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Strategy

Future Skills

The Kingston
Approach

YouGov®



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Kingston University would like to thank all the businesses and industry leaders who have collaborated with us on the Future Skills campaign and in the creation of this report.



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Introduction

Vice-Chancellor Professor Steven Spier,
Kingston University



The Kingston University Future Skills Report builds on our Future Skills League Tables published in 2021 and 2022. They served as a launchpad for a national conversation around the skills businesses most value from graduates entering the world of work. Indeed, what we regard as skills.

We are now taking things to the next level with the introduction of The Kingston Approach just a year after ChatGPT first emerged, signalling significant changes and challenges for business and industry. Since then, the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) has helped us imagine new technological advances and unexplored frontiers. The exponential growth of AI has impelled us all to reckon with the ways it can be harnessed to shape the future.

This is particularly true for the higher education sector, which by its very nature is forward-looking and pushes the boundaries of innovation. Today's emerging technologies will fundamentally change our personal and professional lives. Students being educated right now will go on to navigate portfolio career paths and do jobs that don't yet exist, in sectors we can barely imagine and using tools entirely alien in the current business environment. Their careers and lives will likely be subject to constant change and they will need the skills, including adaptability and resilience, to navigate through this.

To thrive in a digital-first world, we will need a workforce that understands how to harness new technologies and recognises their limitations. The real need is to look at AI from a human-centric perspective, for there will be a premium on human skills that cannot be easily replicated, such as creativity, critical thinking and working in a team.

Kingston University's work championing Future Skills has identified this challenge, as have others such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Economic Forum and global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company. It is no longer simply enough for universities to offer narrow, subject-based knowledge to students in preparation for their future careers. Instead, we need to equip our graduates with the skills we have identified to navigate a world that will continue to be disrupted.

To address this, Kingston University has committed to a radical and innovative approach to learning, embedding Future Skills in the core curriculum in every year of every



undergraduate degree subject across the university. This not only says that these skills are important, but ensures that everyone acquires them. This is particularly important at an institution like ours, where approximately half our students are the first in their families to go to university and may have had less opportunity to develop or recognise the skills required for their future professions.

Beginning in September 2023, every first year undergraduate student has been studying and being assessed on a Future Skills module as a core part of their degree. This builds on the success of our Future Skills pilot programme last year, across five different courses and involving 600 students.

In each new academic year our students will continue to learn and be assessed on their Future Skills, until all undergraduates have attained the full set of graduate attributes as part of their degree. Further information on what this looks like in practice can be found later in this report.

As part of this, every one of our students will be offered a self-assessment of their current digital and AI skills, and then given guidance and learning resources through the Future Skills curriculum to progress them to the next level.

Future Skills: The Kingston Approach shares what we have done and learned so far and invites other higher education providers to reflect on how they address the need for Future Skills, and government and businesses to consider how they can support this innovation. Importantly, it includes testimonials from our business partners, staff and students on the benefits they have seen and received. This report is a call to action for policymakers, industry and government to help ensure higher education is giving students the skills they need to succeed in an ever-changing landscape. We believe through The Kingston Approach we have created a framework to do this.

Professor Steven Spier
Vice-Chancellor, Kingston University

Future Skills

What impact did the Future Skills module have on your life?



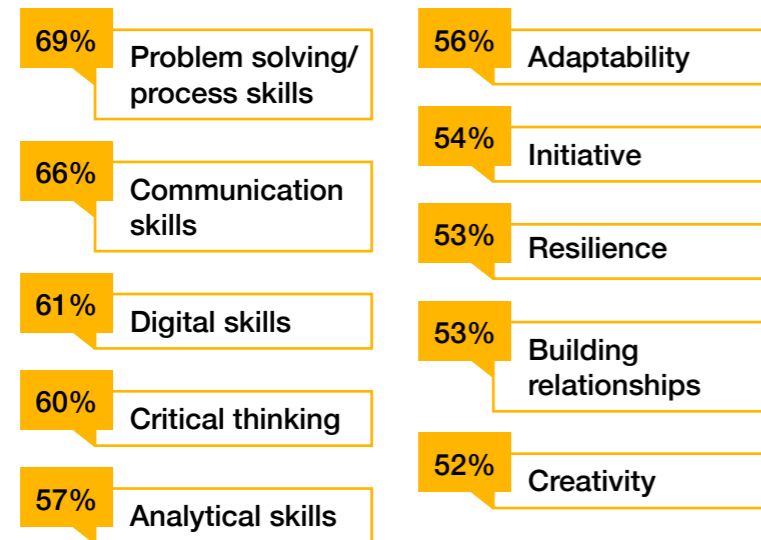
Daunté Redway
Mechanical engineering student

The Future Skills module has had a profound impact by helping me explore the evolving skills necessary for success in my career. I've become much more aware of the importance of adaptability, critical thinking and digital literacy through what I've been learning.



Top 10 Future Skills for 2023

In 2023, the top 10 skills business leaders said they most valued were:



In 2021, Kingston University, working in conjunction with our long-term partner YouGov, created the first ever Future Skills League Table to draw out which skills were most valued by Britain's employers. During the past three years, we have conducted an annual survey of approximately 2,000 senior business leaders. This has provided distinctive insights into their perspectives and allowed us to analyse trends over time.

For our latest report, we have expanded our pool of respondents to include a sample of the wider population for the first time. All told, this year we have surveyed over 2,000 British business and industry leaders, 1,000 current full-time students and 2,000 members of the general public. Through this research, we have confirmed the economic imperative of embedding Future Skills not only across our own curriculum but also across the wider higher education sector.

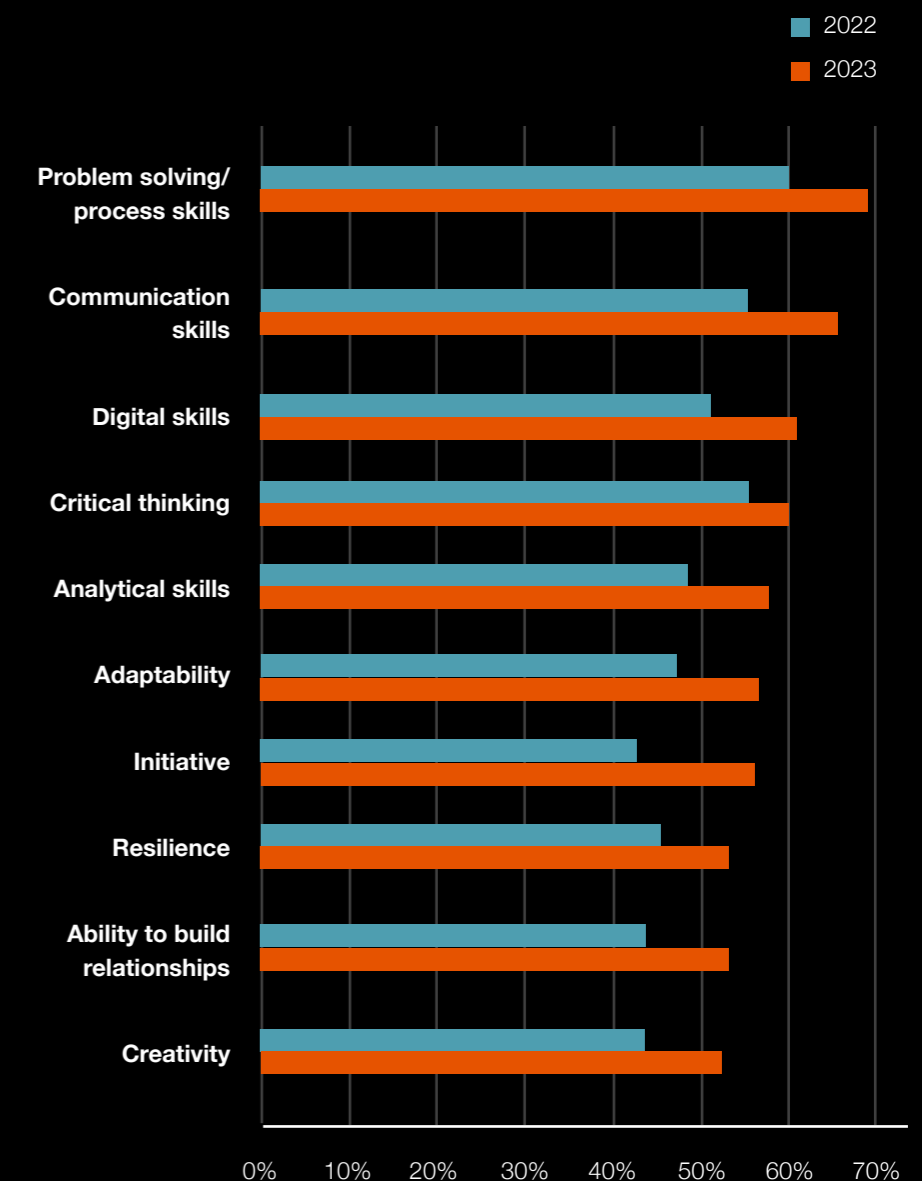
Backed by a range of senior politicians, government policymakers and leading businesses, our campaign seeks to drive a thriving national economy by preparing students for careers in a rapidly evolving workplace.



Future Skills over time

Despite these turbulent times, the top skills and competencies business leaders say they require from graduates have remained remarkably similar.

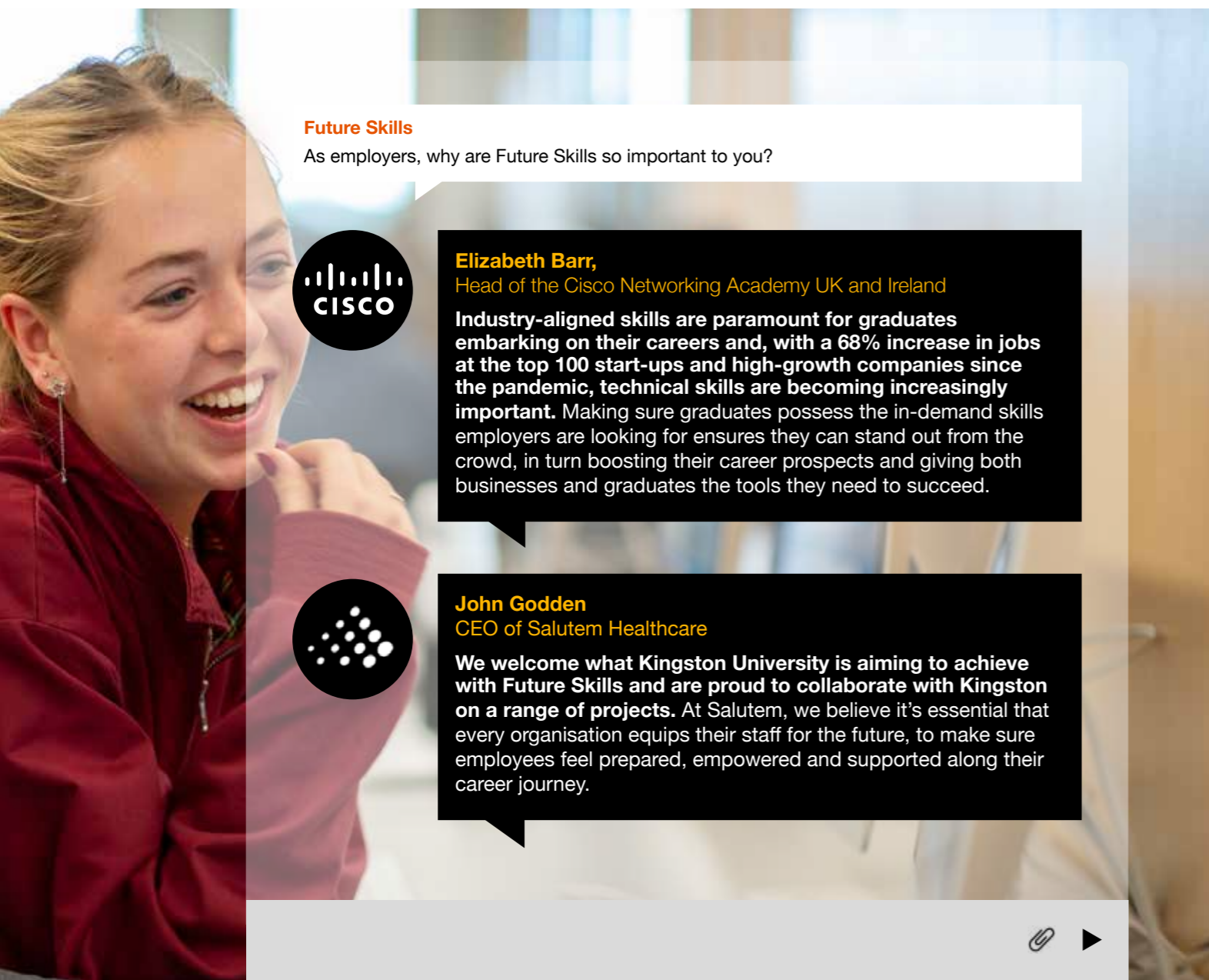
The top five skills employers want in 2023 are problem solving, communication skills, digital skills, critical thinking and analytical skills.



Why Future Skills are so important

Ensuring students have the Future Skills they need to succeed in the world of work has become even more urgent since we started our campaign.

The rise of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to transform our personal and professional lives, but our research shows a significant difference in understanding between business leaders, students and the wider population about the opportunities and challenges they may bring.



Future Skills

As employers, why are Future Skills so important to you?



Elizabeth Barr,
Head of the Cisco Networking Academy UK and Ireland

Industry-aligned skills are paramount for graduates embarking on their careers and, with a 68% increase in jobs at the top 100 start-ups and high-growth companies since the pandemic, technical skills are becoming increasingly important. Making sure graduates possess the in-demand skills employers are looking for ensures they can stand out from the crowd, in turn boosting their career prospects and giving both businesses and graduates the tools they need to succeed.



John Godden
CEO of Salutem Healthcare

We welcome what Kingston University is aiming to achieve with Future Skills and are proud to collaborate with Kingston on a range of projects. At Salutem, we believe it's essential that every organisation equips their staff for the future, to make sure employees feel prepared, empowered and supported along their career journey.

What business leaders think

Business leaders have always been clear — too many graduates are arriving at their doors not ready for the world of work. This has been one of the key drivers for the Future Skills programme from the beginning.

With nearly half (44%) of all companies thinking AI will bring moderate or fundamental change over the next five years, and almost three quarters (73%) accepting AI will change their business model in some way during this time, the workplace is about to alter even more dramatically than it already has.

(75%) have this understanding, compared to 59% of 45-54 year olds. They are understandably eager to learn how to adapt.

50%

of all current students believe their present or future job will be under threat from AI.

When asked, students choose the same Future Skills they need to thrive in an AI-first world as the wider public — communication, problem solving and critical thinking being some of the highest.

What the public thinks

Comparatively, the wider British public is much less clear about how AI will impact their lives.

Only 7%

of businesses think university graduates joining right now are adequately prepared for an AI-first world.

This puts the onus on both businesses and educators to rise to the challenge, with 79% of business leaders believing it is important universities teach skills for the future as part of their curriculum.

One in four business leaders feel apprehensive about the integration of AI into their business.

Only 12%

of the public think they have a good understanding of how AI is going to change the future of work. This tends to increase, the younger and more knowledgeable about technology someone is.

What students think

Students know major change is coming. Our polling from our national representative survey shows that, of all demographics, full-time students are most likely to say they have a good or some understanding about the extent to which AI could impact their careers. Three quarters of all students

Many simply haven't been told, with only 11% receiving any form of communication from their work leaders on how emerging technologies such as AI will impact their industry.

Embedding Future Skills and competencies at an early stage is key as it allows workforce entrants to effectively use their academic knowledge during their early career and also equips them with the skills to remain relevant and effective in the long-term. As a responsible employer, IP Group plays its part in building on this early development by offering personalised learning plans. These place equal emphasis on job-specific development, transferrable skills, and physical and mental wellbeing. The Kingston Approach is an innovative way to help equip today's young generation for tomorrow's workplace.



Anthony York

Group People Director, IP Group

Future Skills

How has the Future Skills module helped you?



Khushi Nagar
Accountancy student

Overall, these workshops have enhanced my university experience and given me an ambitious plan for my personal and professional development. The programme is an ideal opportunity for students to learn important skills and knowledge and I'm grateful for the chance to engage in this enriching learning experience.



Teaching Future Skills is not just about employability, it's about enabling young people to navigate an increasingly complex world. Skills like problem solving and digital literacy don't just open career paths – they are foundational to personal development and are instrumental for the innovation and adaptability our business requires to succeed in the long term.



John Vary
Partner and Futurologist
John Lewis Partnership



Sarah Roche

Talent Director at the Royal Mail Group

As the pace of change continues to accelerate, the skills needed to thrive are shifting. Therefore some of the most important skills include adaptability, strong communication, problem solving and critical thinking abilities. Ensuring we have a future-fit workforce, including graduates, equipped to deal with changing customer needs, remains critical to the future business success of Royal Mail. While current graduates bring valuable academic knowledge, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and these essential skills is crucial.

There is more work to be done, and close collaboration between universities and businesses is crucial for ensuring future graduates possess these future-ready skills. There are more opportunities for universities to adapt their programmes based on industry input and provide practical experience, while businesses can offer opportunities for students to work on real-life challenges that empower graduates for the evolving world of work.



Hannah Guerin,

CEO of the Enterprise Trust and Chief of Staff to Founder and Chairman of HomeServe

Entrepreneurship is an expansive career path open to everyone, but the most successful entrepreneurs and founders all have key Future Skills: persistence, resilience, and creativity. Academic qualifications are fantastic, but to build the next billion-pound businesses we need UK founders to be strong communicators, problem solvers and creators to help make the UK the most entrepreneurial economy in the world, scale British business and boost growth in our country. These aren't just transferable skills, they are essential skills for the workplace and society.

AI will augment, not replace, human skills. However, it will be a prolific factor in the career development of graduates entering the workplace at this time. It will require a shift towards more data driven decision-making and the ability to collaborate effectively with AI systems – not against them. Professionals will need to enhance their proficiency in critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and emotional intelligence – uniquely human skills that will remain invaluable in AI-assisted work environments.



Alastair Marshall
Talent Team Lead for
Sparta Global



The Kingston Approach in practice

From 2023, every first year undergraduate student will complete a Future Skills module as a core part of their degree. In each new academic year, our students will continue to learn and be assessed on their Future Skills, until all undergraduates at the university have completed the programme.

This outcome will be achieved in three stages:



Over the course of their studies, students will demonstrate and reflect on how they use the Future Skills graduate attributes in many different contexts. Working across courses and with industry input, we are creating learning environments that reflect what the Future Skills graduate attributes mean in a variety of professional settings.

The University has identified nine attributes it will instil in its future graduates – **creative problem solving, digital competency, being enterprising, having a questioning mindset, adaptability, empathy, collaboration, resilience and self-awareness.**

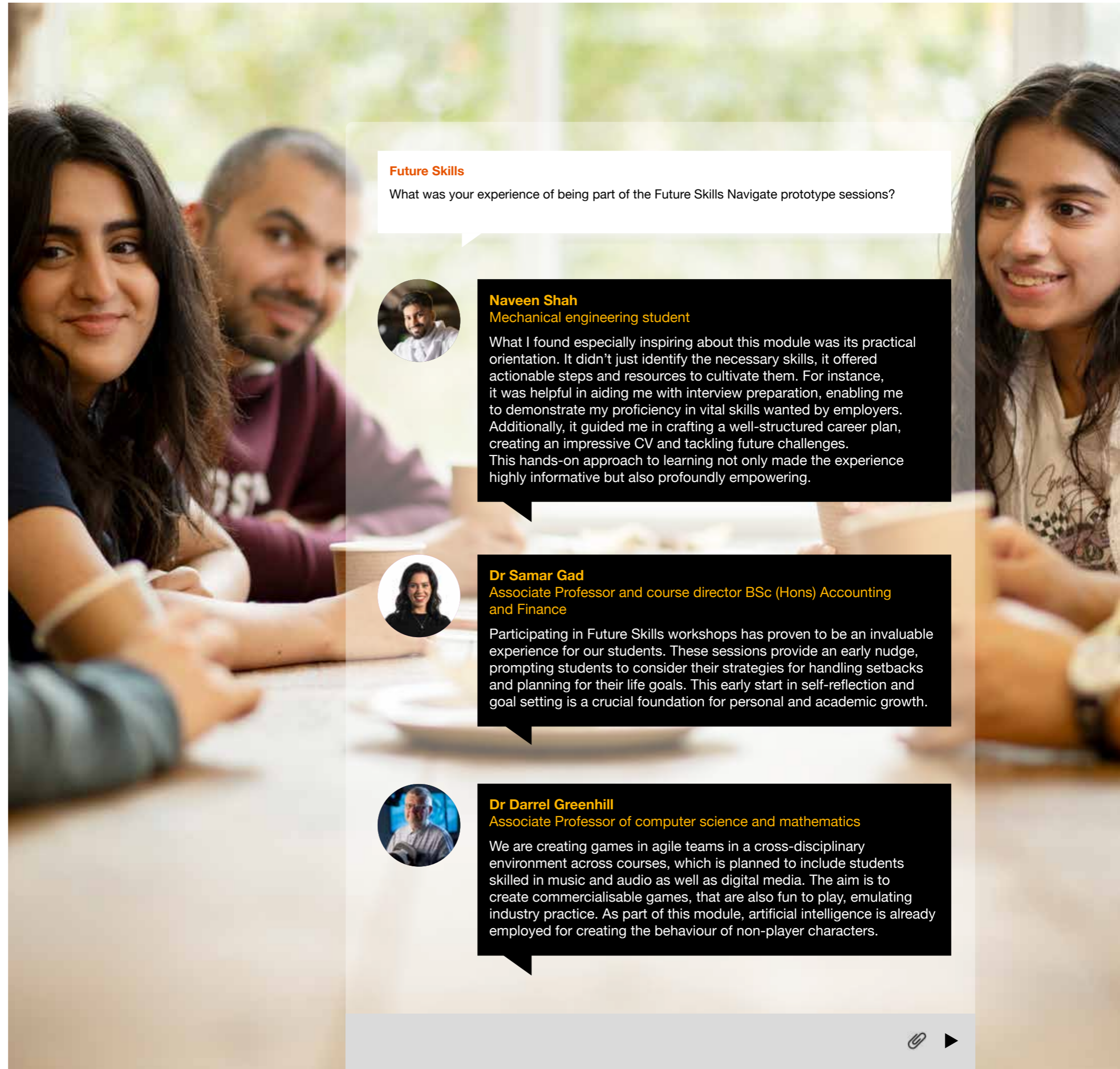
We piloted our Navigate module across five courses last year. More than 600 students from music technology, social work, biosciences, geography and accounting and finance took part. Our key learning from this period is that the programme is most effective when it is delivered as an integral part of students' degree programmes. That's why we are making sure our graduate attributes are contextualised within each subject area. Creativity or problem solving, for example, look very different in a healthcare setting than they do in a music production studio.

Navigate supports students transitioning into university through developing their resilience and reflective thinking. The early stages of the programme involve self-assessment interactive workshops to help students understand the importance of personal development, which are co-delivered by students' course teams and our Graduate Outcomes service.

Students will complete the Explore phase of the programme in their second year, followed by the Apply strand in their final year, gaining a broader understanding of their potential career pathways. The Future Skills programme will also support them to find out more about placement, study abroad and volunteering opportunities and to engage with industry partners.

Just as teaching and learning varies depending on subject area, so too does assessment practice. Every student will be assessed against two universal learning outcomes in each Future Skills module. The learning outcomes are a record of their engagement with and development of the Future Skills graduate attributes. In the first year, this could be the creation and implementation of a personal development plan or the delivery of a reflective essay.

The Future Skills programme will continue to progress until students' final year, ensuring every Kingston University graduate will leave with robust experience that will set them apart in the job market. Above all, the programme will help our students transition out of university and give them the tools to succeed in the wider world.



Future Skills

What was your experience of being part of the Future Skills Navigate prototype sessions?



Naveen Shah
Mechanical engineering student

What I found especially inspiring about this module was its practical orientation. It didn't just identify the necessary skills, it offered actionable steps and resources to cultivate them. For instance, it was helpful in aiding me with interview preparation, enabling me to demonstrate my proficiency in vital skills wanted by employers. Additionally, it guided me in crafting a well-structured career plan, creating an impressive CV and tackling future challenges. This hands-on approach to learning not only made the experience highly informative but also profoundly empowering.



Dr Samar Gad
Associate Professor and course director BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance

Participating in Future Skills workshops has proven to be an invaluable experience for our students. These sessions provide an early nudge, prompting students to consider their strategies for handling setbacks and planning for their life goals. This early start in self-reflection and goal setting is a crucial foundation for personal and academic growth.



Dr Darrel Greenhill
Associate Professor of computer science and mathematics


We are creating games in agile teams in a cross-disciplinary environment across courses, which is planned to include students skilled in music and audio as well as digital media. The aim is to create commercialisable games, that are also fun to play, emulating industry practice. As part of this module, artificial intelligence is already employed for creating the behaviour of non-player characters.

Future Skills is such an important programme for students. It gives us practical knowledge about the skills we need to develop further, such as creative thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration and many more. Focused workshops give a really useful insight into how I can develop skills both during my time at university and outside my studies.

Priyanshi Goyal

Accounting and finance student



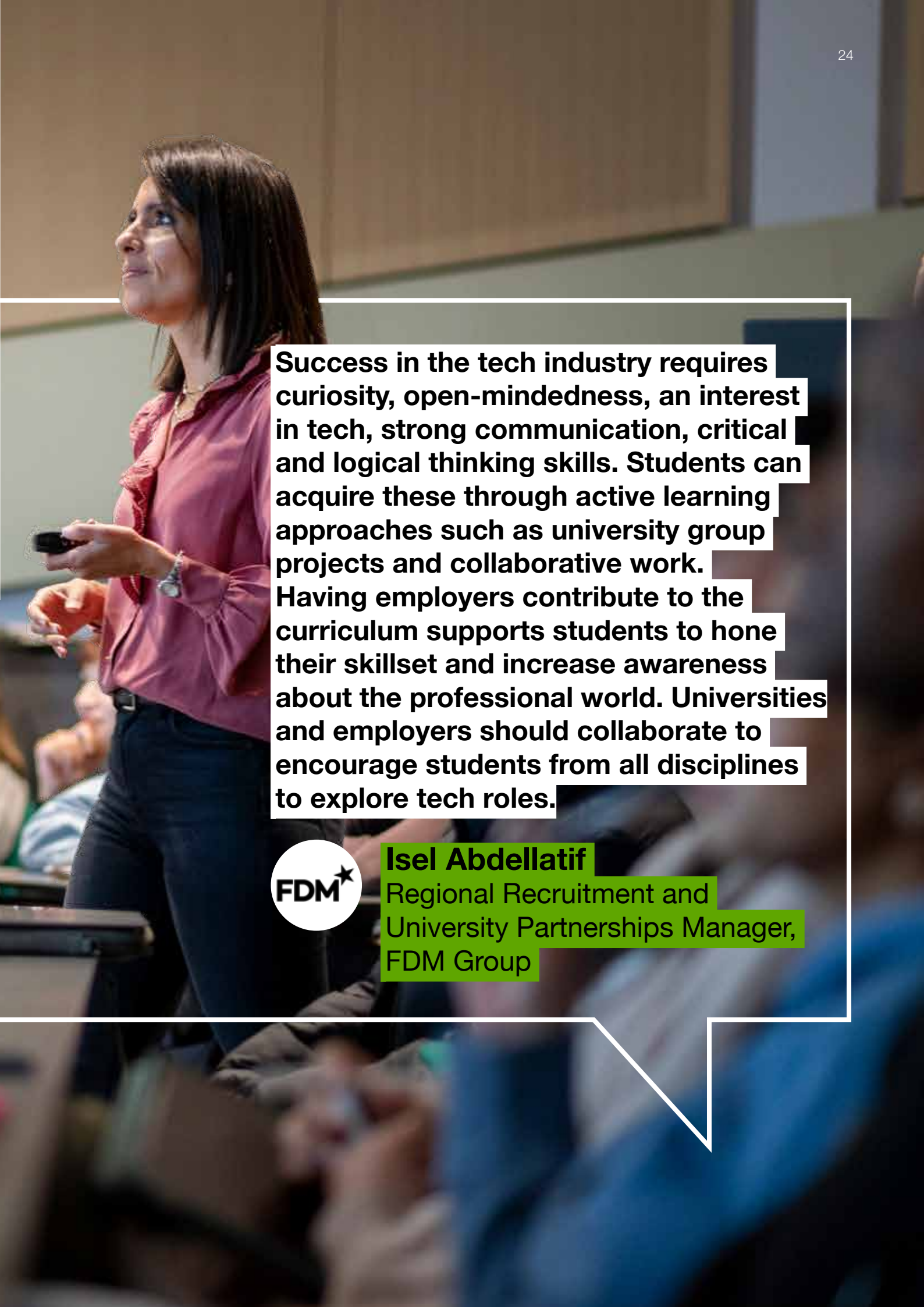


Navigate has helped me with not only my education but also my career, particularly because it has enabled me to work on my graduate attributes through self-reflection. I now have a part-time job in the music industry, which is benefiting my studies as well as giving me vital extra experience.

Francesca Williams
Music technology student

Rolling out The Kingston Approach

The Kingston Approach has been developed as the result of years of insight and commitment from staff, students and industry supporters. We believe that if more universities and other educational institutions embedded Future Skills or similar initiatives into their curriculum, this would go a long way to addressing the significant skills challenges our nation faces.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, stands in a classroom or lecture hall, holding a small black device. She is looking towards the right side of the frame. In the background, several students are seated at desks with laptops, some looking towards the presenter. The room has a modern, educational feel with blue and green accents.

Success in the tech industry requires curiosity, open-mindedness, an interest in tech, strong communication, critical and logical thinking skills. Students can acquire these through active learning approaches such as university group projects and collaborative work. Having employers contribute to the curriculum supports students to hone their skillset and increase awareness about the professional world. Universities and employers should collaborate to encourage students from all disciplines to explore tech roles.



Isel Abdellatif
Regional Recruitment and
University Partnerships Manager,
FDM Group

Our key asks

If we are to ensure every student has the skills they need to succeed in the modern, AI-first world of work, we urge policymakers to:

Support innovation

It would not have been possible for Kingston University to have embarked upon such a transformative Future Skills programme without the financial support of The Mohn Westlake Foundation. **Sustainable funding is needed to support the roll out of outcome-driven programmes such as Future Skills**, which will allow institutions to continue to explore innovative approaches to delivery.

The asks

- Deliver a sustainable funding model for the English higher education sector that supports high quality provision through innovations such as developing students' Future Skills.
- Ensure regulatory burdens are minimised for high quality provision and do not act as barriers to innovation.

Create the right environment

To empower universities with the freedom to innovate, access to a greater pool of funding and increased opportunities to share knowledge through business partnerships, **we need to remove the bureaucracy that constrains the sector.** In many other comparable economies, higher education is rightly seen as an engine of innovation and delivering much needed graduates. This should be the same in the UK.

The asks

- Align universities' teaching and learning missions with economic growth and innovation by moving them out of the Department for Education to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and Department for Business and Trade.
- Remove overly cumbersome regulation that stifles agility and innovation across the higher education sector.

Incentivise institutions

The current funding models for skills are not fit for purpose and the Apprenticeship Levy discourages universities from adopting this approach. Furthermore, while we support the principle of the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, there is much left to be desired in the detail.

The ask

- To take a more flexible approach to enable businesses to adopt vital training through a range of mechanisms, including aligning the Apprenticeship Levy to skills and growth. This will encourage greater collaboration and bolster meaningful business partnerships between industry and universities.

Diversify and expand

The current national education model effectively narrows choices at a very early stage for learners when evidence clearly shows employers are calling for significantly greater breadth. **The curriculum for learners needs to be broadened at a far earlier stage** to develop future skills and aid talent pipelines across all sectors.

The ask

- Commit to increasing the delivery of Future Skills across the national school curriculum to expand pupils' horizons and extend their understanding of the attributes they need to acquire to thrive in a future-facing world.

Our programme ensures that our graduate attributes are explicitly nurtured and assessed for all students in their course. Students are empowered to understand, develop and articulate these attributes – which will be foundational for their lives, and careers, moving forward. These attributes are based on our extensive work with industry – as identified in this and previous Future Skills League Tables. This approach is visionary, relevant and absolutely necessary – we are preparing students for the fast-changing world where low-level skills and knowledge quickly become redundant. Our Future Skills Explore pilot modules include embedded assessment centre simulations, hackathons and projects with external organisations to develop students’ skills.



Professor John Craig
Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education,
Kingston University

Polling

B2B Decision Makers: All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2025 B2B senior decision makers. Fieldwork was undertaken between 4-15 September 2023. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of British business size and region.

Full-time Students: All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1003 full-time students. Fieldwork was undertaken between 20th September - 3rd October 2023. The survey was carried out online.

Nationally Representative: All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2145 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 4th - 5th September 2023. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

Find out more

Join the Future Skills conversation.
Email us at futureskillscampaign@kingston.ac.uk

Read more at www.kingston.ac.uk/futureskills

#FutureSkills #TownHouseStrategy

