



AI Readiness: Building the Bridge from Higher Education to Work in the United Kingdom

How institutions and employers can reduce friction and deliver AI-ready graduates

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Foreword

The transition from higher education to the workforce is a key moment in the lives of young people. It shapes the trajectory of individual lives and the competitiveness of economies. In the UK, this transition is more important than ever, and it sits at an important inflection point for the workforce and the economy. Artificial intelligence is changing the nature of work at great speed, while the UK's world-renowned higher education institutions are being asked to prepare graduates for roles, tools, and expectations that are rapidly evolving.

This research is the product of collaboration between Pearson and Amazon Web Services which combines our unique strengths. Pearson brings decades of experience in learning science, curriculum design, assessment, and qualifications. AWS brings direct insight into how AI is being deployed inside the organisations that graduates are entering, and the skills those organisations now require to drive growth and nurture innovation. Together, we set out to understand how higher education and the workforce expectations align in an AI-driven world.

Across six countries, we listened to learners, higher education leaders, and employers. The UK reveals a distinctive picture. There is strong alignment between universities and employers on the importance of human skills, adaptability, and the ability to combine human judgement with AI.

The shared understanding is a valuable foundation, but alignment on what matters now has not yet translated into confidence that graduates are ready to apply those capabilities in the workplace.

The challenge for the UK is not a lack of ambition, awareness, or talent. It is an execution gap. AI access is proliferating, but structured practice remains uneven. Rule awareness is high, but trust is still fragile. Graduates show adaptability and digital fluency, but too often lack the applied experience employers need from day one.

Closing this gap will require more than the individual efforts that any single institution, employer, or technology provider can deliver alone. It will require shared evidence, stronger feedback loops, practical faculty support, and learning experiences designed around real workplace application. The UK is up to the task, and this report provides a framework for action.

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Reduce friction. Build the bridge.

AI readiness is not owned by higher education or industry alone. It is built — or broken — in the transition between them.

Read the full report: pearson.com/ai-readiness

Introduction

The social contract between higher education and the workforce has long rested on a powerful premise: higher education institutions equip graduates with workforce readiness. Across the globe, the rapid integration of AI into workplaces is outpacing the adaptive capacity of higher education, presenting institutions and employers alike with a critical shared challenge. Institutions must accelerate the cadence of curriculum transformation, supported by employers who must play an active role in defining the capabilities the AI-enabled workforce requires. Without this, the risk is graduating cohorts of students lacking AI readiness for the modern workforce. The distance between institutional intent and graduate outcomes remains one of the most consequential challenges in education today.

The United Kingdom sits in a distinctive position within this global challenge with one of the world's most respected higher education systems, home to four of the top ten universities globally, and a sector that contributes over £150bn annually to the economy.* The UK enters this challenge from a relative position of strength, but the data reveals a more complicated set of dynamics. It is a market where institutional reputation and academic excellence coexist with a measurable lag in AI integration, faculty capability, and connections across the broader ecosystem.

UK institutions are struggling to adapt to a workforce transformation that is not only rapid but also uneven, with a fragmented employer landscape where AI adoption and application is inconsistent across different regions, industries and roles. Indeed, while many UK organisations are actively adopting AI, studies also show that current utilisation is often limited to basic use cases, representing only a fraction of the technology's estimated transformative potential.¹ This evidence suggests that despite the change already in motion, this is just the start and there is more transformation to come.

On top of this, there is a significant variation in both adoption levels across the UK businesses, differing by geographic location, sector, job function and specific role. Business size also has a substantial bearing; with larger enterprises far more advanced in their AI integration and transformation than SMEs.^{2,3} As employers are grappling with how to effectively leverage AI to realise its full potential, HE educators are tasked with producing graduates who meet the needs of a workforce where expectations are not only rapidly evolving but differ hugely depending on entry point.

This external pressure is compounded by an institutional orientation that has prioritised governance and compliance over practical application and direct industry connection. The consequence is a faculty capability gap that limits the depth of AI learning, an AI governance model where high rule awareness has yet to fully build trust, and ultimately, a learner population that is highly self-reliant but remains sceptical of current offerings. While the majority of UK learners continue to value a university education, only 13% are very confident that they are prepared to enter an AI-enabled workforce. Ultimately, the UK has the ingredients for AI readiness, including employer alignment, graduate adaptability, and strong governance awareness, but has not yet converted these strengths into trusted, applied, institutionally guided AI learning at scale.

* London Economics (2024). The economic and social impact of university teaching, learning and research in the UK. London: Universities UK. Available at: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2024-09/LE-UUK-Impact-of-university-TL-and-RI-Final-Report.pdf> [Accessed 7 July 2026].

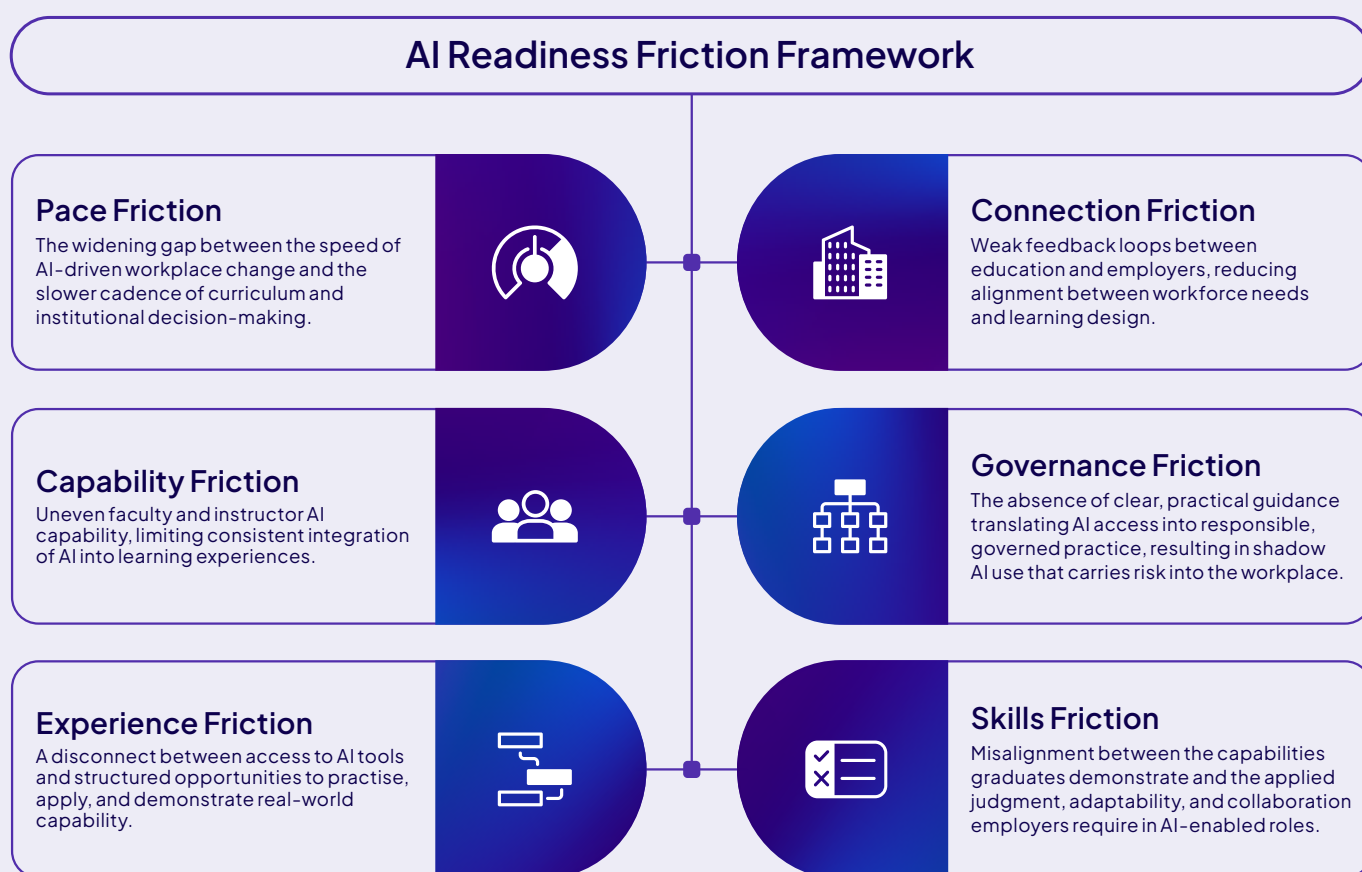
¹ AWS and Strand Partners, Unlocking the UK's AI Potential 2026 (2026). Available at: <https://www.aboutamazon.co.uk/news/aws/new-aws-report-reveals-that-nearly-two-thirds-of-uk-organisations-now-use-ai> [accessed: 7 July 2026].

² Maxim Massenkoff and Peter McCrory, Labor market impacts of AI: A new measure and early evidence, Anthropic, (2026). Available at: <https://www.anthropic.com/research/labor-market-impacts> [Accessed 7 July 2026].

³ Ibid (AWS, (n1)).

The UK already has established mechanisms that point toward what integrated learning can look like, including degree apprenticeships, structured placements, and industry-aligned credentialling programmes that combine academic depth with applied workplace experience. The collaboration between HE and industry that underpins them is precisely the kind of connectivity this research identifies as critical. The challenge is that they remain supplementary to, rather than embedded within, a traditional degree programme which remains the most widely accessed route to graduate employment and the primary focus of this report.

This research, comprising survey and interview data, along with secondary research, provides the evidence for an AI Readiness Friction Framework⁴ which maps the challenges that exist across the full ecosystem from higher education to work. The data shows that success is not random, but clusters around six compounding friction points that impede progress precisely when speed matters most:



⁴The findings in the report are based on a survey of 2711 respondents, including 502 stakeholders in the UK, comprising learners (n=351), HE leaders (n=100), and employers (n=51). Given the sample sizes involved, the data should be read as directional patterns across the market. Where cross-market comparisons are provided, these draw on the total sample across all six markets.

These frictions reinforce one another across education and workplace systems to limit graduate AI readiness. We define AI readiness as the human capability to work effectively alongside intelligent systems: an integration of functional AI proficiency, strategic intelligence, ethical stewardship, and critical human skills such as adaptability, communication, and judgment. Rather than prescribing one-size-fits-all solutions, this framework enables leaders to diagnose where friction is most acute in their context and target intervention at root causes rather than symptoms. What follows is a snapshot of contemporary indicators in the UK, with guidance to support every university, regardless of its current status, to synchronise its AI readiness pathway with speed. **This guidance is equally relevant to employers because the evidence is clear that closing the readiness gap requires HE and industry to act as partners rather than in parallel.**

Chapter 1

examines how fast AI is transforming the education-to-work pathway in the UK, where the most consequential misalignments are between university priorities and employer expectations of a graduate's experience and skills. It concludes with a consolidated portrait of the AI-ready graduate.

Chapter 2

shifts the analysis to four dimensions of the AI readiness divide: the scale and focus of university investment in AI⁵; faculty capability as the primary vehicle for graduate AI readiness; the relationship between institutional behaviour and student confidence; and, the governance challenges created when rules and practice are misaligned.

Chapter 3

details the AI Readiness Friction Framework consisting of six points at which the education-to-work transition most consistently breaks down. This includes a friction-based analysis of the UK market's specific readiness profile.

Taken together, the dataset illustrates the conditions in the UK that have led to progress in delivering AI-ready graduates, while also highlighting the specific challenges hindering full realisation of this ambition. This report is for HE leaders and employers who are navigating the intersection of AI and higher education in the UK and who are looking for evidence-based guidance on closing the AI skills gap, strengthening workforce readiness, and building the industry partnerships that will shape the next generation of AI-enabled graduates.

⁵In this research, the term 'investment' is used broadly, referring to both the extent to which AI is an institutional priority, a pedagogical and curriculum priority, and the scale of the resources (e.g., financial, human) allocated.

Chapter 1: The landscape of AI-driven education-to-work transformation

The accelerating pace of AI-driven change and institutional response

“

The biggest barrier is not the technology. It's the mindset and the governance. Universities are built to be slow, to be reflective. But AI is fast. That friction between the slow institution and the fast technology is where the gap is created.”

Graça Carvalho, University College London (UCL)

In the United Kingdom, stakeholders hold a mixed view of the pace of AI-driven change. A majority of learners (64%) and higher education leaders (62%) describe the pace as ‘fast’ or ‘extremely fast’. UK employers are somewhat more measured in their assessment, with 53% viewing the pace as fast or extremely fast, a figure that likely reflects a more distributed pattern of AI integration across a complex and fragmented employer landscape, where transformation is experienced unevenly.

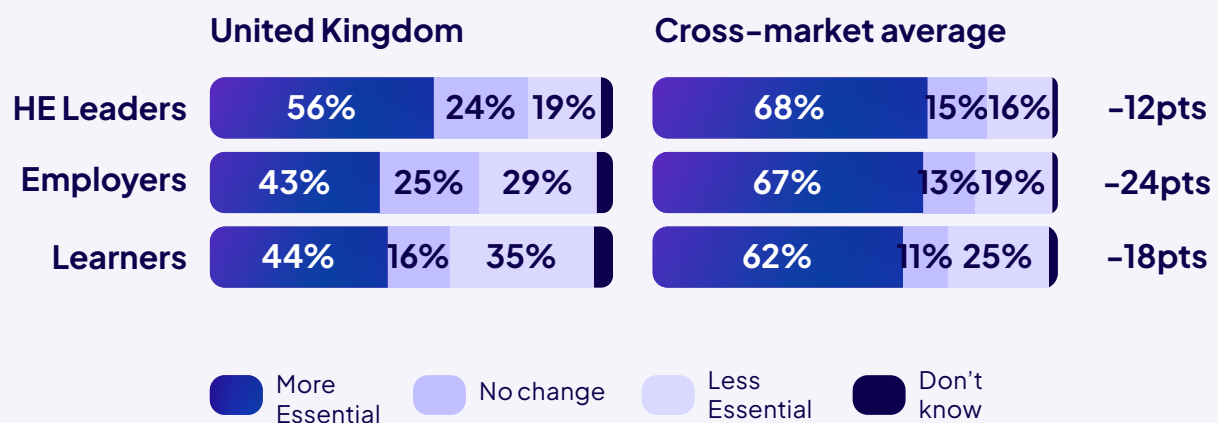
It is understandable, therefore, that a third (34%) of HE leaders highlight ‘unclear and changing employer expectations’ as among the top barriers they face in preparing graduates for AI-enabled workplaces, which is 9 points higher than the cross-market average. This underlines the shared challenge HE and industry face in adapting to AI-driven change. In the UK, the dual challenges of fragmented AI adoption by the workforce and weak connectivity between education and industry compound and reinforce one another.

When looking toward the future, all three stakeholder groups are closely aligned on the anticipated pace of change. Approximately two-thirds of all UK stakeholders--learners (66%), HE leaders (68%), and employers (65%)--expect the pace of AI-driven change to accelerate over the next two years. This widespread awareness of acceleration is met with equally widespread doubt about the capacity of UK universities to keep pace with it. **Only 13% of UK learners believe their institutions are keeping pace with ‘most or all AI developments and workplace changes’**, well below the cross-market average of 21%, and the lowest proportion of any market in the study. HE leaders are only marginally more confident, with just 19% believing their institutions are keeping pace, also below the cross-market average of 32%. Roughly half of UK learners (50%) and HE leaders (47%) consider universities to be keeping pace with some changes, while more than a quarter of learners and HE leaders (both at 28%), and employers (29%), believe UK universities are falling behind, figures that are notably higher than their respective cross-market averages. **While stakeholders broadly agree that change is coming and will accelerate, considerably fewer believe that institutions are currently positioned to meet it.**

The evolving value of higher education

Given the disruption currently being experienced, it is unsurprising that opinions in the UK are mixed regarding the value of university education in the context of AI. When asked if AI developments make a university education more or less essential today, pluralities across all UK stakeholder groups agree that the value of a degree has increased. This view is held by 56% of HE leaders, 44% of learners, and 43% of employers, figures which are lower than the corresponding cross-market average for each stakeholder group.

Views on the current importance of university education



Q. Which of the following statements is closest to your view about higher education in the context of AI:

- AI developments make university education **MORE** essential - graduates need the deep knowledge and human skills that higher education provides
- AI developments make university education **LESS** essential - practical skills and experience matter more than formal degrees
- AI developments haven't changed the importance of university education

In the UK, significant minorities in each group believe AI has either made no change to the value of a degree or has made it less essential, highlighting a level of doubt more prevalent than in other markets, including in the US, a market where the data reveals a similar profile to the UK. This division of opinion becomes even more pronounced when looking to the future, especially for UK learners, who are the most sceptical of any group of learners in the study. When asked if university degrees will become more or less important over the next five years, four-in-ten (42%) believe degrees will become less important, a figure well above the cross-market average of 31%. Just 28% (compared to a cross-market average of 40%) of learners believe that university degrees will become *more* important.⁶

⁶Q5_1 - Thinking about the next 5 years...if AI continues to develop and change the workforce, do you believe university degrees will become...*Much more important, somewhat more important, neither more nor less important, somewhat less important, much less important, don't know.*

In line with their more positive views about the importance of university education today, UK HE leaders (49%) are more confident than learners in the future value of degrees, although their optimism remains below the respective cross-market average. This divergence between the learner and institutional views is a notable feature of the UK data and may reflect a learner-level frustration with the perceived gap between the promise of higher education, their current AI learning experience, and their prospects for employment.

This scepticism, however, should not be mistaken for a wholesale rejection of university education. When considering the best foundation for an AI-enabled career, UK learners show a preference for a blended approach rather than an outright move towards vocational training. Purely practical (23%) and purely academic (20%) pathways also find limited support. Instead, the consensus gathers around a hybrid model, with close to half of learners (47%) believing that combining formal university education with practical work experience provides the best foundation.

Nevertheless, the view of these learners is that universities need to evolve to meet the demands of the modern workplace. When asked what would most increase the value of their education, UK learners call for more practical experience with workplace tools, more human skills development, and curricula more aligned with employer needs. The concern learners share is that a university education is not yet delivering the applied experience that is needed for an AI-enabled world.

UK employers (57%) and HE leaders (49%) are aligned with learners (47%) that a hybrid model of formal university education and practical work experience provides the best foundation for AI-enabled careers. Ultimately, the demand from all sides is for an evolution of the degree framework, rather than an alternative to it. The university continues to be seen as the institution best placed to develop the compound skillset that an AI-enabled economy demands. This is not a rejection of higher education. Rather, it reflects growing expectations that degrees must demonstrate applied capability, not simply certify knowledge. In an AI-enabled economy, what graduates can prove they can do increasingly matters as much as what they know. In the UK, established mechanisms such as degree apprenticeships, structured placements, and industry credentialing point toward what integrated learning can look like. The challenge is that these remain supplementary rather than central to most graduates' experience.

Connecting the AI-ready UK graduate with the workforce



It's a triangular relationship. You have the industry partner that provides the mentor and the problem. You have the academic supervisor that provides the rigor. And then you have the student that provides the talent and the fresh eyes. That magic triangle is what makes it work."

Graça Carvalho, University College London (UCL)

In the UK there is relatively strong alignment between HE leaders and employers on what graduate readiness should look like: both prioritise human skills and the capacity to combine human judgement with AI as the most critical graduate capabilities. This shared understanding provides a strong foundation for building a more effective bridge from education to the workplace. The challenge is translating this shared understanding into tangible outcomes for graduates and those that employ them.

Comparing the views of HE leaders on perceived employer needs with employer-stated priorities, the alignment is clear. UK employers cite communication and collaboration as the most important competencies when hiring graduates today (63%), followed by combining human judgement with AI capabilities (49%) and adaptability (45%). UK HE leaders track this, ranking combining human judgement with AI first (47%), adaptability second (41%), and communication and collaboration third (36%) as the top employer priorities. This shared view of the top 3 requirements for AI-ready graduates is unique to the UK. Across the other markets in the study, HE leaders typically underestimate employer demand for communication and collaboration skills. Of the competencies required for AI-ready graduates, UK HE leaders are most in sync with employers on the value of human skills above technical skills in any market.

However, while there is broad agreement on what matters, when it comes to how much it matters the visible disconnect between HE leaders and employers across markets also exists in the UK: the 27-point gap between the importance employers place on communication and collaboration (63%) and HE leaders' perception of that demand (36%) is the largest such gap in the study.

Key competencies for AI-ready graduates: employer vs educator views

AI skills Human skills

Market	Perspective	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
Overall	HE Leaders	AI tool use	Human judgment + AI capabilities	Adaptability
	Employers	Communication and collaboration skills	Adaptability	Human judgment + AI capabilities

United Kingdom	HE Leaders	Human judgment + AI capabilities	Adaptability	Communication and collaboration skills
	Employers	Communication and collaboration skills	Human judgment + AI capabilities	Adaptability

Q. HE Leaders: Based on your understanding, which THREE of the following are MOST IMPORTANT to employers hiring graduates today?

Q. Employers: Which THREE of the following are MOST IMPORTANT when hiring graduates into your organization today?

Question asked among HE Leaders & Employers

UK employers are clear about the core strengths of their recent graduate hires, citing quick learning and adaptability (61%), above the cross-market average, coupled with their ability to use AI and digital tools (53%). Similarly, when asked to rate specific areas of graduate hire competencies, UK employers are most likely to provide 'excellent' ratings for 'continuous learning mindset' (31%), 'creativity and innovation' (31%), 'adaptability' (29%) and 'AI tool use' (27%). This positive assessment helps explain why, despite the mixed views on the value of university education noted previously, employers still see the value in a university education; it is successfully producing graduates with core human capabilities the AI-enabled workforce requires.

The challenge emerges at the point of integration into the workforce. **UK graduates arrive with adaptability and digital fluency but limited applied AI experience.** The most frequently cited difficulties cluster around the applied experience gap: employers point to the disconnect between academic knowledge and real-world application (43%), a lack of practical experience with workplace AI tools (41%), and the subsequent time required to bring new hires to full productivity (39%). Again, this is reflected in ratings employers provide of their recent graduate hires - with the smallest proportions rating their intakes as excellent on 'applying academic knowledge to real work contexts' (20%).

This disconnect is reflected in a wider pessimism about the direction of institutional travel. Only 39% of UK employers say recent graduate hires are better prepared than those hired five years ago, far below the cross-market average of 60%. More concerning, nearly a third (32%) say recent graduates are actually worse prepared, double the cross-market average.

This experience gap and the resulting employer concern underline the shared nature of the AI readiness challenge. When higher education and industry operate in isolation, the transition from classroom to workplace becomes fractured, and employers face long, often costly onboarding periods for new graduate hires.

The fundamental challenge for the UK, therefore, is to translate the shared understanding of the importance of human skills in the age of AI into a learning curriculum that delivers applied, workforce-ready capabilities. Employers have identified the key strengths of UK graduates but are concerned that the system is failing to provide the real-world context and practical opportunities to apply the key skills needed to keep pace with rapidly evolving employer requirements. Successfully addressing this challenge will require a much closer connection between universities and employers to co-design the learning experiences and pathways that translate shared intent into applied capability.

Employer ratings on graduate skill competencies

Skill competencies	% of Employers rating graduates as “excellent” on each competency	
	UK	Cross-market average
Continuous learning mindset	31%	29%
Creativity and innovation	31%	27%
Adaptability	29%	30%
AI tool use	27%	27%
Communication and collaboration	25%	25%
Critical evaluation of AI outputs	22%	20%
Technical knowledge	22%	27%
Applying academic knowledge to real work contexts	20%	22%

Q. Thinking about the recent university graduates your organization has hired in the past 2 years, how would you rate their capabilities in each of the following areas? By ‘recent’ we mean those that have graduated in the past 2 years.

Question asked among Employers

Sample Size: UK Employers – 51, All Employers – 304

A portrait of the optimal AI-ready graduate

As universities and employers alike navigate the rapidly shifting demands of the AI-enabled workplace, the readiness of graduates to enter the workforce is at risk. The term **AI Readiness** is increasingly used but rarely defined with consistency across the education-to-workforce spectrum. Drawing on our understanding of the demands of employers, the strategic priorities of HE leaders, and the current behaviours of today's students, we have constructed a portrait of the ideal AI-ready graduate as a practical brief for what institutions in the UK are expected to produce.⁷ For a contemporary graduate, AI readiness is a multifaceted construct that combines:

1. Functional Proficiency

This skill set represents the human-in-the-lead aptitude employers demand. Graduates must arrive functionally fluent in workplace-specific tools to directly enhance professional workflows from day one. However, UK employers report an uneven development of functional proficiency. While 27% rate recent graduates as excellent on AI tool use, they are far less convinced about supporting expertise: only 22% rate graduates as excellent on technical knowledge and just 20% on applying academic knowledge to real work contexts. These represent some of the lowest-rated competencies, revealing that while graduates are comfortable using AI tools, many still struggle to translate this into immediate, valuable workplace performance.

2. Strategic Intelligence

This set of skills represents a graduate's ability to move beyond being a user of tools to a strategic operator within a business context. This ranges from identifying precisely where AI adds value to an understanding of its potential impact.⁸ They will have an appreciation for how AI can be deployed as something more than a productivity or efficiency shortcut with a macro-level understanding of how AI impacts an industry vertical to transform workflows. In the UK, only 29% of learners report that critical thinking about AI outputs is covered well in their studies, and working effectively alongside AI is the least-covered curriculum topic. This highlights a challenge producing graduates with the broader strategic intelligence required to drive impact.

3. Ethical Stewardship

This skill set involves a graduate's ability to serve as an ethical filter and risk mitigation manager, focusing on safety, integrity, and the ethical deployment of technology. The UK exhibits a distinct governance-first orientation, boasting the highest rule awareness of any market in the study at 93%, with 55% of learners definitely aware of their university's AI guidance and 42% receiving curriculum coverage on ethical considerations. However, this high awareness has not translated into a culture of trust. Only 35% of learners are comfortable disclosing their AI use to teaching staff, while 18% reject disclosure entirely. Despite this strong focus on governance, UK graduates rate merely on par with the cross-market average on their actual ability to critically verify AI outputs, failing to translate ethical theory into practical workplace risk mitigation.

4. Critical Human Skills

This set of skills represents a graduate's competency to provide what no AI model can: human judgement, creative thinking, collaboration and emotional intelligence. Whereas AI automates execution, the AI-ready graduate possesses the relational and cognitive capabilities to bring purpose and direction. They will bring an adaptable, agile mindset ensuring they remain relevant as the pace of change accelerates.^{9,10} In the UK, these critical human skills represent a relative strength for recent graduates. While technical and strategic gaps remain, UK graduates are entering the workforce with the essential cognitive agility and human-centric capabilities that employers value most.

⁷ For a full discussion of the optimal AI-ready graduate framework, see Pearson and Amazon Web Services (2026), Chapter 1.

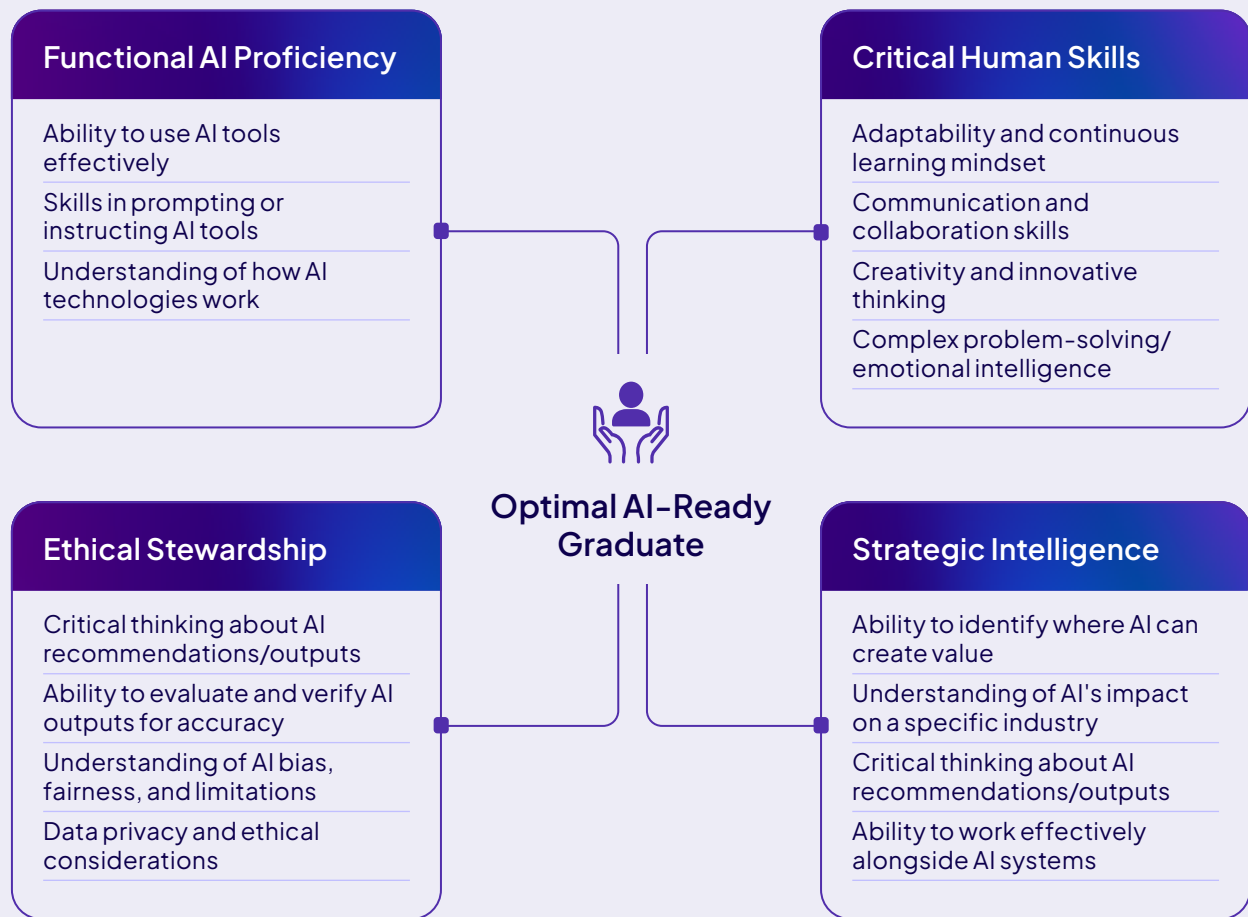
⁸ Q3_8EMP: Which THREE of the following are MOST IMPORTANT when hiring graduates into your organization today?

⁹ Stanford University Institute for Human-Centered AI (2026) AI Index 2025: State of AI in 10 Charts, 12 March. Available at: <https://hai.stanford.edu/news/ai-index-2025-state-of-ai-in-10-charts> [Accessed: 12 March 2026].

¹⁰ OECD (2025) OECD Skills Outlook 2025: Building the Skills of the 21st Century for All. Paris: OECD Publishing. DOI: 10.1787/26163cd3-en. [Accessed: 24 March 2026]

The Optimal AI-Ready Graduate

Key capabilities and skill competencies¹¹



This portrait represents a consolidated vision that runs from matriculated student to workforce-ready graduate. Building a more effective path from the classroom to the workplace requires alignment on these core skill competencies. Far from rendering university education obsolete, the ubiquity of AI reaffirms its critical role in fostering the technical, strategic, ethical, and adaptable talent the workforce expects.

However, developing the AI-ready graduate is at risk due to compounding frictions across the education-to-work ecosystem. This portrait reveals a UK graduate cohort with recognised strengths in adaptability and human skills, yet one whose potential is undermined by systemic misalignments. The issue is not an absence of inherent talent, but an ecosystem in which shared belief, held by higher education and industry, in the importance of human skills has not translated into alignment on specific curricular priorities and learning experiences that would make those skills demonstrably work-ready. The chapters that follow examine the institutional conditions that are leading to this outcome and where the most targeted and effective interventions can be made.

¹¹N.B. Some key skill competencies are essential across more than one domain of capability. For example, critical thinking about AI recommendations/outputs is a core skill required to generate strategic intelligence as well as to perform as an ethical steward of AI technologies.

Chapter 2: Progress toward institutional AI readiness: investment, faculty capability, graduate confidence and governance

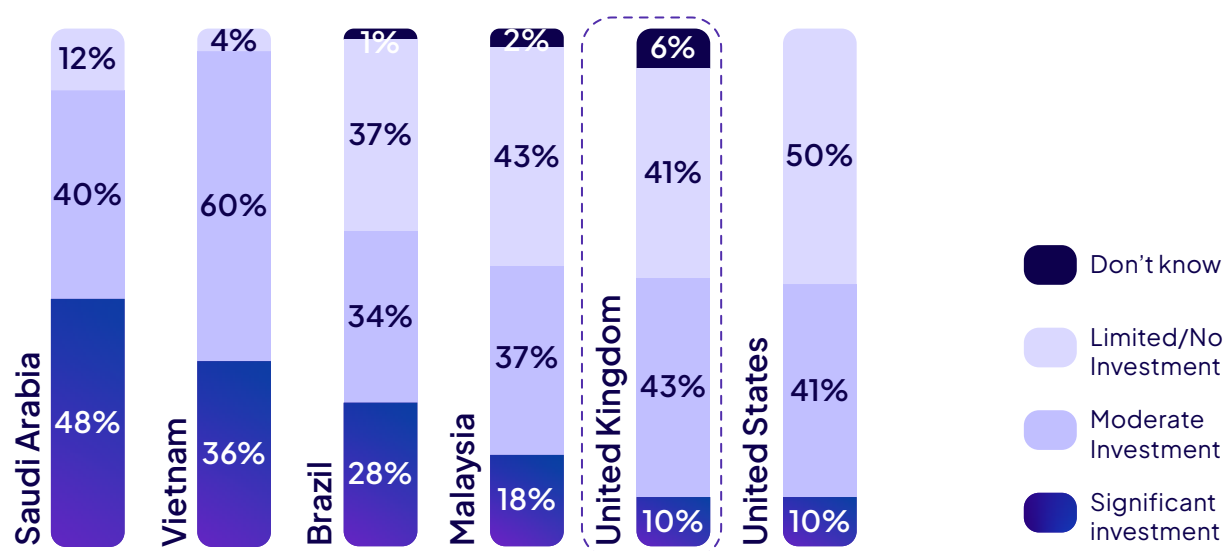
As UK institutions and learners adapt to a shifting landscape, the data reveals a picture defined by structural constraints, misaligned investment, and a significant distance between institutional ambition and graduate outcomes. While UK HE leaders demonstrate an understanding of what AI readiness requires, their capacity to deliver it is constrained by resource allocation and limited faculty training and education-workforce connections that remain underdeveloped. The focus of our analysis in this chapter is on four dimensions of institutional readiness: the scale and focus of AI investment;¹² the capability of faculty as the primary vehicle for graduate AI readiness; the relationship between institutional behaviour and student confidence; and governance, a unique challenge in the UK where high rule awareness has so far failed to foster a culture of trust.

Institutional investment: scale, focus, and friction

In the UK, the rapid rise of artificial intelligence represents a significant disruption that adds further pressure to institutions already managing competing demands and a complex set of operational and funding challenges. This is reflected in the UK data, which highlights a significant constraint in the form of institutional investment in AI, with 'investment' referring to the prioritisation of AI integration within the institution as well as financial resources. Just 10% of UK HE leaders characterise their institution's AI investment as significant, which is the joint lowest rate in the study and 12 points below the cross-market average. A further 43% describe investment as moderate, while a similar proportion (41%) report limited investment. When asked to evaluate investment levels, over a third (39%) of UK HE leaders believe that current funding levels are inadequate to properly prepare graduates for an AI-enabled workplace, slightly higher than the cross-market average of 33%. **The core challenge is not simply investment volume but how effectively institutions translate investment into learner experience, faculty capability and applied workforce readiness.**

¹²In this research, the term 'investment' is used broadly, referring to both the extent to which AI is an institutional priority, a pedagogical and curriculum priority, and the scale of the resources (e.g., financial, human) allocated.

Reported university AI investment levels



Q. How would you characterize your institution's current level of investment in AI?

Question asked among HE Leaders

Sample Size: HE Leaders – 452

Consistent with the cross-market picture, HE AI investment priorities are often inward-facing. UK HE leaders report that investment is directed primarily towards faculty training (50%) computing infrastructure (46%), AI tools (40%) and curriculum development (40%), while industry partnerships receive least attention with just 27% saying investment is focused here. This limited external orientation is reflected in the weakness of employer feedback loops; only 12% of UK HE leaders report having comprehensive formal mechanisms for gathering workforce intelligence.

The barriers UK HE leaders identify to better preparing students are not only financial but also include structural issues. They cite the difficulty of keeping pace with AI developments and insufficient staff capacity (both 37%) as primary obstacles followed by limited budgets (34%). This internal strain is compounded by a recognised deficit in faculty expertise, suggesting that current inward-facing investment is failing to resolve these deep-seated challenges. Lacking robust external signals from industry, faculty are left to navigate curricular changes in a system where the capacity to adapt is limited and the crucial signals from employers that would help direct that adaptation arrive too slowly and inconsistently.

Faculty capability is a key determinant of graduate AI readiness

Despite the largely inward-facing focus of current institutional AI investment in training and curriculum development, only 6% of UK HE leaders rate their faculty's AI knowledge and skills as 'very strong', less than half the cross-market average of 13%. In total, just 31% rate their faculty's capability as 'strong' or 'very strong', compared to a cross-market average of 44%, while the near-majority of 49% describe it as 'mixed'.

One contributor to this capability deficit is the extent of professional development. Only 5% of UK HE leaders describe faculty training at their institution as extensive, the joint-lowest rate in the study alongside the US. While UK HE leaders are more likely than their US counterparts to report access to 'quite a lot' of training, the overall provision remains highly inconsistent. More than a quarter (28%) of UK leaders state that their faculty receive limited or no AI training at all.

The consequences of this training deficit are felt directly in the learner experience. Only a small minority of UK learners (15%) report that their instructors use AI regularly, 12 points below the cross-market average. This lack of consistent, modelled practice creates a 'faculty expertise lottery' for students. Rather than experiencing a systematically designed, AI-integrated education, a student's exposure to AI tools and their applied professional workflows depends heavily on the personal initiative of individual instructors. For the majority of UK learners, faculty-led AI instruction remains the exception rather than the norm. **Whether a student develops AI capability often depends less on institutional policy than on whether they happen to be taught by an AI-confident instructor.**

This inconsistency is reflected in student satisfaction with the quality of instruction. When asked to rate a range of learning elements, learner satisfaction with the quality of AI teaching and instruction is among the lowest. Notably satisfaction with AI teaching quality is 15 points lower than satisfaction with access to AI tools. UK learners report greater satisfaction with access to AI technologies than they do with access to quality AI teaching, a view shared by their international peers although the gap between satisfaction with the two is largest in the UK. Access without faculty-guided practice places students at risk of developing unguided habits that could hinder their professional capabilities.

Learner satisfaction with elements of AI learning

	% of Learners “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with each element	
	UK	Cross-market average
Access to AI tools and technologies	64%	68%
Guidance on appropriate AI use	60%	65%
Support for questions about AI	59%	65%
Way AI is used by teaching staff	54%	63%
Amount of AI content in curriculum	51%	58%
Quality of AI teaching and instruction	49%	61%
Hands-on practice opportunities	44%	57%

Q. How satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of AI learning at your university?

Question asked among Learners

Sample Size: UK Learners – 351, All Learners – 1,955

Institutional capability and graduate confidence

The combined effect of limited investment, constrained faculty capability, and weak employer connections is acutely felt in the curriculum, which in turn has a significant impact on graduate confidence. The data reveals that AI integration into the UK curriculum is superficial, failing to provide the depth or practical application that students need and employers expect.

Only 19% of UK learners report that AI is covered ‘extensively’ or ‘quite a lot’ in their studies, the lowest rate in the study and 11 points below the cross-market average. Just 3% describe it as a major focus across multiple courses. This thin integration is evident when looking at specific competencies. While ethical considerations are covered for 42% of learners, consistent with the UK’s governance focus, applied skills are more sparsely integrated. Only 30% of learners report meaningful coverage of how to use AI tools effectively, 29% for the critical evaluation of AI outputs, and less than a quarter (21%) state their studies cover how to work effectively alongside AI systems.

The consequences are important. The lack of deep, practical integration contributes to a low level of confidence in student outlook, **only 14% of UK learners rate their personal AI readiness¹³** as high, less than half the cross-market average of 32% and a fraction of the 43% reported in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, fewer than half of UK learners (48%) feel their university is preparing them well for an AI-enabled career.

This crisis of confidence extends to leaders in these institutions. UK HE leaders are markedly less confident than their global peers that their graduates meet employer expectations, with only 19% feeling ‘very confident’. The specific nature of this confidence gap is outlined by what learners themselves are calling for: more practical experience with workplace AI tools (40%), greater human skills development (37%), and better curriculum alignment with employer needs (33%). **The message from learners is clear: they are aware of the skills the modern workforce requires and are not confident that the current educational framework is delivering them.**

The governance challenge: shadow AI and the ungoverned student experience

The UK’s governance culture is distinct from the other markets in the study and represents something of a paradox: extremely high rule awareness coexists with low trust and pervasive ‘shadow’ AI usage. UK learners report the highest level of rule awareness among students of any country surveyed. More than half of UK learners (55%) report being ‘definitely aware’ of their university’s AI guidance, 17 points above the cross-market average, while 40% are ‘very confident they comply with their university’s guidance on AI usage – the highest of any market in the study.

When asked to define an AI-ready institution, UK HE leaders rate ‘clear policies on appropriate and responsible AI usage’ and ‘academic integrity guidelines’ as their two most important characteristics. This view is mirrored by UK learners, who also rank these two elements highest, indicating a consensus on the importance of a clear regulatory framework. While the need for ethical rules is acknowledged across markets, the UK’s particular focus on academic integrity guidelines sets it apart.

However, this relative strength in rule awareness has not translated into a culture of trust. The data reveals a significant ‘trust gap’ between knowing the rules and being transparent about AI use. Only 35% of UK learners are comfortable with teaching staff knowing the full extent of their AI usage, while nearly one in five (18%) are not comfortable with any level of disclosure at all. In addition to this lack of comfort with transparency, learners also report high levels of independent tool sourcing: 60% use independently discovered tools for writing and drafting, compared to 18% who use university-provided options. **A culture of ‘shadow AI’ usage persists in the UK, at similar rates to those observed in markets with far less developed governance culture.**

This suggests that a governance framework built primarily for compliance, while well-intentioned and supported by both leaders and learners, is not sufficient to encourage open and guided practice. The governance challenge for UK institutions, therefore, is not a lack of rules but a question of cultural emphasis. The task is to evolve the current framework, moving beyond a foundation of compliance to build the trust required for transparent, purposeful, and institutionally guided AI use. The UK has built the rulebook much faster than it has built trust.

¹³ Q. Please imagine a ladder, with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder (10) represents being completely ready and prepared to enter AI-enabled workplaces – having all the knowledge, skills, and capabilities you need. The bottom of the ladder (0) represents being not at all ready and prepared to enter an AI-enabled workplace. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally stand right now? ‘High readiness represents those answering 10, 9 or 8 on 0–10 scale.

Chapter 3: A framework for a shared direction

The AI Readiness Friction Framework

The gap between higher education and work, from institutional intent to graduate AI readiness, is real and widening. The AI Readiness Friction Framework provides a tool for identifying where the most consequential interventions lie. It illustrates where the education-to-work transition most consistently breaks down. These frictions reinforce one another but are not fully dependent on one another. This report has outlined how the dynamics that underpin the six frictions operate in compounding procedural relationships impacting graduate AI readiness. This diagram illustrates a hierarchy that moves from macro-systemic drivers to institutional implementation and finally to individual learner outcomes.



Faculty capability defines the extent of a student's applied experience, while the pace of institutional investment and transformation informs the development of effective governance. The frequency and quality of employer engagement determine how well the curriculum and educational experience reflects workforce reality. Ultimately, high friction in any single area will result in bottlenecks elsewhere in the education-to-workforce ecosystem that begins with global technological shifts and concludes with a deficit in individual graduate AI readiness. But these frictions are also discrete and addressable. Reducing friction at any single point has the potential to generate benefits across the ecosystem.

Friction profile of the UK

No market is friction free. The UK is no exception and has a distinctive friction profile that positions it as an incremental pragmatist alongside the US. This profile is defined by an institutional orientation that prioritises governance and compliance over practical application and industry connection. The consequence is a significant faculty capability gap that limits the quality and consistency of the curriculum, and a learner population that is self-reliant, sceptical, and underserved by the current system.

Pace Friction: accelerating, but still underestimated

This friction reveals the structural misalignment between the exponential speed of AI innovation and the linear, multi-year cadence characteristic of institutional curriculum design and accreditation cycles. In the UK, pace friction is uniquely challenging because the rapid speed of AI adoption is compounded by its unevenness. While all stakeholders agree that change is accelerating, UK employers are more measured in their assessment (53% fast/extremely fast) than learners or HE leaders. This reflects a fragmented landscape where AI integration is inconsistent across different industries, roles, and functions, creating confusion for institutions trying to adapt their curricula. HE leaders note changing employer expectations as among the most significant challenges they face in equipping graduates for the workforce.

This external challenge of tracking a target that is not only moving fast but also unevenly is met with severe internal constraints. The UK HE sector, already hampered by significant capability friction, struggles to keep pace. When asked about the barriers to preparing graduates, in addition to shifting employer needs (34%), HE leaders cite a lack of faculty AI expertise (43%) and insufficient staff capacity (37%) above all else. This combination of external confusion and internal strain results in a profound confidence gap. Only 13% of learners believe their institutions are keeping pace with AI developments, well below the cross-market average of 21%. Ultimately, pace friction in the UK is defined by an already constrained system struggling to adapt to a workforce transformation that is not only rapid but also unpredictable.

Connection Friction: weak feedback loops across the education-to-work ecosystem

This area of friction refers to the absence or underdevelopment of feedback loops and partnership infrastructure between industry and academia leading to misaligned views on graduate AI readiness. Connection friction is one important contributor to the UK's AI readiness profile, stemming from an institutional focus that remains largely inward-looking. This is starkly evident in investment priorities, where industry partnerships rank last at just 27%, a figure 12 points below the cross-market average. This limited external orientation is also reflected in the weakness of employer feedback loops. Only 12% of UK HE leaders report having comprehensive formal mechanisms for gathering workforce intelligence, and only 45% report regular or ongoing interaction of any kind, creating a vacuum where curricular decisions are made without timely signals from the market.

This friction is compounded by the rate at which employers are evolving their graduate requirements, a dynamic acknowledged as a challenge by both employers and HE leaders. Without structured, reciprocal feedback loops, both sectors remain misaligned, leaving universities to design curricula in a vacuum and employers to navigate an unpredictable graduate talent pipeline.

¹³ Microsoft AI Economy Institute (2025) Global AI Adoption 2025, Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation. Available at: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/corporate-responsibility/topics/ai-economy-institute/reports/global-ai-adoption-2025/> [Accessed: 25 March 2026].

Capability Friction: professional development is lagging industry demands

Capability friction highlights the uneven distribution of AI knowledge and skills among faculty, which prevents the consistent integration of AI into the student learning experience. This is the internal bottleneck through which all institutional ambition must pass. Capability friction is a significant source of friction in the UK, with HE leaders citing a lack of faculty AI expertise (43%) as their single greatest barrier to preparing AI-ready graduates. This institutional concern is reflected directly in the learner experience. When asked to rate their AI learning, students place the 'quality of AI teaching and instruction' among their lowest areas of satisfaction.

A key driver of this capability deficit lies in a systemic lack of professional development. Only 5% of UK HE leaders describe faculty training as 'extensive' (the joint-lowest rate in the study) while more than a quarter (28%) report that their faculty receive limited or no AI training at all. The consequences are felt directly in the classroom, where only a minority of learners (15%) report seeing their instructors use AI regularly. This lack of consistent, modelled practice creates a 'faculty expertise lottery' for students, where exposure to modern tools depends on individual instructor initiative rather than systemic design.

Governance Friction: learner shadow AI usage is outpacing institutional policy

This friction is driven by limitations in translating AI tool access into governed, equitable infrastructure and guardrails that engender an environment of mutual trust. Governance friction in the UK is complex. The country's governance culture, which prioritises clear policies and academic integrity guidelines, is its most distinctive feature and has resulted in the highest rule awareness of any market surveyed. More than half of UK learners (55%) are 'definitely aware' of their university's AI guidance, 17 points above the cross-market average. While this is undoubtedly a relative strength of the UK system, it should not be read as an absence of friction – as with the other frictions highlighted in this report, improvements are required.

The UK's success in creating awareness has not translated into a culture of trust. A significant 'trust gap' persists between knowing the rules and being transparent about their application. Only 35% of UK learners are comfortable with teaching staff knowing the full extent of their AI usage, while nearly one in five (18%) are not comfortable with any level of disclosure at all.

The consequence is a pervasive culture of 'shadow AI' usage, with majorities of UK learners using tools they have independently discovered rather than university-provided options across academic tasks, even though the UK has a more developed governance culture than many markets. This suggests that a governance framework built primarily for compliance, while well-intentioned, is not sufficient to encourage the open, guided practice required to build ethical stewardship.

Experience Friction: prevalent disconnect between tool access and practical application

Experience friction in the UK highlights a critical execution gap: the issue is not a lack of AI access, but a profound deficit in structured, workplace-relevant practice. While learners have access to tools, the curriculum fails to provide the necessary framework for their application. Formal coverage of applied skills like the critical evaluation of AI outputs and working alongside AI systems remains superficial.

The consequences of this are clear. Learners rank ‘hands-on practice opportunities’ as their lowest area of satisfaction, while employers cite the resulting ‘experience gap’ and lack of practical application (43%) as their top hiring barrier. Both sides of the education-to-work bridge recognise that unguided, independent tool use is not a substitute for structured learning.

Theoretical knowledge and self-sourced tool use are insufficient for building genuine workforce capability. Institutions must move beyond merely providing access and begin deliberately designing for practice by embedding structured, faculty-guided application into the core of the curriculum. Equally, employers must step forward as active contributors, providing the workplace contexts, authentic challenges, and tools that make that practice meaningful.

Skills Friction: functional AI proficiency misaligned with broader capabilities

This area is the downstream manifestation of all preceding frictions. It reflects how systemic constraints ultimately surface as gaps in graduates’ applied capability at work.

Skills friction in the UK manifests as a critical disconnect between strategic alignment and practical execution. Unlike in many other markets, there is a strong, shared understanding between HE leaders and employers on the importance of human skills like adaptability, communication and collaboration. However, a disconnect remains: while HE leaders recognise communication and collaboration as employer priorities, they still significantly underestimate just how much employers value these specific skills. There is work to be done to build on this shared foundation and fully align expectations.

Currently, UK employers acknowledge that recent graduates possess foundational attributes, rating them highly for their adaptability and digital tool skills. But this is consistently undermined by the gap between theoretical knowledge and applied experience. UK graduates arrive with potential, but without the demonstrated, workforce-ready competence employers require. The ‘experience gap’ cited by employers as a top hiring barrier is the ultimate manifestation of skills friction, limiting the immediate effectiveness of even the most promising graduates.

Resolving this friction requires moving beyond philosophical agreement and building the connective tissue between education and enterprise. The challenge for the UK is not one of identifying critical competencies, but of delivering learning mechanisms that develop them. It demands a closer connection between universities and employers to co-design learning experiences that translate a shared vision for graduate skills into the tangible, applied outcomes the modern workforce demands.

Overcoming AI readiness frictions: case studies in action

Contributors to this report have provided useful case studies of how their institutions are overcoming AI readiness frictions. These innovative bright spots demonstrate that when institutions and employers embrace shared data, shared uncertainty, and shared accountability, the AI readiness gap begins to close.

A snapshot of each is presented below — full case studies are provided in the main report.¹⁴



Pace

To close the gap between fast-moving markets and slow-moving curricula, **Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGV)** replaces periodic curriculum reform with semesterly immersion weeks and executives-in-residence keeping course content market-current.



Connection

To close the feedback loop between employer needs and curriculum design, **University College London (UCL)** runs the Industry Exchange Network (IXN), matching live company challenges directly to students working under joint industry and academic supervision with 40 to 45 per cent of participating students subsequently recruited by their industry partners.



Capability

To address uneven AI capability across the institution, faculty at the **University of Pittsburgh** run AI Across Disciplines to train colleagues across subjects and sustain PASTA, a cross-institutional peer network for sharing practical integration experience, building the consistent faculty capability that confident AI integration requires.

To build faculty AI capability across disciplines, **Prince Sultan University** addressed the human dimension before the technical one, treating emotional and behavioural readiness as a prerequisite and using low-code approaches to enable teaching staff from law, business, and the humanities to integrate AI into their own teaching and research.



Governance

To replace fragmented policy with practical guidance, **British University Vietnam's (BUV)** AI Assessment Scale (AIS) provides a tiered framework shifting focus from policing student behaviour to deliberately designing assessments around AI.



Experience

To convert AI access into applied fluency, **Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation (APU)** provides frontier computing infrastructure including Malaysia's first NVIDIA-powered AI supercomputing lab, and designs assessment around authentic workplace tasks, creating structured conditions for students to practise with real tools on real problems.

To bridge the gap between AI access and applied competency in healthcare, **Illinois Institute of Technology** launched the Health Tech Talent Institute, partnering with Leap of Faith to place students directly on live health informatics challenges using industry-supplied AI tools.



Skills

To move graduates beyond technical proficiency towards applied judgement, **Illinois Institute of Technology** builds its curriculum around an explicit humans-in-the-lead philosophy, treating critical thinking, systems thinking, and ethical reasoning as equal priorities alongside technical and data skills - producing graduates with the adaptability and collaborative judgement employers require in AI-enabled roles.

¹⁴<https://www.pearson.com/power-of-learning/ai-readiness.html>

Conclusion: Bridging the AI readiness divide, from insight to execution

AI-ready graduates do not emerge by chance. They are deliberately built through an ecosystem designed to foster applied capability. The evidence provided in this report is a resource for determining what is required by institutions, employers, and learners.

What this means for the UK as an incremental pragmatist

The UK friction profile reflects the archetype of the incremental pragmatist. It is a market where investment is internally concentrated, capability constraints are intensive, and the most acute frictions are foundational. **Ultimately, building this bridge is a shared pursuit that higher education and business leaders must tackle together.** The UK needs to coordinate its assets around the right outcomes through industry connections, continuous faculty development, and embedding applied experience at the core of the curriculum.



What this means for HE institutional leaders

Below are high-level conclusions and implications for UK institutional leaders overall. To deliver AI-ready graduates at the pace that the transforming workforce demands, action is required across all six friction points. Use our Friction Framework Self-Assessment tool¹⁵ to diagnose where friction is most acute in your institution, then prioritise action accordingly.



Pace

Accelerate the cadence of curriculum and institutional decision-making through modular design, stackable credentials, and faster review cycles that keep learning aligned with workplace change. The fragmented nature of AI adoption across the UK highlights that closer, more agile connections between industry and education are vital to ensure curricula are fit for purpose.



Connection

Industry partnerships should shift from a transactional recruitment activity to a central feature of curriculum design. Proactively create more formal partnerships and significantly expand networks of industry touchpoints. Build ongoing feedback loops so real-time workforce signals directly inform learning design and assessment standards.



Capability

Faculty AI capability remains a critical bottleneck, exacerbated by very low reported rates of instructors using AI and lack of faculty access to structured AI training in the UK. Invest heavily in continuous, applied professional development. Connect educators to live industry contexts through embedded partnerships and employer-hosted training rather than relying on one-off experimentation or purely theoretical learning models.



Governance

Rule awareness is high in the UK, but the governance challenge extends beyond visibility into building trust. Effective governance is about creating the conditions for transparent, ethical, and confident AI use. Replace punitive or restrictive governance with a supportive culture that promotes ethical, positive AI use, modelled by faculty, and integrated into assessments.



Experience

This represents a key friction point in the UK market. Move beyond simply providing access to tools by embedding structured, credit-bearing opportunities to practice, apply, and demonstrate AI capability in authentic workplace contexts. Prioritise co-designed assignments, degree apprenticeships, and industry-sponsored micro-credentials to bridge the practical application gap.



Skills

While there is strong alignment in the UK on how vitally important critical human skills are in the AI era, a major gap remains in how to design and deliver learning experiences that actually cultivate them. The curricular priority must be building these relational skills alongside technical proficiency, establishing a balanced Graduate AI Attribute Framework in active partnership with employers.¹⁶

¹⁵ <https://www.pearson.com/power-of-learning/ai-readiness/diagnostic.html>.

¹⁶ See also the Optimal AI-Ready Graduate profiled in chapter 1 of this report.

What this means for business leaders

The graduate readiness needed for the AI-enabled workforce is not for higher education institutions alone to determine. To support this, below are our high-level conclusions and implications for UK business leaders overall. Leaders should prioritise actions that directly reduce friction, rather than adding new layers of strategy or policy. Use our Friction Framework Self-Assessment tool¹⁷ to diagnose where friction is most acute in your context, then prioritise action accordingly.



Pace

Move quickly to diagnose the AI capability needs your organisation is facing now. Communicate them to university partners with specificity, regularity, and intentionality. The pace of friction that you feel as an employer should be shared with institutions that build future talent. Industry Advisory Board participation is an efficient channel for this.



Connection

Build systematic, ongoing relationships with university partners that extend beyond graduate recruitment or career fairs. Provide clear, continuous signals to education partners about role-level expectations, validating credentials assessment criteria, and sharing feedback earlier and more often than annual cycles allow. Contribute to employer surveys and skills analyses.



Capability

Support universities in understanding the practical implications of AI for your sector by opening your organisations to educators. Faculty who are unfamiliar with the impact of AI in professional contexts cannot teach its application credibly. Embed practitioners, share case materials, and treat faculty development as a strategic investment in the pipeline of talent your organisation depends on.



Governance

Communicate what responsible AI governance looks like inside your organisation and what will be expected of graduates from day one. Refer to accreditation bodies where available; contribute to dialogue and university run engagements where no such body exists.



Experience

Purpose-built co-designed programmes are an effective way to address the shortage of practical experience. Work with universities to co-design and host authentic workplace scenarios. Sponsor degree apprenticeships. Publish case studies to support universities in their curricular development strategies.



Skills

Communicate the specific skills your sector needs directly with universities. The more precisely employers articulate what AI-ready skills competencies look like in practice, the better institutions can deliver it. Co-design Graduate AI Attribute Frameworks with institutions. Communicate hiring needs using common skills frameworks in job specs and postings.

Meeting this moment in the UK requires educators and employers to work together with the same urgency. The foundation is under construction with graduate potential, institutional capacity, and employer knowledge as assets. **The UK is not short on ambition, awareness or talent. The task is to build the bridge that converts awareness, ambition and alignment into applied capability at scale.**

¹⁷ <https://www.pearson.com/power-of-learning/ai-readiness/diagnostic.html>

Supporting information

Methodology

This report is based on a comprehensive multi-market study designed to capture a 360-degree view of the AI transition within the higher education ecosystem. Data was gathered through a mixed-methods approach, combining extensive quantitative surveying with targeted qualitative insights across six strategic markets: Brazil, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, the US, the UK, and Vietnam. All fieldwork was conducted by PSB Insights.

Quantitative survey

To ensure the findings reflect the complexities of the current labour market and academic landscape, the survey engaged three distinct stakeholder groups:

Learners: Undergraduates currently enrolled in higher education, representing a diverse range of institutional types and academic disciplines, from STEM to the humanities.

Higher Education Leaders: Comprising both Senior University Administrators and Educators. This includes faculty with 3+ years of experience and responsibility for curriculum development and/or wider strategic decisions for a department, faculty or institution and administrators with decision-making responsibility for budgets, strategy, and course design.

Employers: Business Leaders with responsibility for strategic decisions and talent strategy. To ensure relevant data, participating organisations must have hired graduate-level employees within the past two years.

Market	Learners	HE Leaders	Employers	Total
Overall	1,955	452	304	2,711
United States	351	101	51	503
United Kingdom	351	100	51	502
Brazil	350	100	50	500
Saudi Arabia	302	50	50	402
Vietnam	301	50	51	402
Malaysia	300	51	51	402

Fieldwork was conducted via online survey which ran between the 7th and 28th of January 2026.

Qualitative interviews

To contextualise the survey data, the research included a series of 7 in-depth qualitative interviews with key leaders and innovators in AI adoption from the higher education sector. These sessions allowed for a more nuanced exploration of the friction points in the transition from education to work, and how institutions are overcoming them, along with the shifting value of the university degree.

The views and opinions expressed by the interviewees during this project are their own and were shared in their capacity as individual professionals. These insights do not necessarily reflect the official policies, positions, or endorsements of their respective institutions.

Interviews were conducted through February 2026.

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