THE FUTURE OF PEOPLE, WORK and THE WORKPLACE
Early provocations and potential indicators of future trends
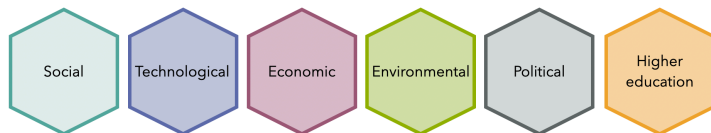
Introduction

This short paper is designed to support conversation about the future of people, work and the workplace. It draws on the initial findings from Ash Futures' horizon scanning work.

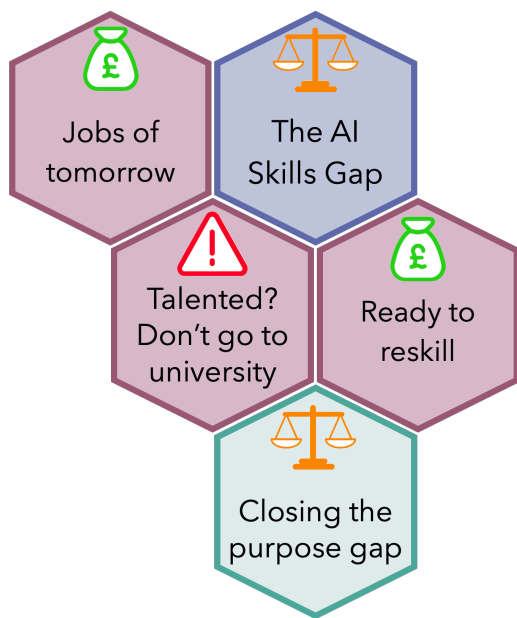We have included 30 individual issues, grouped into 7 themes:

- Changing jobs

- The post-Covid workplace

- Technology disrupts

- The demographic bulge

- A difficult age

- Mental health matters

- The long view

Each individual issue is colour coded according to the broad category we believe it falls into. The categories are shown at the bottom of each page.

Each issue is also marked as a potential opportunity, a potential threat or as having an uncertain outcome for Unite. This is our interpretation and is subjective. Readers may disagree.

Social | Technological | Economic | Environmental | Political | Higher education

£ Opportunity   ⚠ Threat   ⚖ Uncertain

Changing jobs

Jobs of tomorrow

The AI Skills Gap

Talented? Don't go to university

Ready to reskill

Closing the purpose gap

Jobs of tomorrow

The [2020 Future of Jobs report](#), from the World Economic Forum projects that in the mid-term, **job destruction will most likely be offset by job growth** in the 'jobs of tomorrow'— the surging demand for workers who can fill green economy jobs, roles at the forefront of the data and AI economy, as well as new roles in engineering, cloud computing and product development. The transformation will start quickly. By 2022, WEF expects, 42% of the core skills required to perform existing jobs will have changed. In addition to high-tech skills, specialized interpersonal skills - sales, human resources, care and education – will be in high demand.

A [January 2021 report to government](#) by the AI Council suggests that AI could deliver a 10% increase in UK GDP in 2030 if approached correctly. The report suggests near-term directions for all government departments to get the ball rolling. [But research by Microsoft](#) reveals that **the UK has lower AI maturity, adoption levels and workforce skills** than its competitors - and that organisations embracing AI outperform the competition by 11.5%. To close the AI skills gap, organisations need to invest in building the skillsets of their workforce by embracing AI, creating agile workers and reskilling employees.

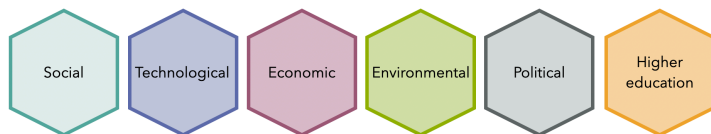**The AI Skills Gap**

Talented? Don't go to university

[Research conducted by MIT Sloan Management Review and Boston Consulting Group](#) found that **returns on investment for AI are greatest among firms that incorporate the technology alongside the workforce** rather than using it as a substitute for workers. According to the study, 31% of jobs in AI-concentrated fields require only a high school diploma, with this segment of jobs paying an average of $22.42 per hour. This finding - that the best AI talent is found in people who have avoided going to university - echoes research carried out elsewhere.

[Over 30% of British graduates are "overeducated" relative to their jobs.](#) The surplus is likely to increase as jobs are transformed by the fourth industrial revolution – transformations that mean, the world [need to reskill more than 1 billion people -](#) almost 1/3 of the global workforce, by 2030. In parallel to all this, economic and demographic shifts are putting additional pressure on the workforces of today. As the world moves further into the decade that the United Nations and
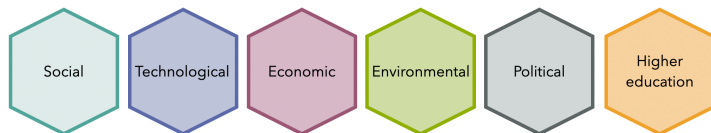
Ready to reskill

Key

Social | Technological | Economic | Environmental | Political | Higher education

Opportunity | Threat | Uncertain

others have called the "decade of action" to implement the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,](#) we must also focus on achieving equitable, inclusive progress to equip and enable the world's people to thrive in the jobs of the future.
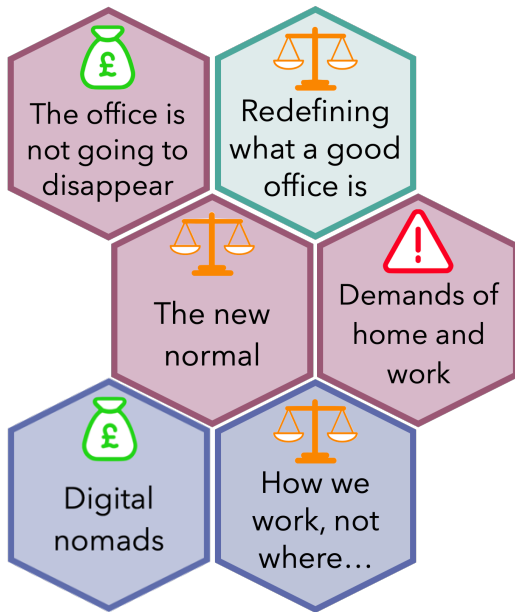

Closing the purpose gap

Today's digital workforce expect digital transformation to **better reflect and respect their concerns and values**, not just boost business capabilities and opportunities. [A global survey](#) of more than 4,000 managers and executives, found that 72% of respondents strongly agree that it is very important to them to work for an organization with a purpose they believe in, but only 49% strongly agree that they believe in their organization's purpose. Furthermore, only 36% of respondents strongly agree that they believe in their organization's ability to advance its purpose. This "purpose gap" suggests that senior leaders lack credibility when it comes to aligning their organizations around a shared vision. That lack of credibility puts their companies' long-term competitiveness at risk.

Social Technological Economic Environmental Political Higher education

Opportunity Threat Uncertain

The post-Covid workplace

While ubiquitous virtual work is working – for now – many of us are still functioning from cultures, norms, relationships, and practices that were in place prior to the pandemic. If we wish to change or adapt any of those factors in the future, it will be difficult without some degree of physical presence. This means **the office is not going to disappear** - but it *will* require a fresh, new approach. People will still need places where they can come together, connect, build relationships, and develop their careers. The size, scale, and openness of the modern office can be detrimental to the quality of those relationships. Beyond relationship building, offices matter for a host of other reasons. Both people and organizations use work settings as a means of expressing their values and aspirations. The design of physical places helps us express our professional identities.
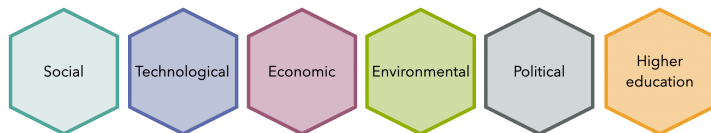
Experts suggest **the workplace post (or even mid) Covid-19 will likely be defined by people's *desire* to return, rather than the *necessity* to return**. And while social distancing in offices may not be ideal, the challenge of engineering the ultimate socially-distant space has been a good excuse to think about what constitutes a good office anyway – not just practically, but for our mental health and happiness. Health and hygiene, rather than shiny new tech, are the key concerns. That means setting up key guidelines for making sure employees know what the protocols are going to be for (eg) hand sanitisers, hygiene standards, social distancing in the workplace, thinking about access, staggered hours.

The signs are that post-pandemic, **flexible working will become the new 'normal'**; according to estimates from Global Workplace Analytics, 25-30% of the workforce are likely to be working from home multiple days a week by the end of 2021. If this is the case, why would companies spend more than they need to on costly premises or office space that will only be occupied some of the time?

In future, many businesses may decide that a smaller office better suits their needs, and their budget. So, rather than being a place where employees go to work every day, the workplace could become a central hub for employees to gather, collaborate, brainstorm and meet clients when they need to.

Social   Technological   Economic   Environmental   Political   Higher education

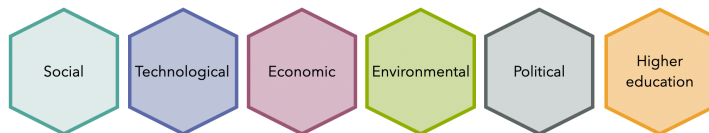£ Opportunity   ⚠ Threat   ⚖ Uncertain

As professionals juggle **the demands of work life and home life** all in the same place, many employers have relaxed rules about workers starting and ending their days at a set time. "I think you'll see a new norm around trust and respect in the ways employers manage their staff moving forward", says career coach Julie Kratz. "By all means, it's not about throwing out all the rules," she emphasises, "but it's about letting people co-create them". This may also benefit women in the workplace - allowing them more flexibility to balance working, caring and home life. According to Elise Gould, senior economist at the Economic Policy Institute, these policies could have a positive benefit on working women, allowing them to "make a schedule around the other responsibilities they have."

Demands of home and work

The workplace of the future will be designed according to how work is done, not where work is rather than – necessarily – a physical space. It will be a shared sense of purpose, a culture of collaboration, a way of tapping an ecosystem built specially to drive business value. It will empower and inspire people to do their best work – to communicate, collaborate and solve problems. It will deepen engagement and drive productivity.

How we work, not where…

Technology will be a critical element, allowing an organization to attract the right talent, bridge physical and digital workspaces, appeal to workers of different generations and integrate data into the decision-making process. Human employees will work side by side with digital ones. Finding success in this new model this requires a holistic approach to digital enablement.
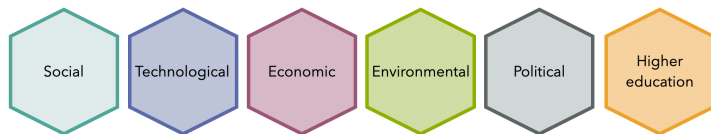
Despite border closures and travel restrictions resulting from the virus, various countries are stepping up efforts to **incentivise the movement of digital nomads –** people who work remotely and relocate relatively freely. In October the Dubai government launched its virtual working programme, an initiative that gives foreign professionals, entrepreneurs and those working in start-ups the opportunity to move to the emirate and continue to work remotely in their current jobs. Another locations that has become an increasingly attractive proposition for digital nomads during the pandemic is Mexico. In February 2020, hotel operator Selina – which specialises in accommodation for digital nomads – announced that it was looking to expand its offerings in Mexico from 2300 beds to 10,000. In July Barbados launched its Welcome Stamp programme. This was followed in August by the launch of the Work From Anguilla programme .Cayman Islands, Bermuda and Montserrat have similar

Digital nomads

Social   Technological   Economic   Environmental   Political   Higher education

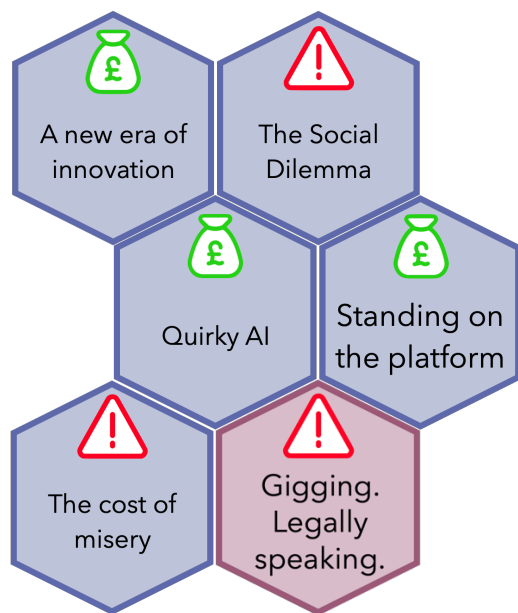£ Opportunity   ! Threat   Uncertain

initiatives. The approach has also been replicated in Europe, with Croatia, Greece and the regional government of the Portuguese island of Madeira unveiling incentives to attract foreign remote workers.

The digital nomad phenomenon is set for continued expansion in the coming years, as businesses offload expensive office space and employers and employees alike become more accustomed to working remotely. Outside is a California based company offering digital nomads co-living and co-working spaces, online platforms and services for remote workers. The company has eight locations in the US and nine elsewhere in the world, including Tulum and San José del Cabo in Mexico; Ericeira and Lisbon in Portugal; and Bali.
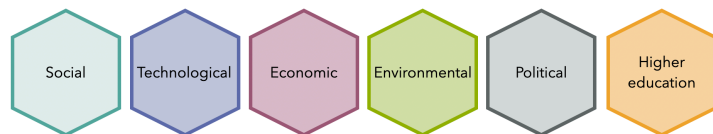
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Technology disrupts

A new era of innovation £	The Social Dilemma ⚠
Quirky AI £	Standing on the platform £
The cost of misery ⚠	Gigging. Legally speaking. ⚠

A new era of innovation £

A new era of technological progress is breaking. The speed at which covid-19 vaccines have been produced has made scientists household names. Prominent breakthroughs, a tech investment boom and the adoption of digital technologies during the pandemic are combining to raise hopes of a new era of progress: optimists giddily predict a "roaring Twenties". There are three reasons to believe a new era of innovation that could lift living standards, especially if governments help new technologies to flourish.

- First is the flurry of recent discoveries with transformative potential - vaccines, bespoke antibody treatments, gene editing, growing meat in a lab, artificial intelligence, driverless cars, spectacular falls in the price of renewable energy.

- The second reason for optimism is booming investment in technology. In the second and third quarters of 2020 America's non-residential private sector spent more on computers, software and research and development than on buildings and industrial gear for the first time in over a decade. Public R&D spending across 24 OECD countries is growing again in real terms. Investors' enthusiasm for technology extends to medical diagnostics, logistics, biotechnology, semiconductors and electric vehicles.

- The third source of cheer is the rapid adoption of new technologies. It is not just that workers have taken to videoconferencing and consumers to e-commerce—significant as those advances are, for example to easing the constraints on job seeking posed by housing shortages. The pandemic has also accelerated the adoptions of digital payments, telemedicine and industrial automation. It has been a reminder that adversity often forces societies to advance. The fight against climate change and the great-power competition between America and China could spur further bold steps.

Innovation alone will not, however, allow economies to shrug off the structural drags on growth. Yet it is reasonable to hope that a fresh wave of innovation might soon reverse the fall in economic dynamism which is responsible for perhaps a fifth of the 21st century's growth slowdown.

Social | Technological | Economic | Environmental | Political | Higher education

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The Social Dilemma, a documentary on Netflix, takes an in-depth **look at how big tech companies, by amassing more and more data on us, are getting better and better at manipulating us**, with devastating results. Google, *et al* equip legions of brilliant engineers with vast databases and powerful AI programs to make their products as addictive as possible. The more time we spend on our screens, the more the companies learn about us, the more money they make from advertising—commercial and political—tailored to our fears and desires. And once they deduce what news and (mis)information we like, or might like, online sites feed us more of it, confirming our biases. If you begin a search on, say, climate change, Google may suggest different results depending on what it knows about you and others where you live, according to a former Google designer.

Toward the end of the film, *Social Dilemma* identifies capitalism as the ultimate cause of the ills wrought by big tech. Rosenstein, the Facebook designer, notes that capitalism promotes "short-term thinking based on this religion of profit at all costs." This approach, which views nature as something to be mined, literally and metaphorically, for monetary gain, has given us climate change and other environmental threats. The successful big-tech firms have figured out how to mine our attention. "We're more profitable to a corporation," one former Facebook executive says, "if we're staring at a screen, staring at an ad, then if we're spending our time living our life in a rich way." He and others say the government must regulate tech firms to limit the harm they do; the companies cannot be trusted to regulate themselves.

There's plenty of chat about 'mainstream' AI – but there are also many **quirky, applications of AI** , such as

- Ara, an AI designed toothbrush by Kolibree which uses deep learning algorithms on a low-power processor within the toothbrush so users can monitor progress duration, frequency, etc. which shows in a dashboard of the Kolibree smart app. It also shows an overview of the brushed areas for each brushing including the missed spots.

- IntelligentX which utilises AI for brewing beer as well as adjust the taste of it. Currently, it has four different varieties, Amber AI, Golden AI, Pale AI, and Black AI – and uses machine learning of feedback data to adjust and personalise new recipes.
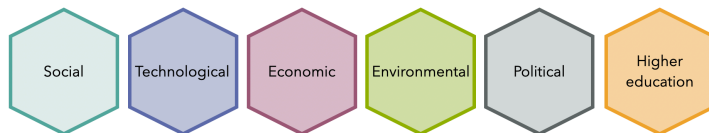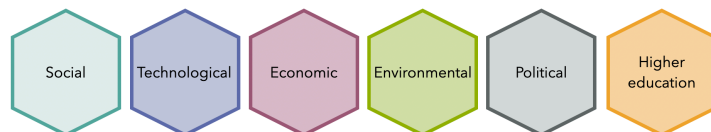
- AI Duet, an intelligent piano that includes the capabilities of neural networks from Google's open-source Magenta project. The neural network is fed with tons of melodies and over time it learns certain fuzzy relationships between nodes and timings and built its own map based on the data which is fed into it by users. So, whenever someone plays a note, the neural net algorithm responds based on the notes as well as training data.

- Beauty AI is an intelligent platform which is designed with the perception of human beauty. A team of biogerontologists and data scientists built this machine learning algorithm to get vital information of a human body. All a user needs to do is take a selfie and robots will look into human pictures and compare them with various features such as wrinkles, symmetry, etc

- A London football team, Wingate & Finchley has appointed an AI coach in order to select the form and tactics of the team. The AI coach works as a manager for the team.

- Sogou, a search engine company in China has created a digitally synthesized news anchoranchor. The researchers used the AI system to create an image-like facial feature with an animated body to copy expressions, voices, etc

- Symrise, a prominent manufacturer of fragrances and flavourings has worked with IBM to examine how AI can be applied in creating fragrances. The company has already created AI-based perfumes and will be creating more in the future.

- Researchers at Japan's National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology have designed an insect-sized drone which is capable of artificial pollination. The drones are coated with a patch of horse-hair bristles and a liquid gel and will collect and transfer pollen from one plant to another

The last ten years has seen **platform businesses such as Airbnb and Uber** - whose business model is to create platforms which match suppliers with buyers - start to replace the world's biggest companies, despite having relatively few tangible assets. Take Walmart: the US retailer falls firmly into the asset exploitation category and has a market capitalisation of $239.3bn on revenues of $490.01bn while e-commerce giant Alibaba has a market cap of $431.21bn on revenues of $25.78 bn. For its part, Facebook, a platform with even fewer physical assets than the retailers, has a market cap of $503bn on revenues of just $33.17bn. Alibaba, Airbnb, Facebook and Uber are by no means
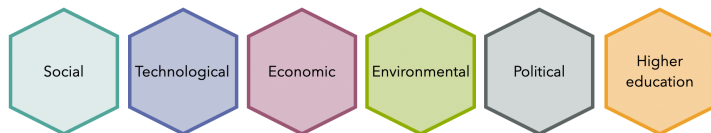
Standing on the platform

Social | Technological | Economic | Environmental | Political | Higher education

Opportunity | Threat | Uncertain

isolated examples: a study by the Wharton School's SEI Centre into 1,500 companies found that organisations with digital platforms and virtual networks receive valuations on average two to four times higher than companies with more traditional business models. Platform businesses share four unusual characteristics which are likely to make them more attractive to investors:

- Platform businesses think outside sector siloes: For platform businesses, the vision questions are less "what products or services are we offering?" and more "How can we address markets with bigger margins?" and "What connections/ interactions or sales are we enabling?' As well as operating outside conventional sector boundaries, platform businesses focus on the area of the sales/customer interface where a lot of value is created compared to other areas of the value chain.

- They excel at creating value by connecting demand and supply: The high valuation of platform business such as Facebook and Alibaba is the result of the value created by the network on behalf of the organisation. The concept is not new but has become far more prevalent with the internet opening up mass consumer access to digital markets.

- Platform businesses scale fast: Platform businesses scale quickly because, being tech and information based, they are not held back by the need to invest in tangible assets ahead of a planned expansion. In 2011, Airbnb went from being a US company to an international organisation, opening ten European offices in three months and hiring hundreds of people in response to a competitive threat. Meanwhile since its 2010 launch, Uber has penetrated 724 cities and 84 countries.

- Platform businesses thrive on data and insight: One of the reasons that platform businesses command big valuations is the potential for monetising all elements of the network. Uber, Alibaba and Airbnb currently make money through fees for the transactions they facilitate between buyer and seller. However, these businesses are also in the middle of massive data flows about consumers' movements, location and decisions which could also be monetised. We are already seeing Facebook and Google harvesting, cleansing and summarising data and developing insights which they can then package and sell to smaller organisations which can't perform these tasks as cost effectively.

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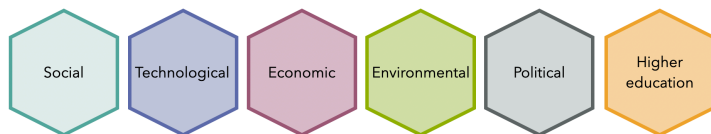
The cost of misery

With offices across the world shuttered, millions of people are now dutifully working from their homes and isolating themselves from others to reduce contagion. However, anyone who has followed stay-at-home orders has experienced a deep irony: **the benefits of home isolation are dependent upon others who don't have the option**. During the pandemic, Amazon increased its human workforce by over 50%, surpassing a million employees in 2020,. It tracks every detail of the labour process through its scanners and, increasingly, wearable technology. Workers receive instructions on how fast to walk in warehouses and what order to pick items and are given continual feedback from managers and machines on their speed, or "rate." Comprehensive AI-driven surveillance is now being rolled out to Amazon's burgeoning fleet of sub-contracted delivery drivers in the name of enhanced safety, though sceptical drivers anticipate further pressures to meet strict deadlines.

The result is efficiency - at the cost of misery. Amazon boasts an injury rate double the national average, according to media reports, with even more injuries at more automated facilities, where machines set the pace. Some workers complain about anxiety and nightmares over "rate", leaving them likelier to burn out and fuelling turnover in warehouses.

Gigging. Legally speaking.

At the moment, most of the **challenges to platform-based enterprises such as Uber and Deliveroo** have involved trying to shoehorn them into legal frameworks that were designed for a pre-platform age. This is a piecemeal approach that has so far produced erratic results. In February, for example, a French court ruled that a Deliveroo courier should be treated as an employee rather than a contractor. In September, Spain's supreme court made a similar ruling about another delivery startup, Glovo, after lower courts had made a series of contradictory rulings.
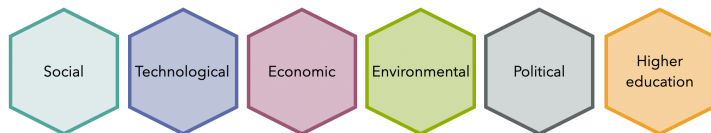
A better way of thinking about it would be to recognise that we're in a position analogous to that of Britain in the 1830s and 1840s when parliament passed the Factory Acts to regulate the conditions of novel kinds of employment as the Industrial Revolution roared ahead. The Factories Act of 1847, for example, colloquially known as the 10 Hours Act, met a long-standing demand by mill workers for a 10-hour day. Other legislation regulated the use of child labour and other practices. We need that kind of comprehensive approach to the gig economy because, as other kinds of employment get automated away, it will be what provides employment for

Social | Technological | Economic | Environmental | Political | Higher education

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an increasing number of people - just as the factories of industrialising Britain provided jobs for people coming off the land.

We should be thinking of what the French entrepreneur Nicolas Colin calls "a new social contract" that would cover workers against the new risks of the day – the impossibility of renting housing in cities when your income is derived from gig platforms; access to loans when and where you need them, not necessarily to buy a car but instead to learn new skills when it's time to move on. And, as he says, "to help workers organise so that they defend their interests themselves, but with a different approach from that which was embraced in the coalmines of the 19th century or the car factories of the 20th".

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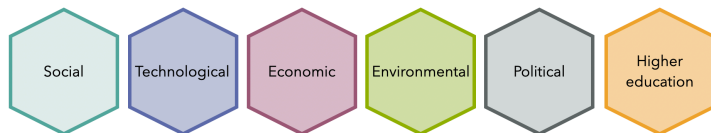
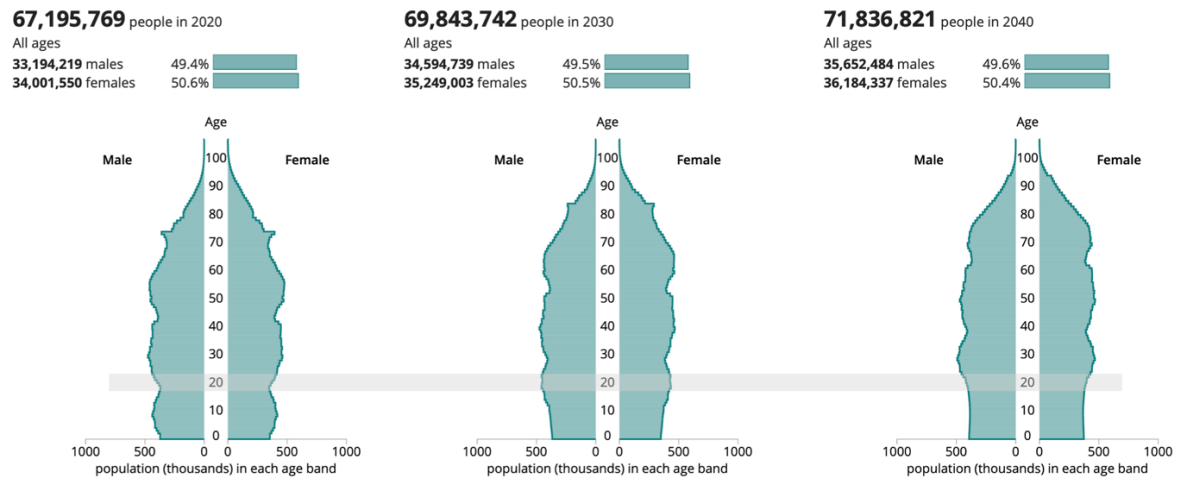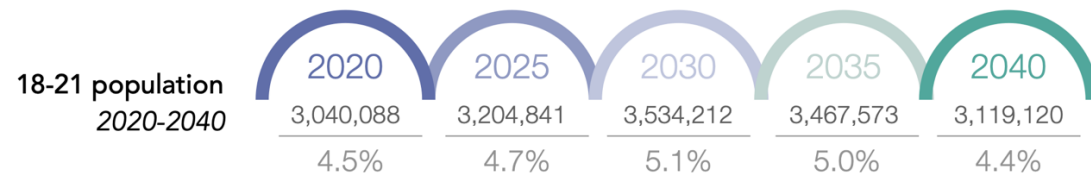£ Opportunity   ! Threat   Uncertain
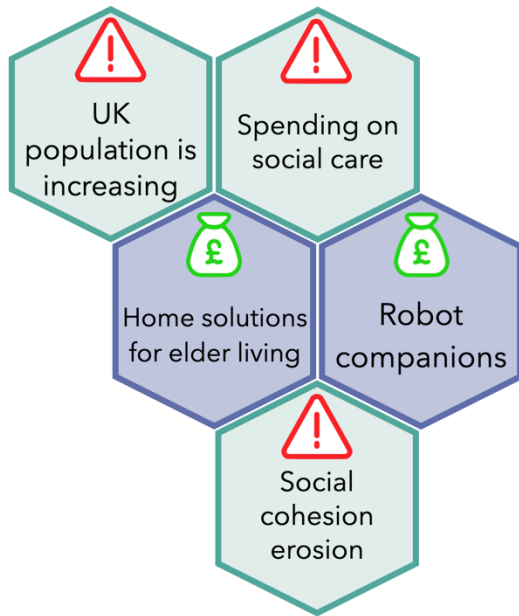
The Demographic bulge

Demographic bulge

Office for National Statistics projections show that **the balance of the UK population will be substantially different by 2040**. There will be more people in all the older age group - with the number of over 85s doubling to 3 million. At the same time, there will be fewer young children and more teenagers. The dependency ratio (pensionable age : working age) is likely to rise from just under 300:1,000 to over 350:1,000 by 2040 - with rising issues of affordability of care.

Within those broad changes, the population of 18-21 year olds increases to 2030 and then reduces to 2040, with implications for the potential undergraduate student population.

18-21 population
2020-2040

	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
	3,040,088	3,204,841	3,534,212	3,467,573	3,119,120
	4.5%	4.7%	5.1%	5.0%	4.4%

67,195,769 people in 2020
All ages
33,194,219 males — 49.4%
34,001,550 females — 50.6%

69,843,742 people in 2030
All ages
34,594,739 males — 49.5%
35,249,003 females — 50.5%

71,836,821 people in 2040
All ages
35,652,484 males — 49.6%
36,184,337 females — 50.4%

A difficult age

UK population is increasing *(threat)*

Spending on social care *(threat)*

Home solutions for elder living *(opportunity)*

Robot companions *(opportunity)*

Social cohesion erosion *(threat)*
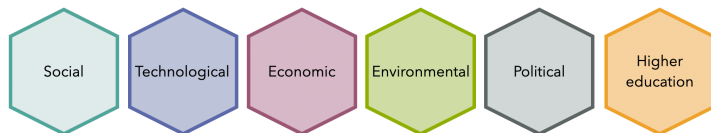
UK population is increasing *(threat)*

The UK population is expected to increase by about 3 million over the next 10 years, passing 70 million by 2031 and reaching 72.5 million by 2043. Almost three quarters of the increase will be caused by net in-migration. England's population is rising faster than the other UK nations. Office for National Statistics projections show that the balance of the UK population will be substantially different by 2040. There will be more people in all the older age groups - with the number of over 85s doubling to 3 million. At the same time, there will be fewer young children and more teenagers. The changing demographic structure means that the UK will need to prepare for more deaths. There will be a 'tipping point' emerging and the current number of deaths of 0.5mn per year will increase by 20% over the next 20 years. This increase in the number of older people will have a profound impact on a wide range of public services - as the number of older people with care needs is expected to rise by more than 60 per cent in the next 20 years. Many people are not saving enough and will need to work longer. Health and social care costs – already challenged - will rise.

Local authority spending on adult social care in England fell 8% in real-terms between 2009–10 and 2016–17, but was protected relative to spending on other local authority services. Looking forward, funding pressures are only going to grow. The population is getting bigger and older, and expectations are rising along with the costs of meeting them. Social care is facing high growth in demand pressures, which are projected to rise by around £18 billion by 2033–34, at an annual rate of 3.9%. This is a combination of growing and ageing populations, rising numbers of people living longer with long- term conditions, and rising costs of providing care services. How social care cost will be paid for in future, especially given the levels of public debt caused by the Covid-19 response, is an open question.

Spending on social care *(threat)*

Social Technological Economic Environmental Political Higher education

Opportunity   Threat   Uncertain

Home solutions for elder living

CES2021 unveiled a range of **technology designed to support elders** who want to continue living at home instead of moving into nursing homes. These include

- Zibrio, a scale that assesses users' balance to predict if they are at risk for a fall, can also be incorporated into at-home routines and FallCall Solutions' Apple Watch apps that send alerts when a fall is detected and help family members check on users
- Mighty Health, an app that pairs users with health coaches, trainers and personalized nutrition planners
- Caregiver Smart Solutions is a multifaceted platform that makes it easier for seniors to stay at home with a machine-learning-based app for early detection of potential health issues, fall sensors, monitors and emergency buttons
- Rendever is a virtual reality platform that wants to help reduce isolation. It can be used with reminiscence therapy, which guides individuals with dementia through experiences that remind them of their pasts and to allow virtual travel to landmarks.

Robot companions

Robots that can hold simple conversations and learn people's interests are to be deployed in some UK care homes after an international trial found **they boost mental health and reduce loneliness**. The trial, in the UK and Japan, found that older adults in care homes who interacted with the robots for up to 18 hours across two weeks had significant improvement in their mental health.
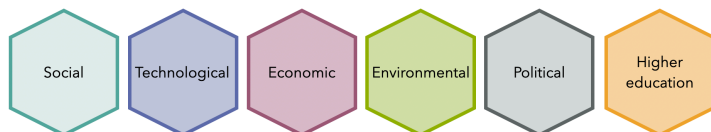
The wheeled robots, called "Pepper", move independently and gesture with robotic arms and hands and are designed to be "culturally competent", which means that after some initial programming they learn about the interests and backgrounds of care home residents. This allows them to initiate rudimentary conversations, play residents' favourite music, teach them languages, and offer practical help including medicine reminders.

The researchers, led by Dr Chris Papadopoulos at the University of Bedfordshire, said the trial was not intended to explore the replacement of human carers with robots, but to help fill lonely periods when, because of a stretched social care system, staff do not have time to keep residents company. He said the robots would be worth using because happier residents mean less work for staff and improve satisfaction ratings, boosting occupancy. The initiative comes amid a continuing staffing crisis for UK care homes exacerbated by the pandemic, during which over 18,000 residents have died of confirmed or suspected Covid-19.

Social   Technological   Economic   Environmental   Political   Higher education

Opportunity   Threat   Uncertain

Social cohesion erosion
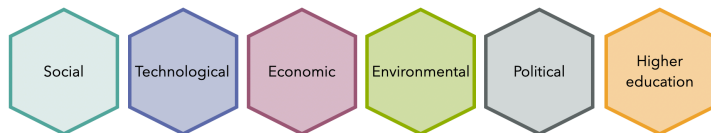
In its Global Risks Report 2021, the World Economic Forum sets out the results of its latest Global Risks Perception Survey (GRPS). Nearly 60% of respondents identified "infectious diseases" and "livelihood crises" as one of the top short-term threats to the world. **Respondents also identified "social cohesion erosion" as a critical short-term threat**. Young adults – or perhaps more accurately, the relationship between young adults and older adults – are at the frontline of this erosion. Young adults worldwide are exposed to environmental degradation, the consequences of the financial crisis, rising inequality, and disruption from industrial transformation. They and their younger siblings are a generation that faces serious challenges to their education, economic prospects and mental health. According to the GRPS, the risk of "youth disillusionment" is being largely neglected by the global community, but it will become a critical threat to the world. Hard-fought societal wins could be obliterated if the current generation lacks adequate pathways to future opportunities—and loses faith in today's economic and political institutions.

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Mental health matters

Deterioration will linger
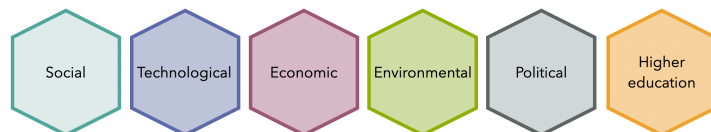
One in six young people are mentally ill

STEP up

The pandemic has already had **a marked effect on people's mental health**. Researchers worldwide are investigating the impacts of this stress and some fear that the deterioration in mental health could linger long after the pandemic has subsided. More than 42% of people surveyed by the US Census Bureau in December reported symptoms of anxiety or depression in December, an increase from 11% the previous year. Data from other surveys suggest that the picture is similar worldwide. "I don't think this is going to go back to baseline anytime soon," says clinical psychologist Luana Marques, at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts. UK Students responding to the Student Covid Insight Studies (SCIS) in late 2020 reported lower levels of life satisfaction and happiness, and higher levels of anxiety compared with the general population.

The government has been urged to set up a post-pandemic wellbeing fund for schools in England after a major study highlighted **worsening mental health among young people**, with teenage girls particularly severely affected. The research tracked the experiences of young people in England, at the ages of 11, 14 and 17, and found that while wellbeing declined for all groups as they got older, girls experienced far lower levels of wellbeing and self-esteem than boys and were more likely to feel unhappy about their physical appearance. The study by the Education Policy Institute and the Prince's Trust, conducted over two years and based on data from the Millennium Cohort Study, found the proportion of girls that felt unhappy about their appearance rose sharply between the ages of 11 and 14, from one in seven (15%) to about one in three (29%). Researchers found that poverty, heavy use of social media, being bullied in childhood and lack of physical exercise all had a negative impact on wellbeing, and warned that the experience of the pandemic was likely to exacerbate existing mental health and wellbeing problems among young people.
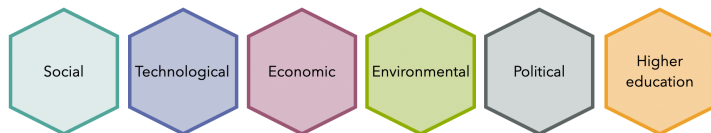
One in six young people are mentally ill

An NHS Digital report published in 2020 found one in six young people have a probable mental illness, up from one in nine in 2017.

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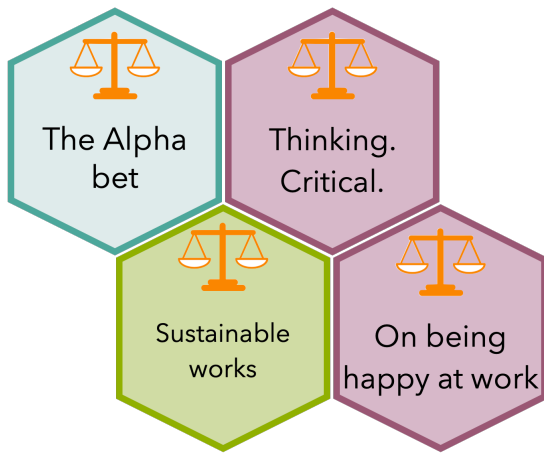
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STEP up

Cambridge students are being invited to take part in a university mental health testing study. The Student Experiences in the Pandemic (STEP) study seeks to monitor students' mental health and wellbeing during Lent Term. The study aims to identify what effects the pandemic has had on students' mental health and well being, as well as pinpoint risk and resilience factors. In a statement, the university said results from the study would be used to "help the university to design better well-being policies." This comes amid news that 73 per cent of students have said that their mental health has declined during the lockdown, according to the mental health charity Mind.

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The long view

People: [Generation Alpha](#) – the first group of millennials' children born from 2010 onwards - are expected to grow up to be the best-educated generation ever, the most technologically immersed, and the generation more likely than any in the past century to spend some or all of their childhood in living arrangements without both of their biological parents. Alphas are an aspirational generation having grown up admiring the lifestyles of influencers, thinking they can triumph over life's many obstacles while pursuing their passion with purpose. For Alphas, innovation is having the "latest" and "newest", which drives their innovative spirit. They will seek continuous improvement, motivated by their values of helping others, but also desiring recognition for their successes. It's not enough for them to innovate, they need their peers to *see* that they are innovating to have a sense of fulfillment in life.
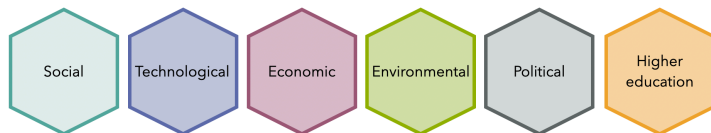
[Alphas will have very different ideas about what "education" means.](#) They are likely to prioritise skills over degrees, real-world simulations, and on-the-job training over classes and will expect highly personalised and engaging training. They tend to learn at a fast pace and to be able to apply that learning in new ways. They are highly collaborative, and want education to come to them - not for them to go to it. This means that [virtual learning](#) will continue to be in high demand.

Work: The future of work depends on workers' ability to think - and to think critically - about ways to innovate, create and [lead through change](#). The challenge is that social is feeding everyone's desparate desire for distraction – and, by doing so, is crippling indivduals' ability to develop the thinking skills they need. Social media makes everyone have the attention span of a few seconds before they desire the next hit. Nervous and uncertain about the future, bombarded by [500 million tweets](#) per day, how can people create new ideas if they don't find the focus and fortitude to develop them?

Being successful in the future workplace will depend on focus and creativity. To be successful, people must develop three key skills for the future: eliminate distractions, find time to think, and discover the value of deep work.
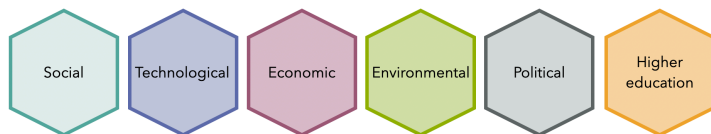
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Work: [The 21st century is the era of sustainable economy](). Companies, communities and countries will rewire their policies and programmes at scale to protect the planet and people alongside their need for profits. Work – and jobs - that drive this sustainable way of life will therefore be at the centre of the 21st century and will grow in millions. Technology and tech companies will advise, create and enable these new jobs in the intersection of climate change and public services as well as consumer products. Technology will play a crucial role in supporting and modernizing management to better align to these emerging contours of 'work'. New tools, applications and platforms will help reconstruct workplace processes and redefine productivity. Digital platforms will enable skilling at scale. Companies that fail to acknowledge, own and act on this requirement to change will find themselves losing in the race to adjust and scrambling to influence the future.

Workplace: [It appears to be the case that working from home can make people happier](). That working-from-home happiness boost could, in turn, make workers more productive. It seems, therefore, that home-working may actually be more efficient than office-work, and that the glory days of the office are gone. The office, after all, came into being when the world of work involved processing lots of paper. The fact that it remained so dominant for so long may reflect a market failure – that before covid-19, the world may have been stuck in a "bad equilibrium" in which home-work was less prevalent than it should have been. The pandemic represents an enormous shock which is putting the world into a new, better equilibrium.
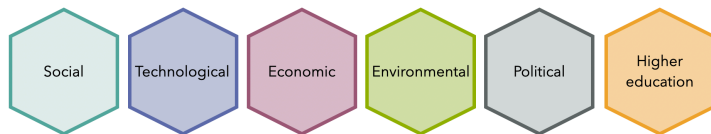
But. The extent to which home-working remains popular after the pandemic has passed will depend on a bargain between companies and workers. It will also depend on whether companies embrace or reject the controversial theory that working from an office might actually impede productivity. Since the 1970s researchers who have studied physical proximity (ie, the distance employees need to travel to engage in a face-to-face interaction) have disagreed on the question of whether it facilitates or inhibits collaboration. The argument largely centres on the extent to which the bringing-together of people under one roof promotes behaviour conducive to new ideas, or whether doing so promotes idle chatter.

Not everything about working from home is pleasurable, of course. In July 2020, a study found that the average workday under lockdown was nearly 50 minutes longer than it was before, and that people became more likely to send emails after work hours. Leesman, a workforce consultancy, has surveyed the experience of more than

Sustainable works

On being happy at work

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100,000 white-collar workers across the rich world during the pandemic. It finds that satisfaction with working from home varies according to whether that person has dedicated office and desk space or not. Indeed, it is uncertain whether the benefits of working from home can last for a sustained period of time. A study on Chinese call-centre workers found that, eventually, many people were desperate to get back to the office, if only every now and then, in part because they were lonely. And, of course, some of the best decisions and insights come from hallway and cafeteria discussions, meeting new people and impromptu team meetings.

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Authors

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Simon Hooton has over 30 years' experience of producing strategies and plans for governments, companies, charities and regional agencies. He is practiced in horizon scanning and is experienced at working with senior teams to help them understand the future impacts of drivers of change and to identify how to adapt to secure future success.

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