of practical skills needed for the workplace. The reformed curriculum specifically emphasises a holistic approach that fosters communication skills, social participation, and spontaneity, preparing students amid rapid social and technological change for the workplace.

2025 high priority skills:



AI engineering expertise



Global business agility



Problem solving and critical thinking



Sustainability and green technology skills



Comparing the UK and East Asia

The comparison between East and West reveals distinct priorities in workplace skills.

Kingston University's Future Skills emphasises individual capabilities that enable workers to navigate challenges independently, while East Asia thinks collectively, by positioning individuals within a social matrix driving group performance. While both areas agree technical skills must be complemented by human-centric skills their governance approaches diverge significantly.

Key learnings

UK employers are increasingly considering using skills based recruitment, with 56% likely to consider skills-based recruitment as an optimal way to modify their hiring practices. As this gains momentum, and candidates are judged increasingly on competencies rather than their degree subject as a proxy for them, **it confirms the need for explicit acquisition of those skills demanded by the job market.**

NTU research shows that AI and digital skills are uniformly treated as top strategic priorities in Asian countries. Our research indicates **UK industry is only partially aware of AI's transformative potential**: UK polling showed just 23% anticipate AI will fundamentally change their business. This suggests **the UK risks lagging behind its Asian counterparts.**

Both East and West recognise the need to balance technical expertise with human-centric skills. There is some convergence on what those skills need to be. However, problem-solving, creativity, and resilience are uniquely emphasised in the western polling, while Eastern nations focus on leadership, ethics and global awareness.

Eastern approaches to skills are government-led with substantial funding and nationwide standards aligned to government priorities and employer needs. NTU research shows government-led initiatives in Asian countries reflect a strong focus on digital skills and AI readiness, with growing attention to other skills to complement this. UK research evidences a strong and continued demand from leading businesses for human-centric skills, the skills required to harness new technologies. **The West could learn from Asia's approach to targeted prioritisation and allocation of funding directly aligned with industry needs and national economic growth strategies – ensuring the UK can remain globally competitive and at the forefront of innovation.**

Conclusions and provocations

What the UK can do



Through a global perspective on skills, adopt the emerging East Asian model where skills directly link to the national economic strategy.



Expand university-industry collaboration, establishing strategic partnerships similar to Singapore's SkillsFuture model.



Integrate AI and advanced digital training in universities, enhancing automation, cybersecurity, and data ethics through frameworks modelled on Japan and Taiwan's approaches.



Foster entrepreneurship and global agility, aligning education with business competitiveness, inspired by Republic of Korea's innovation hubs.

What East Asia can do



Adopt human-centric skills alongside technical education, focusing on UK-leading skills in creativity, resilience and adaptability.



Adopt Kingston University's flexible Future Skills approach to avoid over standardisation.



Implement rapid feedback loops, like Kingston University's annual business survey, to help ensure relevance in fast-changing labour markets.



Improve skills teaching within a sustainable model, integrating green technology and AI in workplace frameworks.



Strengthen public-private partnerships in upskilling, learning from the UK's integrated undergraduate skills models.

What Kingston University is doing



Setting the standard for thought leadership on Future Skills across the UK and internationally.



Transforming higher education with the complete implementation of our Future Skills framework across all undergraduate programmes by September 2025.



Growing our own research to evaluate the attainment of graduate outcomes and the transformative impact of Future Skills on employability, career paths and satisfaction.



Partnering with global brands challenging students through authentic live business problems that demand innovative solutions and create opportunities.



Exploring international research opportunities to examine global trends, foster cross-cultural knowledge exchange and advance our understanding of emerging patterns.



Building strategic partnerships with industry leaders to expand the Future Skills for business agenda.



Now that you've seen our extensive research, proven industry impact from business testimonials, and how we are leading the way in preparing students for the future, both in and out of the workplace, we invite you to collaborate with us in preparing the next generation of talent. Here's how you can get involved with Future Skills:

What you can do



Partner with us on Future Skills with your business challenges and tap into our student talent to help your business innovate.



Innovate your business through our Knowledge Exchange and Research Institutes (KERIs).



Join us as thought leaders on Future Skills to shape skills development strategies.



Drive business growth with our Knowledge Transfer Partnerships.



Upskill your workforce with bespoke professional development courses and AI-enhanced digital training.



Recruit from our talent pool of diverse students and graduates.



Work with us on Future Skills.
Scan the QR code for more information.



Kingston University and Nanyang Technological University gratefully acknowledge the below literature, which informed the development of the Eastern Perspectives section of this report.

For further information or to explore collaboration opportunities with the Centre for Cross Economy at NTU, please scan the QR code above.

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Where figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size in the 2025 wave was 2005 B2B senior decision makers in the 2023 wave 2025 B2B senior decision makers. Fieldwork was undertaken between 7th March – 22nd April 2025 and 4th – 15th September 2023, respectively. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of British business size and region.

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Scan the QR code to find out more about our
Future Skills programme.