



**FUTURE FWD**  
ENABLING NEXTGEN

# **REVIEW AND NEXT STEPS**

Warwick  
Schools  
Foundation



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Enabling transformation through the power of education

# INTRODUCTION

**As the second Future Fwd conference was being planned, we aimed to harness the positivity of our first event and build on the many impactful relationships formed.**

**Future Fwd 2023** showed that there is a deep and untapped well of support to address in a very practical way the many challenges facing current and future generations of students, and what we can and should do to support them.



Working with like-minded people and groups with whom to collaborate was instrumental to the conference's success, and I should like to thank all our speakers – over 40 in total – who so generously gave of their time, sharing their expertise, challenging assumptions and norms, and provoking serious discussions.

Our friends at MTM Consulting built on their impactful survey from 2022, exploring more deeply the perceptions of parents and employers, with **fascinating results**. We must heed what we have been told by such critical groups. It gives us extra impetus to embrace partnerships in education, and more effectively address the need for skills development alongside knowledge acquisition and application.

## **What were the main takeaways from Future Fwd 2023?**

**First**, we need courage in addressing the skills deficit – harnessing the power of parents in working with schools in developing strong communication skills, and hand in hand with business, in ensuring the future-readiness of our pupils

**Second**, to do this, we also need courage in addressing the curriculum and in particular the examination curriculum. There is no inherent conflict between knowledge and skills-rich programmes; knowledge itself develops skills. But there is an ongoing debate about what is formally examined and when, and how many GCSEs are desirable. Each setting will have its own view on this, and its own constraints, but can we work more effectively to share practice and unblock some of the obstacles in the current educational climate? This courage should also extend to our physical environment, as there is much to be learned from an integrated approach to the whole 'learning habitat'.

**Third**, if future-readiness is a concern for the whole of our society, then all members of our society need to be embraced. The message of inclusion is a powerful one - and ensuring safe spaces outside the safe school environment for those who have diverse needs is essential, if we are to fully harness the gifts every human has to offer. I am delighted that Anita Gleve has commented on this further later in this report.

**Fourth**, the Arts. Vibrant opportunities for all pupils to explore the arts - wherever such experiences may lead them - are crucial for the wellbeing of our society. They help to foster joy - and joy is life-affirming.

**Finally**, AI. Much has been written on the opportunities and threats inherent in generative AI. It creates a generational paradigm shift in how we learn, how we teach, and crucially how we encourage ethical thinking amongst our students.

And what of the future? Once again we want to seize the momentum from the conference and work with likeminded professionals in exploring what it means to create future-ready students, ready to make a positive impact on society, in their workplaces and in their communities.

Our young learners need courageous leadership and we aim for Future Fwd 2024 to be a platform for the impact of such courage to be shared.

We will once again hear from and develop the voice of Gen Z and Gen Alpha, and in particular, we are seeking to showcase educational programmes in schools and colleges across all sectors and settings, in the following areas:

- Entrepreneurship
- Financial literacy
- Business and industry links
- Ethical AI
- Singing for wellbeing.

In addition, we will be looking at the impact of a pilot pupil coaching project run by Nyman Coaching Associates.

I look forward to seeing you in July 2024 at what will be another thought-provoking and impactful conference.

**Richard Nicholson**  
Principal, Warwick Schools Foundation

# FOREWORD

**The University of Warwick was delighted once again to be principal sponsor of Future Fwd.**

Innovation is one of the university's core strategic priorities. The development and promotion of innovative ways to develop education, across school sectors and between education and industry, is a cause we should all champion.

Whether it is key skill development for a world in which AI will have an ever-growing presence, curriculum design to foster design and creative thinking, the joy which the Arts brings to our lives, the development of entrepreneurship, so deeply embedded in the West Midlands region, or the need for a more inclusive society, Future Fwd once again brought together like-minded leaders who want to seize every opportunity to enhance the life-chances and opportunities of the next and subsequent generations – 'NextGen'.

Whilst a great deal of the conference focused on the sharing of exceptional practice, Future Fwd also provided a forum for deep discussion and reflection on complex educational – and indeed economic – challenges. Future Fwd is a place where difficult questions are asked, knowing that the answers are equally complex and will require a cross-sector approach to address. The Future Fwd mindset is undoubtedly one which is undaunted by challenge, because it understands that a confident future for our young people has benefits for the whole of society.

The key discussion points and 'take-aways' in this Conference Report echo many of the current key educational debates but also add new perspectives, ideas, and fresh insights. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed being a part of Future Fwd 2023.

**Rachel Sandby-Thomas CB**

Registrar, University of Warwick





## the business of education

**This year's survey highlighted a growing concern shared by both parents and business leaders regarding the education system's ability to adequately prepare children for the challenges of the future.**

Two aspects particularly stand out:

### **Future-readiness**

The report highlighted that the past 12 months have witnessed a significant decline in parental confidence regarding their children's preparedness for the future within the educational system. Only 48% of families who took part in the 2023 survey feel that schools are adequately equipping their children, marking a considerable drop from 69% in 2022.

This lack of faith is further exemplified by business leaders, with only slightly over a third expressing confidence in the preparedness of graduates.

These figures underscore the urgent necessity for collaboration between schools and business leaders to effectively prepare the younger generation for the challenges and opportunities of the future. It is evident that concerted efforts are required to bridge the gap between education and industry to ensure that our children receive the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in an ever-evolving world.

### **Communication skills**

There are also significant concerns around communication skills, which are unanimously recognised by contributors as one of the most crucial abilities for success in today's world.

While acknowledging the education system's role in teaching academic subjects, the survey highlighted that parents and business leaders hold the shared belief that communication skills should be nurtured at home. These findings suggest that the weak point lies within families' understanding of their role within the education system and how they can effectively deliver these critical skills to their children.

Clear and effective communication is crucial in today's interconnected world, enabling individuals to thrive in various aspects of life. Efforts to bridge this gap must focus on strengthening the connection between schools and families, fostering open lines of communication, and providing the necessary tools to facilitate the development of effective communication skills at home.

Future Fwd clearly has a role to play in bridging gaps between schools, families, and businesses. The full survey may be found [here](#).

### **James Leggett**

Managing Director at MTM Consulting

# A FOCUS ON INCLUSION

**In 2023, inclusive education emerged as a pivotal focus for the wider independent education sector, akin to the emphasis on teacher wellbeing in 2022.**

As the CEO and Founder of Chatsworth Schools, inclusive education has been engrained in our core since 2018 and I've seen first-hand how inclusive practices extend beyond just supporting children with SEND. It's about creating school environments that mirror our diverse society, where every child and adult feels a sense of belonging and the ability to thrive.

Inclusive education to my mind now equates with equitable education. It's essential that this approach becomes mainstream, accessible to everyone, not just a select few.

The Future Fwd conference's ambition to push education forward by creating a collaborative thought lab for innovators shows their commitment to ensuring education benefits the many, not the few.

**Anita Gleave**

CEO and Founder, Chatsworth Schools



# A CONFERENCE COMMITTED TO SUSTAINING DIALOGUE ON THE NEED FOR CHANGE IN SCHOOL EDUCATION...

At Kidzink, we pride ourselves on keeping pace with the ever-evolving needs of schools, students and teachers. As solely education focused architects and interior designers, we believe that learning spaces and places must keep pace with innovations in pedagogy and technology, in education policy and curriculum – this is a must so that students can thrive. The classrooms of today and of tomorrow must not look like the classrooms of yesteryear, and attending events like Future Fwd go a long way in informing our research and design ideas.

We're already looking forward to Future Fwd 2024!

**Jenny Mollon, Director of Education, Kidzink**

## ...TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE TO BENEFIT FROM DEVELOPMENTS IN AI AND TECHNOLOGY

**This year's conference renewed its focus on some key preoccupations central to the world of school education.**

Inevitably perhaps, given the intense pace of recent developments and the way that the public imagination has been captivated by those developments, the conference looked in some detail at artificial intelligence, gaming, and its role in the immediate future of education.



## ...TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE TO THRIVE

**Future Fwd 2023 was not just another education conference - rather, it was a vehicle to facilitate ongoing dialogue concerning the dynamic and continuous change necessary in education if schools are to enable young people to thrive in a fast-changing world.**

This year's conference brought together people from all sectors of the economy to focus on how educational communities can best support young people to take up their place as a force for good in the world.







## ...TO GIVE YOUNG PEOPLE VOICE, AND TO TAKE HEED OF WHAT THEY HAVE TO SAY FROM DEVELOPMENTS IN AI AND TECHNOLOGY

A commitment to giving voice to the coming generation, and listening to it, lies at the core of this conference's agenda.

Richard Nicholson, Principal of Warwick Schools Foundation, in welcoming all speakers and delegates to the conference reminded the conference of the core purpose of education in contributing to the creation of a safe, stable, and enriching society, a society in which young people are able to take their place and make a positive contribution.

## ...TO REAFFIRM THE UNIQUE ROLE OF THE HUMAN AS EDUCATION CHANGES

**But the conference was not focused solely on technology.**

Instead, it devoted much attention to the human factors at the heart of the educational process, and sought to ensure that the voices heard and noted were those of the new generation, as much as those of the existing educational establishment.





## ...TO LISTEN TO ALL AND TO BUILD POSITIVE CHANGE

A key element enabling this function of education is the process of dynamic, active listening, and this process lay at the heart of the conference.

Delegates heard and engaged with a range of speakers who probed at searching questions and topics.

## ...TO TAKE A LONG, HARD LOOK AT SCHOOL QUALIFICATIONS FROM DEVELOPMENTS IN AI AND TECHNOLOGY

The creative tension between the need to provide young people with qualifications - a ticket to the next stage of their education - and the need to cultivate their humanity, creativity, versatility, and communication skills surfaced repeatedly across the talks and events - and to discuss pathways to success after school for all students.



## ...TO MAKE LASTING COMMITMENTS TO CHANGE

**Delegates and speakers alike were united in their energetic commitment to positive change.**

A common theme at the heart of this commitment was the belief that the most positive elements of humanity in education stand to benefit from the frenzied pace of current technological change, particularly in the field of AI. And that government needs to give more direction to schools in this area as the current advice is very vague.



# WHAT DID THE 2023 CONFERENCE FOCUS ON?

**Following a full day of varied talks, addressing five key areas for consideration and development, 'think-tank' Round Table discussion-groups convened for intense reflection and dialogue.**

These Round Table discussion groups then reported back with their findings at a plenary session, details of which form the remainder of this report.

Significantly, the granular detail of these plenary reports emphasises that progress in driving change is made up of specific steps. None of those steps in and of themselves are necessarily of arresting originality, but the cumulative effect of such incremental steps will constitute real progress towards re-fashioning an education system into something which is forward-focused, progressive and enabling.

So perhaps that is the key take-away from this year's conference - the idea that radical change in education will be driven by a sequence of thoughtful, incremental actions, and that a dynamic process of dialogue and reflection - such as took place at this year's conference - will provide a conceptual engine-room to lead significant progress.

Before we set out the recommendations from the Round Table groups, here are some of the key focal points of the conference, under the topics addressed by the Round Table groups.

# ONGOING POINTS OF DIALOGUE AND REFLECTION...



# ... CONCERNING THE CURRICULUM

**Curriculum was unanimously seen as an area ripe for redevelopment, and a commonly held view was that the current provision in English schools is an anachronism, due to obsolete emphases on learning content for the purpose of gaining qualifications, rather than on creative and critical thinking skills, oracy, and real-world problem solving.**

The structure of the curriculum in England was explored. In general, the current specialisation of the existing A level programme was felt to have significant benefits, and this is interesting in the context of the government's plans for A level reform. The current emphasis on the quantity of GCSEs taken by students was felt to be of little to no benefit to students.

Delegates were excited by the idea of the curriculum, particularly at Key Stages 4 and 5, focusing more on creative thinking, research projects, teamwork, and communication skills. It was noted too that a number of schools are now creating their own GCSE equivalent GCSEs, and/or reducing the number of GCSE sat by pupils. More on such initiatives may be found here: [rethinkingassessment.com/school-directed-courses](https://rethinkingassessment.com/school-directed-courses).

The physical learning environment was also addressed, with consideration of a more integrated approach to the 'learning habitat' through specialist design; in turn, this approach can foster inclusion.

# ...CONCERNING SEND

**There was much focus on the role of the best kind of SEND provision in opening up pathways to success for each student. A thorough understanding of different qualifications and the rising importance of BTEC and T levels for the less academic should be explored further.**

Delegates focused on the concept of SEND provision being fully integrated into the leadership, structures, and work of schools, such that schools enable students to progress from school to the individual pathway which best matches potential.

The interplay between best-practice SEND provision and the ethos of schools, as defined by school leaders, was explored. It was felt important that there is more dialogue between SEN specialist schools and mainstream schools to grow understanding and offer multiple options to students.





# ... CONCERNING BUSINESS & INDUSTRY

**The concept of seamless creative dialogue between the business sector and education seemed to embody an ideal, but delegates felt this was still far off for most schools, and therefore there was much discussion of ways to bring these sectors closer together.**

Business leaders seemed perplexed by a perceived lack of readiness for the world of work on the part of young people leaving education, particularly in respect of key communication skills such as speaking.

This frustration of business at a perceived lack of work-readiness in career entrants was noted, but delegates were excited by the idea of school education equipping young people more effectively with the creative, interpersonal and communication skills they need to thrive in a rapidly changing world.



# ... CONCERNING ARTS – MUSIC

**The (English) Government's recently refreshed National Plan for Music Education was the focus for much discussion and analysis.**

There were concerns about how the aims of the National Plan might be reconciled with the realities of funding and a general undervaluing of the arts in national policy-making.

There was considerable exasperation concerning a long-term trend of underinvestment in music education.

There was much interest in the concept of partnerships between schools and musical practitioners, and how these might enable schools to square the circle in terms of bringing musical excellence into schools in a climate of scarce funding.



# ... CONCERNING AI

**There was much optimism about the potential of AI in education to strengthen, support and re-affirm the key human qualities and skills inherent in the best education, rather than to eliminate them.**

The ways in which schools might make an effective transition to integrating AI into their practice (as well as best practice) was thoroughly discussed.

There was discussion of how all stakeholders could get 'up to speed' with the new capability of AI, particularly instantly accessible generative AI. In order to effectively harness all the potential opportunities delegates recognised the need for immersive education in the new tech, which would include teachers, families and, of course, students.

In addition, there was also a discussion around the use of gaming in education, and the skills that can be developed through educational games and their particular use in developing skills of analysis and decision making.

Delegates were excited by the capacity of AI to free up teachers for more creative ways of engaging with their students; they were equally excited by the potential for AI to support individual students very precisely in their learning.

There were very few fears of a 'takeover' of education by AI - rather, delegates felt that AI has the capacity to strengthen and enhance best practice and to enable the human input of teachers to establish new relevance and efficacy.



# WHAT THE CONFERENCE HAD TO SAY ABOUT KEY TOPICS IN EDUCATION...

Key thoughts and recommendations  
from the Roundtable Discussion Groups

# CURRICULUM

**Chair:** Dr Stephen Burley, Head Master, King's High School, Warwick

This Roundtable Discussion Group centered their discussion on this question – **How can school curriculum be reformed and enhanced to prepare young people for their future lives?**

## Key recommendations

- Discuss and identify curriculum development priorities for action and impact.
- Recognise the importance of lobbying government and policy-makers.
- Give priority to inter-school collaboration – it creates effective ripples of positive change.
- Explore whether the curriculum should remain in subject domains or areas / themes, and analyse whether there is currently too much content, especially at GCSE level – might an excessive amount of content leave behind too many students?
- Review curriculum deep content – how helpful is the core curriculum, and what should it be?
- Develop research projects and integrate these into the curriculum – these are a crucial opportunity for students, and should be central to any curriculum.
- Focus on the importance of oracy – another core skill for future student success.
- Enhance cross-curricular learning – choice, flexibility, adaptability – crucially important.
- Develop more real-world content in the curriculum, connecting dynamically with future careers and pathways.
- Review the choice of subjects available for study – e.g. at A level; establish what works well for students.
- Explore whether curricular specialisation could occur earlier in the secondary school journey.
- Review all qualifications and assessments, asking key questions – how many GCSEs should be taken? How many subjects can one student reasonably master in two years? (6 – 8 subjects maximum at GCSE emerged as a consensus)
- Review assessment types – the IB model poses an attractive alternative to exclusively summative assessment.
- Review the early years curriculum, as getting this right is crucial.

## A key 'takeaway' message from this Roundtable Discussion Group

Develop flexibility in the curriculum – this is a key imperative, enabling each student to play to their strengths.

# SEND

**Chair:** Angela Fairs, Headteacher, Riverston School and College

This Roundtable Discussion Group centered their discussion on the following question – **How can school leadership strengthen SEND provision so that all students can make better progress?**

## **Key recommendations**

- Define inclusion as a school purpose at the top of school leadership and ensure that all career pathways for students are explored, through effectively integrated SEND provision.
- Cultivate school mindset in relation to SEND provision, building teams, underlining the crucial function of the SENCOs, incorporating SENCO voice at SLT level, and working to develop SEND awareness at board / trustee / owner level.
- Review current specialist provision to identify areas for development and enhancement especially around options for qualifications.
- Foster a culture of lifelong learning amongst all teachers, and ensure inclusion of neurodiversity is hard-wired into appraisal structures.
- Provide more curricular options for students, so that all students can thrive - this may be through a range of qualifications and pathways, such as BTECs.
- Discuss and explore with parents what constitutes student success - for example, apprenticeships can be a successful route for some students.
- Give a lead in defining successful pathways for students, so that students and their families are liberated in their thinking to support the best pathway for each student.

## **Some key 'takeaway' messages from this Roundtable Discussion Group**

- Build mind-set and build teams in support of enhanced SEND provision.
- Ensure that all schools have a SENCO on SLT – this is crucial.
- Offer inclusive qualification options in non-selective schools.

# BUSINESS & INDUSTRY

**Chair:** Jas Rohel, CEO Education Awards

This Roundtable Discussion Group centered their discussion on this question – **How do we include in the curriculum more business links, and how can schools engage better with the world of business?**

## Key recommendations

- Identify what the skills gaps are, and develop educational initiatives from there.
- Explore these key questions:
  - How can schools enhance their provision?
  - How can businesses benefit as they support schools?
- Share good practice in schools in relation to creative links with the world of business – crucially important.
- Explore who within schools will pursue and maintain contacts with businesses and be precise in identifying and establishing points of engagement with individual businesses, as so much can change quickly.
- Develop messages about the relevance and impact of humanities degrees and communicate these messages to businesses.
- Explore new ways to finance careers provision in schools.
- Continue and enhance careers fairs and similar events in schools – these are currently a successful working model.
- Educating families is important – invite presenters into schools to highlight particular career pathways.

## Some key 'takeaway' messages from this Roundtable Discussion Group

- Engage students in exploring what they want in terms of career guidance, and what is needed.
- Note and explore solutions to barriers which currently prevent the seamless engagement of schools with businesses, and which can prevent business representatives coming into schools.
  - Share best practice between schools – forming inter-school networks helps to grow contacts between schools and businesses.

# ARTS – MUSIC

**Chair:** Richard Hart (Delivery Lead, Warwickshire Music Education Services)

This Roundtable Discussion Group centered their discussion on the following question -  
**What is effective practice in delivering co-curricular experiences through partnerships?**

(In exploring this question, particular attention was paid to the refreshed National Plan for Music Education).

## **Key recommendations**

- Underline the importance of curricular music provision as the key to all, as it will establish the best context for enhancements to the co-curricular provision.
- Emphasise the importance of group participation in music - it is a crucial factor, delivered through ensembles, etc.
- Explore solutions which overcome barriers to implementation, in particular costs.
- Establish a culture of enhanced music provision through school leadership.
- Get partnerships right, as partnerships are a key factor in the delivery of excellence in music education - over time, partnerships will bring about the best provision, and in turn will influence best practice.
- Never lose sight of the innate power of music - in pushing forward innovation and progress, remember that music brings about joy and engagement with others, and that it also provides gateways to cultural engagement in wider society.

## **Some key 'takeaway' messages from this Roundtable Discussion Group**

- School leadership needs to be inspiring in order to drive improvements in school music - this, combined with the best partnerships, can provide crucial inspiration, such that both school and partner(s) collectively build a transformational musical culture.
- Specialist music teaching, especially at primary level, is essential in driving forward positive developments in music education.

# AI

**Chair:** Jenny Parkinson-Mills, Director of Digitally Enabled Learning, Warwick Schools Foundation

This Roundtable Discussion Group centered their discussion on exploring the impact of AI on the curriculum – **Integrating AI into teaching and learning to develop or even redesign the current curriculum model, rather than merely using it to optimise what is currently done.**

## Key recommendations

- Explore how AI will reduce teacher workload, and how it will enable teachers to explore more creative approaches to teaching and learning.
- Embrace the great opportunity afforded by AI for personalised learning - this will be transformative for all students and help meet their individual needs. In particular for SEN students, it will help to remove barriers to their learning.
- Explore how AI can facilitate multiple strands of learning in the classroom.
- Explore how the curriculum, transformed, and supported by AI, needs to drive assessment (currently the curriculum is driven by assessment and qualifications).
- Educate all members of the school community on AI - all need to be educated on its positive potential, as ultimately the character and quality of human input will determine the nature of the AI.
- Explore whether schools should move to centre their teaching on character, creative thinking, and communication.
- Explore what can be done in the immediate short term:
  - Educate and enable school staff - give them scaffolds to engage with AI, e.g., 'prompt literacy' for teachers. Educating the students is also paramount in order to support them in how they use the technology effectively and safely.
  - Explore ways in which AI can be used beyond the classroom, such as using AI as a 'personal tutor', and use prompting appropriately to develop the most effective responses.
  - Educate parents - this will be key. Engage them in practical discussions about AI in education and how they can support their children to use the technology appropriately, and indeed use it themselves.

## **A key 'takeaway' message from this Roundtable Discussion Group**

Focus on the opportunities offered by AI, centering on the positives, and on proactively exploring the capability of AI to transform education.



# Thank you to all our partners

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## Thank you to all our contributors

The quality of the talks at Future Fwd in 2023 was down to the knowledge, expertise and professionalism of our speakers, facilitators and contributors:

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Sally Taylor  
Sian Crossley  
Dr Steve Berryman  
Tom Doust  
Tom Ravenscroft  
Victoria Sarson

We thank you enormously for giving up your time to prepare and speak to our 2023 cohort.



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