Digital Education Council

AI in the Workplace 2025

Understanding Industry Needs: What Employers Expect

In collaboration with GFTN
Global Finance & Technology Network

Foreword

It is our pleasure to publish this new report focused on employer sentiment towards AI in the workplace. The results paint a stark picture. Employers are embracing AI at pace, with many reporting meaningful gains in productivity, efficiency, and innovation. However, they also express growing concern that graduates are not ready for this world.

This disconnect cannot be ignored.

Graduates entering today's workforce are expected to be AI-literate, adaptable, and able to think critically in ways that complement and enhance machine intelligence. Yet many employers doubt whether current graduates can engage with AI tools thoughtfully and responsibly. They are not just looking for technical capability—they are looking for human judgment, ethical awareness, and the ability to build on AI-generated output with originality and purpose.

This report is part of our ongoing effort to ensure that higher education remains future-focused and fit-for-purpose. It complements our previous **DEC Global AI Faculty Survey** and **DEC Global AI Student Survey** and provides a critical third perspective: that of employers, who are actively navigating the transformation of work and rethinking the skills they value most.

We are grateful to the employers who participated in this research and shared their insights. We also thank our member institutions and collaborators around the world who continue to support the Digital Education Council's mission to drive positive change.

We hope this report prompts institutions to reflect deeply on how they prepare students—not just for today's jobs, but for the emerging roles of tomorrow. It is only through sustained collaboration between education and industry that we will close the readiness gap and ensure graduates thrive in an AI-powered future.

Daniel A. Bielik
President

Hui Rong
Research & Intelligence Lead

Executive Summary

This report, developed in collaboration with the Global Finance & Technology Network (GFTN), **captures the perspectives of over 100 employers, collectively representing over 4 million workers across 18 industry clusters and 29 countries and territories**. It provides a timely look into how AI is reshaping the workplace, how employers are responding, and what they expect from higher education to build an AI-ready workforce.

AI is now widely used, with 63% of employers reporting it as game-changing or very helpful in boosting productivity. Yet, the current use of AI in the workplace remains in its early phase. Today, AI primarily serves an assistive function—searching for information and drafting emails. A more disruptive phase lies ahead, with the rise of Agentic AI and Physical AI, to fundamentally reshape the work and human-AI collaboration.

72% of employers believe that AI adoption will lead to reductions in headcount. In the meantime, 62% expect new roles to be created. The emerging roles cited by employers across industries are largely homogeneous and AI-centric—such as AI engineers and prompt engineers. As AI integration deepens, more nuanced, sector-specific roles are expected to surface.

Yet, as AI adoption accelerates critical enablers remain underdeveloped. 53% of organisations lack formal governance structures, and 41% report missing AI upskilling and training. Many employees are using AI without clear guidance or accountability.

Meanwhile, higher education—a cornerstone of workforce preparation—is falling behind. Only 3% of employers believe higher education institutions are adequately preparing graduates for an AI-driven workforce. Higher education must urgently rethink its role, relevance, and curricula. This is a defining moment—one that calls for institutions to confront hard truths about their role in the evolving economy and take immediate action to close the widening gap between education and employment.

Preparing for the future of work demands shared responsibility. Institutions, employers, and governments must act in collaboration, while individuals must take ownership of their growth—recognising lifelong learning as a non-negotiable in an era of constant change.

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1. AI in the Workplace

AI Enters Daily Work for Many, Yet Adoption Remains Fragmented

Organisational-Level Adoption of AI in Daily Work

Question: Are people on your team using AI tools in their daily work?

56%

employers report most of their team members use AI in work daily.

Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

AI is rapidly becoming a fixture in the workplace, but its adoption remains uneven.

While over half of employers (56%) report that most of their team members now use AI in their daily work, 29% say only some employees do, 9% report just a few team members use AI, and 6% are unsure.

This distribution reveals a widespread but fragmented adoption landscape, where access to and engagement with AI tools varies not only between organisations but also within them.

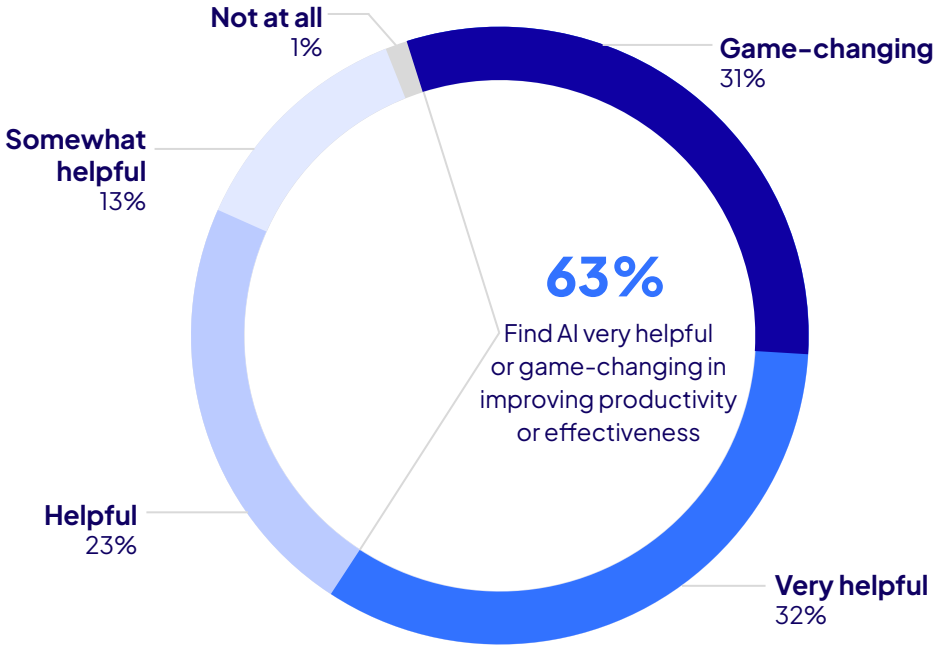
The wide adoption yet disparity in AI uptake suggests that even though many are using AI, not every employee is experiencing the productivity boost that AI could offer.

As AI capabilities continue to evolve, this unevenness could have broader implications for organisational performance gaps.

AI is Already Driving Gains for Many

Perceived Impact of AI on Individual Productivity and Effectiveness

Question: How helpful has AI been in improving your own productivity or effectiveness?



Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

Will the AI usage gap lead to a new productivity gap—one that reshapes performance and competitiveness?

63% of employers say AI has been either very helpful or game-changing in improving productivity and effectiveness. For many, AI has become more than a convenience—it's a competitive advantage.

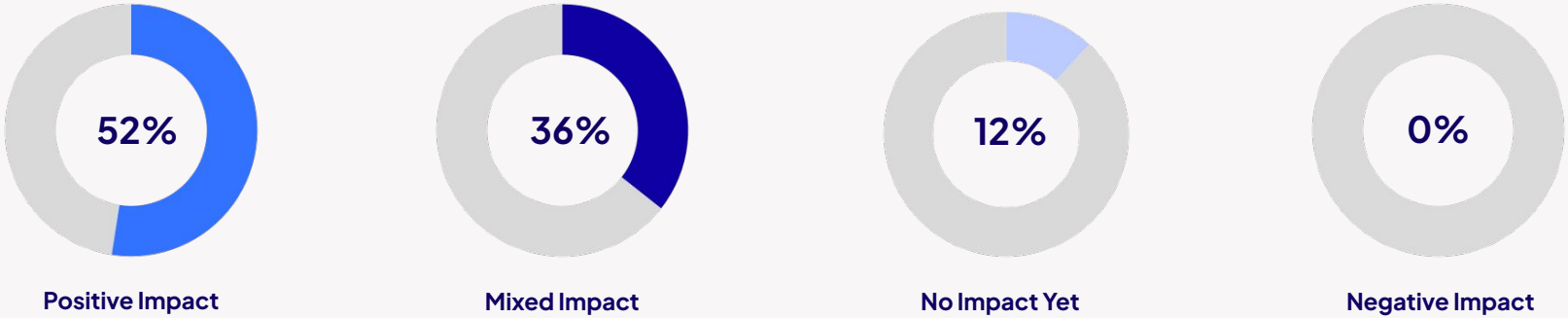
This raises a pressing question: who gets to access that value, and who doesn't? While some teams are realising transformative gains, others are underusing AI or applying it without the guidance needed to unlock its potential.

If left unaddressed, this imbalance could entrench a new productivity divide—one driven not by access to AI, but by the ability to use it well.

Efficiency Gains Meet Growing Pains: AI's Mixed Impact on Work

AI's Impact on Work

Question: Within your organisation, have you seen changes in how work is approached because of AI?



Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

While AI can be game-changing for many, its impact on work is not universally positive. 52% of employers report a clear, positive impact on their teams citing benefits such as reduced time spent on repetitive tasks, faster iteration, and improved efficiency.

Yet for 36%, the experience is more ambiguous. While they acknowledge productivity gains they also report new challenges, including novel types of errors and oversight risks. These mixed experiences suggest that whilst AI is unlocking value it is also reshaping work in ways that require new forms of oversight and adaptation.

Meanwhile, 12% of leaders say they've seen little to no impact, or are unsure. This signals that for some teams the potential of AI remains unrealised. Notably, no employers report purely negative impact from using AI.

AI Aids, Not Replaces Employees—For Now

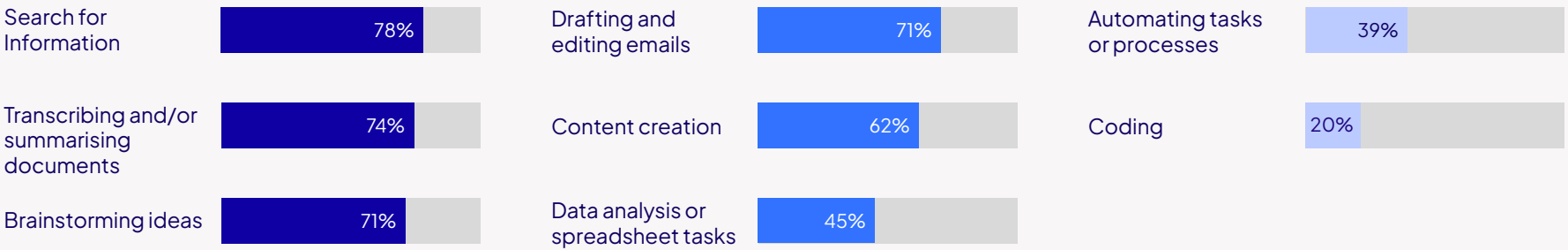
AI in the workplace is still primarily serving as an assistant to human work, rather than replacing it. The most common use cases involve task-level support, such as searching for information, transcribing or summarising documents, brainstorming ideas, drafting and editing emails, and creating content.

More advanced or autonomous applications are still emerging. 39% of employers report that they have started using AI to automate tasks or workflows, suggesting that many organisations are still in the early stages of integrating AI into core business systems and processes.

AI today remains largely assistive. It is currently being integrated as a productivity tool—augmenting, not replacing, human capabilities. However, the transformation of work is still unfolding, and its most disruptive phases are yet to come.

Common Use Cases of AI in the Workforce

Question: What kinds of tasks do you see your team using AI for?



Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

AI in the Workplace 2.0: What Comes Next Will Redefine Work

AI's current assistive role is likely just the first phase of greater change yet to come.

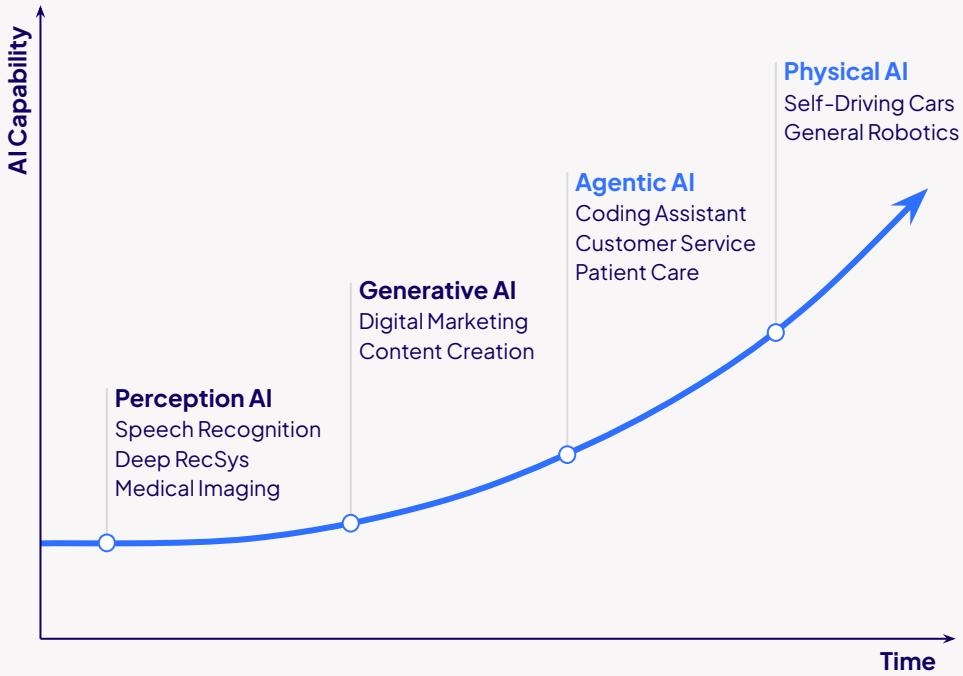
As industry moves beyond generative AI toward more autonomous, decision-capable systems—known as **Agentic AI**—the nature of work will shift more profoundly. Agentic AI can plan, execute, and adapt workflows with limited human input, challenging organisations to rethink the role of humans.

Physical AI, such as robotics and self-driving vehicles is also advancing. While still limited in the world of work today, these technologies are set to reshape transport, manufacturing, and frontline service work - and many other physical tasks.

Together, this evolution will redefine how AI is used in the workplace—moving from today's content creation and information tasks to far more advanced, end-to-end process execution, and autonomous decision-making.

> *Generative AI is just the first layer; agentic AI and physical AI will fundamentally redefine the relationship between humans and machines.*
>
> **— C-level Executive, Marketing Services, France**

NVIDIA's AI Progression Chart



Source: CES 2025 Highlights, NVIDIA 2025.

2. Looking Ahead, How AI Is Reshaping Employment

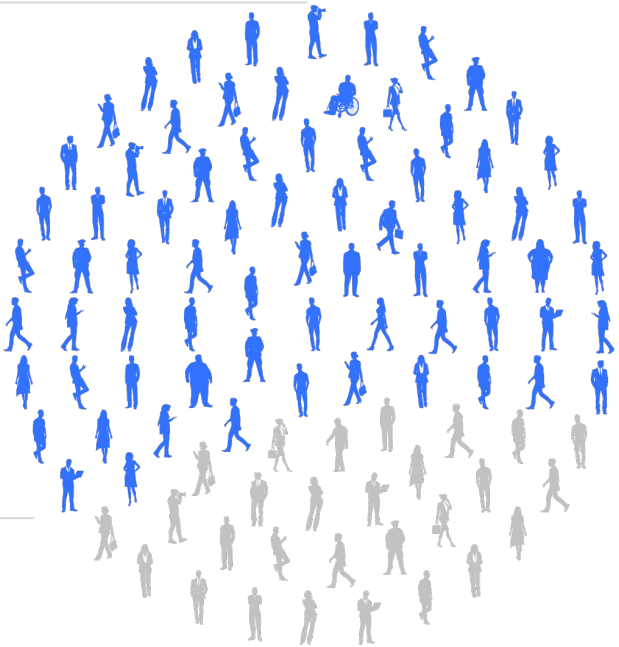
Employers Expect AI to Reduce Headcount Across Sectors

Share of Employers Expecting AI to Reduce Headcount

Question: Do you believe increased AI adoption in your workplace will reduce the headcount required?

72%

of employers believe AI adoption will reduce headcount



Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

The conversation around AI and employment has long been dominated by a single, high-stakes question: **Will AI replace human workers?**

While there is still no definitive answer, employer sentiment suggests that significant disruption is on the horizon. 72% of employers believe that AI adoption will reduce the headcount required in the workforce.

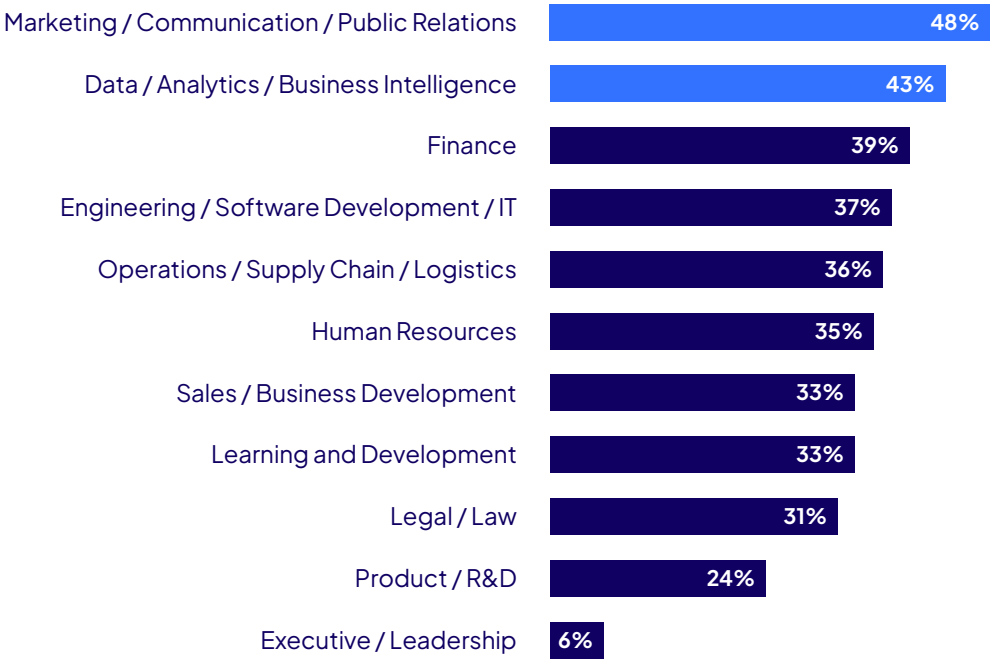
These concerns are echoed in the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report which states that AI and automation will displace the equivalent of 8% of existing jobs by 2030.

This projected shift underscores a pressing need for proactive workforce planning and re-skilling, especially for roles identified as most at-risk of displacement.

The First to Go? Marketing and Data Roles Are Perceived at Highest Risk

Employers' View on Impact of AI Adoption on Headcount by Role

Question: In which roles would AI adoption lead to a reduction in headcount?



Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

AI-driven headcount reductions are expected to affect every business function, with the most vulnerable roles perceived to be Marketing and Data-oriented roles driven by the rapid proliferation of automation tools in these areas.

In these functions, AI is already being used to automate tasks. As a result, these teams are likely to see efficiency gains accompanied by reductions in traditional roles.

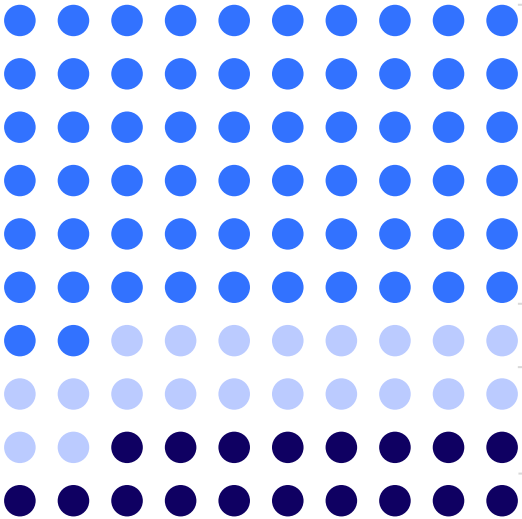
Jobs of the Future

The Digital Education Council introduced the Job Transformation Matrix, which analyses each role at the task level to understand AI's impact. It suggests that in many professions, jobs will not simply vanish, but rather evolve into new forms.

Role Changes: Reduction on One Side, Reinvention on the Other

Employers' View on Role Emergence as a Result of Increased AI Adoption

Question: Do you expect new roles to emerge in your industry as a result of increased AI adoption?



62 % of employers **expect** new roles to emerge

20% of employers are **not sure**

18% of employers **do not expect** new roles to emerge

Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

Even as AI is expected to reduce headcount, it is also seen as a driver of new job creation. Across industries, employers demonstrate considerable confidence in the emergence of new roles driven by AI, with 62% anticipating job creation within their sectors.

Notably, 18% of employers do not expect new roles to emerge and another 20% remain unsure. This highlights a degree of uncertainty about how AI will reshape roles within their sector.

The impact of AI adoption is likely to be twofold. On one hand, new roles will continue to emerge. On the other, individuals who do not adapt to this evolving landscape may face a contraction of opportunities.

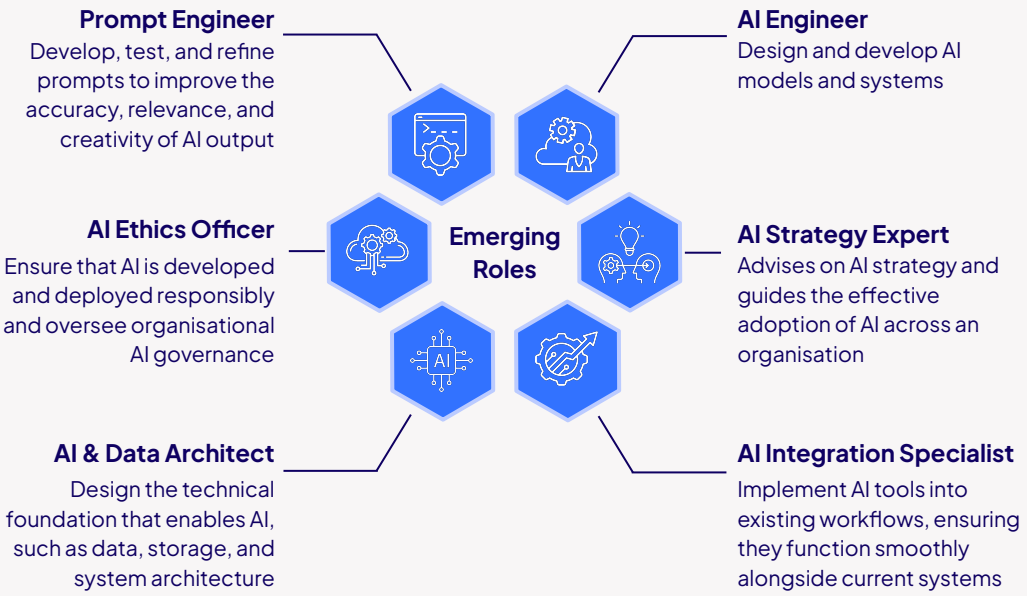
> ***There are going to be winners and losers**, not only across countries, but also within countries. Better educated are likely to be either less negatively affected or see larger gains because they are better prepared to take advantage of opportunities, such as technologies.*

— Michal Rutkowski
Regional Director for Human Development, The World Bank
Interview with DEC President, Daniel A. Bielik, April 2025

The First Wave of AI-Enabled Roles Has Arrived—The Next is Yet to Come

Employer Anticipated Emerging Roles as a Result of Increased AI Adoption

Question: Which new roles do you expect to emerge in your industry as a result of increased AI adoption?



Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

Across industries, the emerging roles anticipated by employers are highly homogenous, AI-centric, and largely industry-agnostic. The most frequently cited roles include Prompt Engineers, AI Engineers, and AI Strategy Expert—roles that are directly linked to the technical development and deployment of AI.

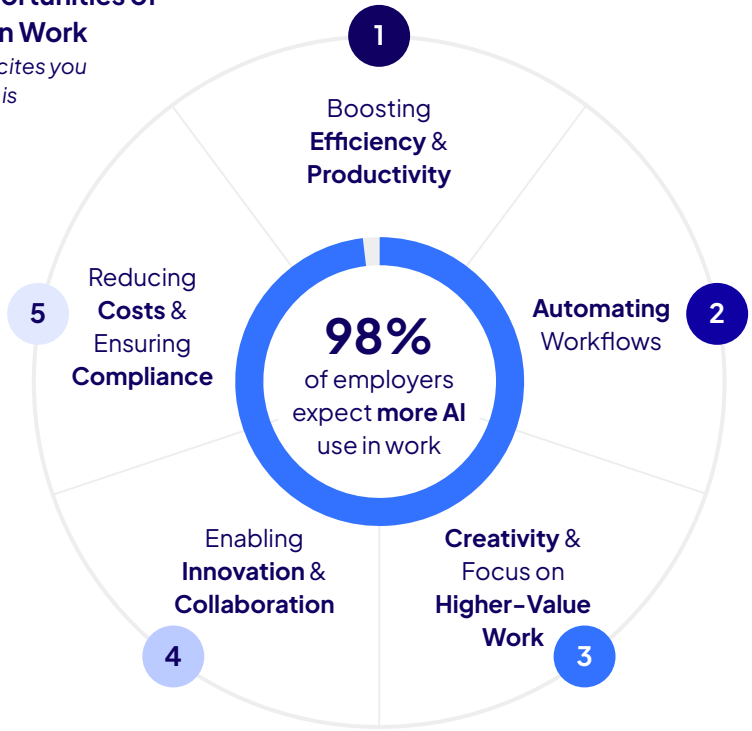
This uniformity suggests that employers' understanding of AI-driven workforce transformation is still in its early stages. While these roles reflect the current wave of AI adoption, they do not yet capture the deeper, more nuanced ways AI is likely to reshape jobs within specific sectors.

As AI capabilities mature and integration deepens we can expect a second wave of more industry-specific roles to emerge—ones that reflect the unique workflows, risks, and opportunities of each sector.

AI is the Expected Future in the Workplace

Top Cited Opportunities of AI Integration in Work

Question: What excites you most about how AI is reshaping work?



Nearly all employers expect AI use to increase within their teams and organisations as they look to capture the broad opportunities AI presents.

The most widely cited opportunity is increase in efficiency and productivity.

Another key area of opportunity lies in the automation and elimination of repetitive tasks. As organisations move toward more sophisticated AI systems, such as Agentic AI, new automation use cases are expected to emerge, streamlining processes even further.

Employers also see AI as a tool to unlock greater creativity, enable innovation, and reduce costs.

Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

Top 5 Concerns About How AI is Reshaping Work

Top 5 Concerns About How AI is Reshaping Work

Question: What concerns you most about how AI is reshaping work?

01 **Job Displacement & Unemployment**

02 **Over-Reliance on AI Tools, Loss of Critical Thinking**

03 **Ethics, Data Privacy & Security**

04 **Misinformation & AI Hallucination**

05 **Gaps in Governance and Compliance**

Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

Job displacement and unemployment top the list of concerns about how AI is reshaping work, reflecting deep anxiety about the potential erosion of human roles.

Equally pressing is the fear that over-reliance on AI may lead to a decline in critical thinking skills. This raises important questions about the risk of skill atrophy and the evolving relationship between human capabilities and AI literacy: How do we ensure foundational skills are developed before introducing AI? And how might AI be leveraged to enhance—rather than diminish—human critical thinking and judgment.

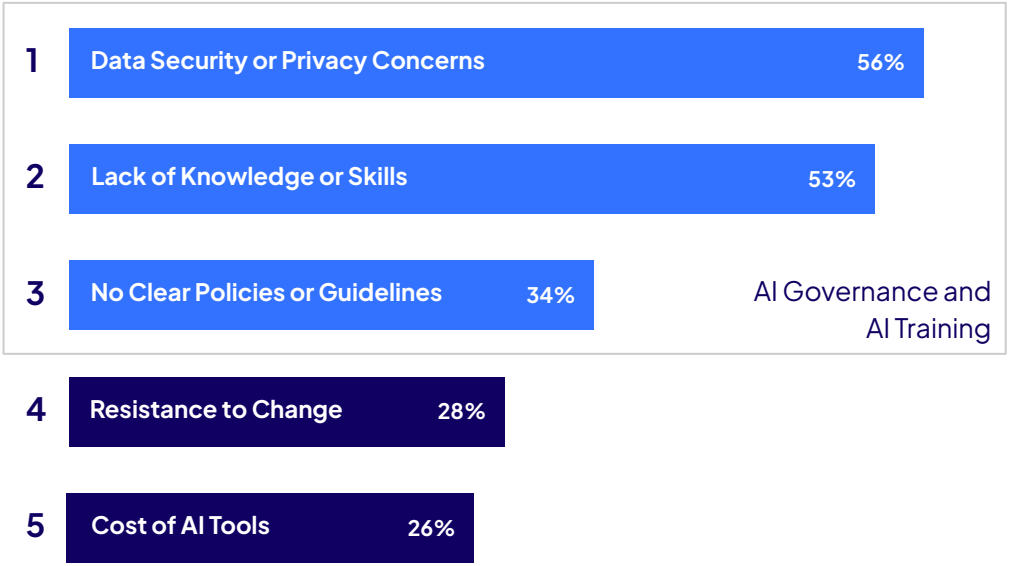
Concerns around ethics, data privacy, and security, along with the rise of misinformation and AI hallucinations, further amplify the risks. These issues converge in a pressing concern—persistent gaps in governance and compliance, highlighting the need for robust institutional governance frameworks to ensure safe, responsible AI adoption at scale.

3. Bridging the AI Adoption and Productivity Divide

Lack of AI Governance and Training is Holding Back AI Adoption

Top 5 Barriers to AI Adoption

Question: What are the main barriers to adopting AI in your team / organisation? (Choose up to three)



The top three barriers to AI adoption identified by employers are data security and privacy concerns (56%), lack of knowledge or skills (53%), and no clear policies or guidelines (34%).

Together, these barriers point to two core organisational challenges:

01 | The urgent need for AI Governance Frameworks
With data security and privacy concerns topping the list, it is clear that organisations must develop robust AI governance structures, building clear and enforceable policies on data management, usage boundaries, and responsible AI practices.

02 | The growing demand for AI training and upskilling
Organisations can drive effective transitions by investing in targeted, role-specific training that equips employees with the skills and confidence to work effectively with AI.

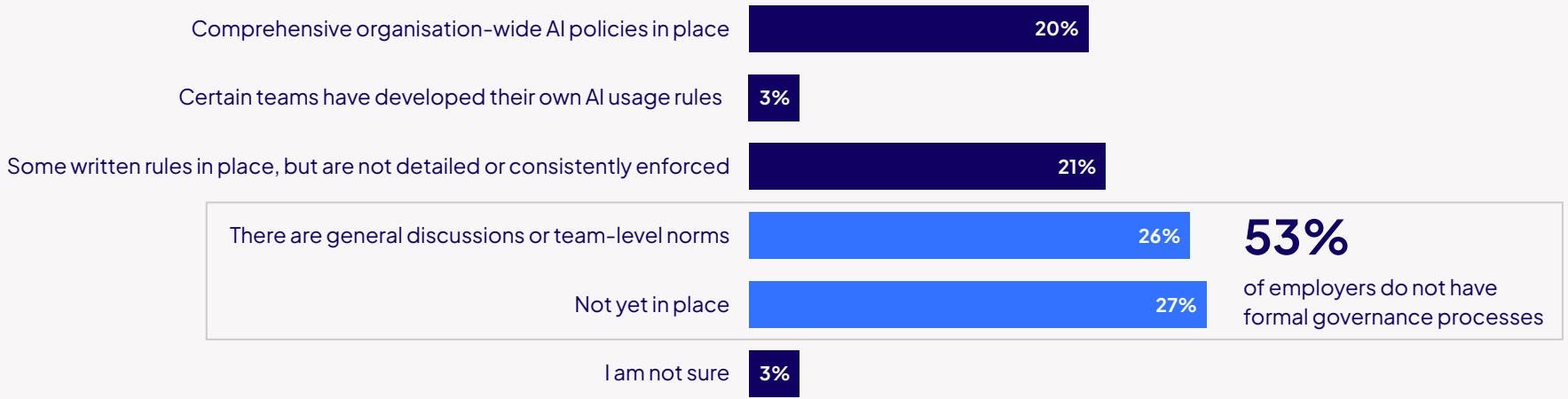
Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

Widespread AI use, But No Rulebook

While AI adoption continues to expand across organisations, formal governance is lagging. 53% of employers say they either have no official guidelines or rely only on general discussions or informal team norms to guide AI use. This would appear to leave a majority of employees navigating AI tools without clear boundaries or accountability.

Organisational Guidance on AI Tool Usage

Question: Has your company shared any do's and don'ts when it comes to using AI tools?



Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

Learning by Doing: Organisations Are Figuring AI Out As They Go

While AI adoption is growing, structured training remains inconsistent across organisations. 41% employers say they do not currently offer any AI-related training, suggesting that many employees are using AI tools without formal guidance or support.

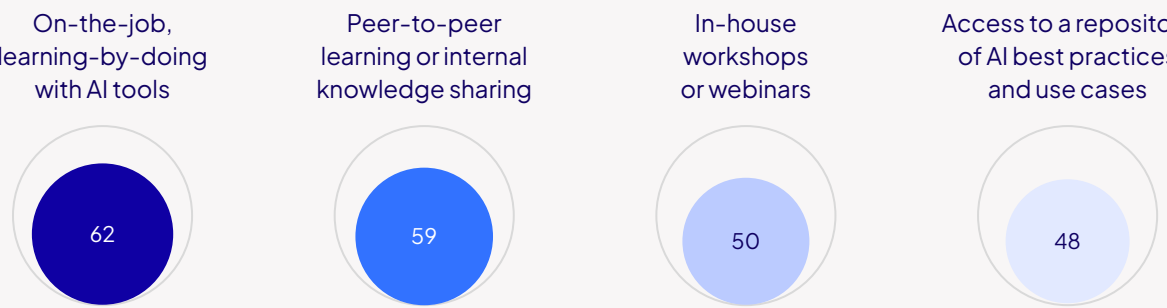
When asked about preferred training methods, employers favour informal, practical, and embedded approaches. The top choices include on-the-job learning with AI tools, peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, and in-house workshops or webinars. Many also value access to a repository of AI best practices and use cases that teams can draw from as needed.

41%

of employers say that they do not offer AI-related training yet.

Top Preferred Ways of AI Literacy and Skills Training

Question: What would be your preferred way to train AI literacy and skills for your team or yourself?



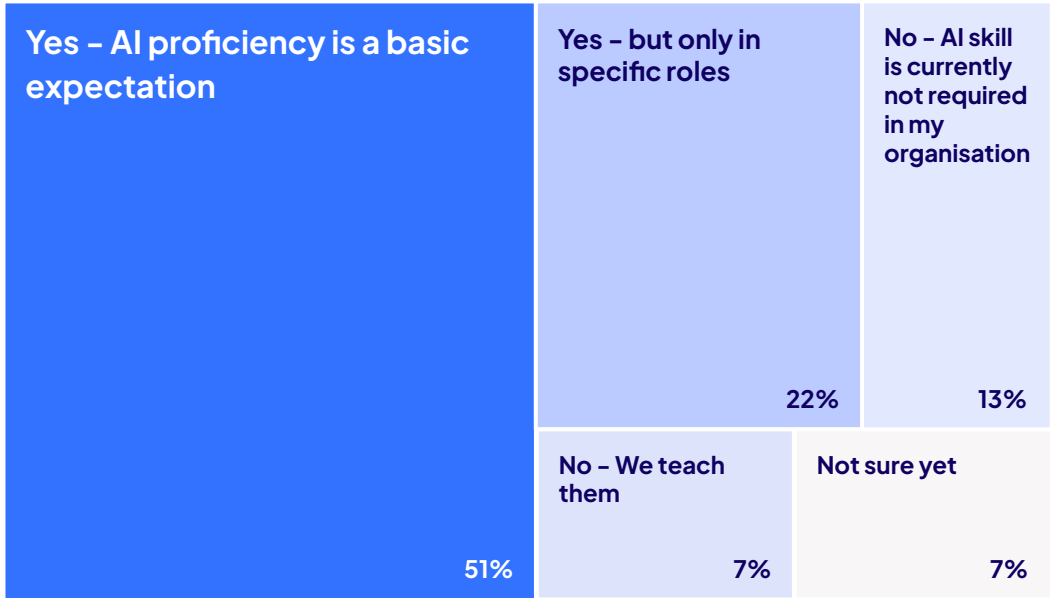
Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

4. Role of Higher Education in Building AI-Ready Talent

Graduates Are Entering an AI Workforce They Are Not Ready for

Employer Expectation of AI Proficiency Among Graduates

Question: When hiring recent graduates or early-career professionals, do you expect them to know how to use AI tools?



Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

AI proficiency is rapidly becoming a baseline expectation for new graduates entering the workforce.

51% of employers now expect graduates to be proficient in using AI tools.

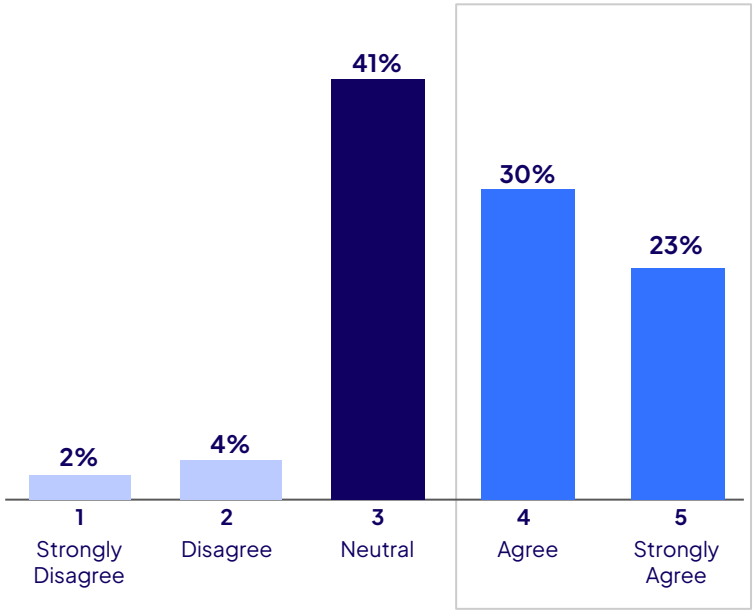
Despite rising employer expectations, **48%** of students report feeling unprepared for an AI-enabled workplace, according to the Digital Education Council Global AI Student Survey 2024.

This indicates a clear skills gap is emerging. This disconnect signals a widening gap between the pace of change in the workplace and the readiness of graduates entering it.

Employers Question Graduates' Ability to Critically Evaluate AI

Employer Concern Over Graduates' Critical AI Evaluation Skills

Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "I am concerned about university graduates' ability to critically evaluate and build upon AI-generated content."



53%

of employers are concerned about graduates' ability to critically engage with AI.

While AI proficiency is becoming a baseline requirement for graduates, many employers remain concerned about how graduates engage with AI critically.

53% of employers express doubt about graduates' ability to critically evaluate and build upon AI-generated content, highlighting a key gap between technical use and thoughtful application.

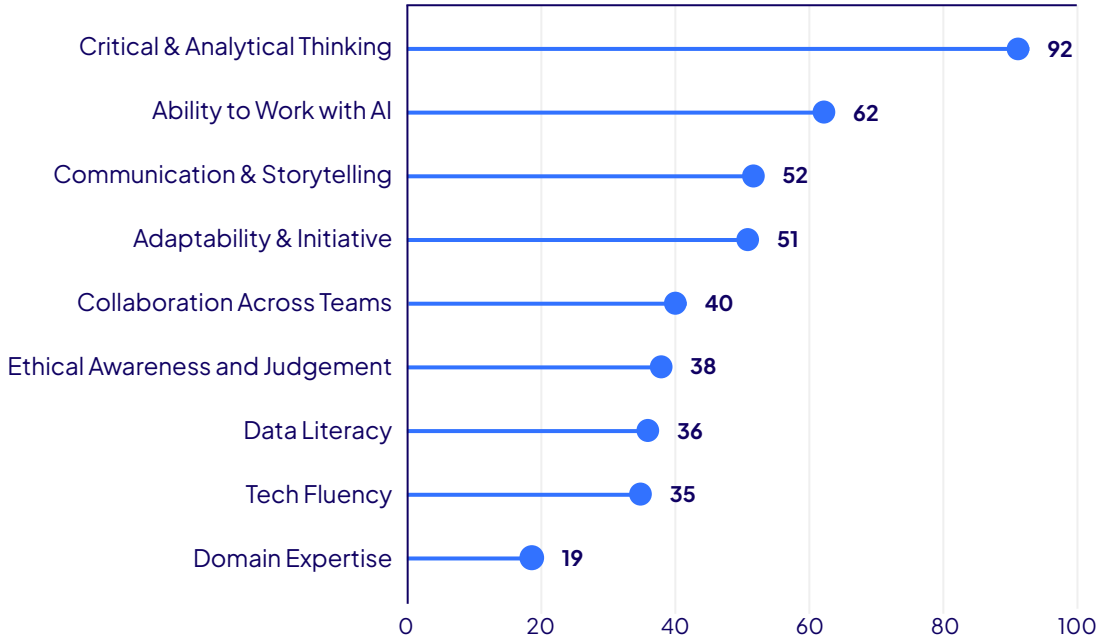
A notable 41% of employers remain neutral. It suggests that employers may not have clear expectations or a strong reference point for what "good" AI engagement looks like. It further points to a broader challenge— in many organisations the idea of critically engaging with AI is still loosely defined, leaving both educators and employers dealing with a moving target.

Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

Graduates Who Can Think and Work with AI Win the Job

Top Skills Employers Prioritise in Graduates, % of respondents

Question:Which of the following skills or mindsets are most important for new graduates in an AI-enabled workplace? (Choose up to 5)



Critical & Analytical Thinking tops the list of skills employers prioritise in graduates, with 92% identifying it as essential. In an AI-driven workplace this ability becomes even more important as graduates must be able to effectively evaluate and build upon AI output.

The ability to work with AI ranks second, highlighting that AI literacy is now a core expectation. Employers are looking for graduates who can use AI tools confidently, responsibly, and effectively in their roles.

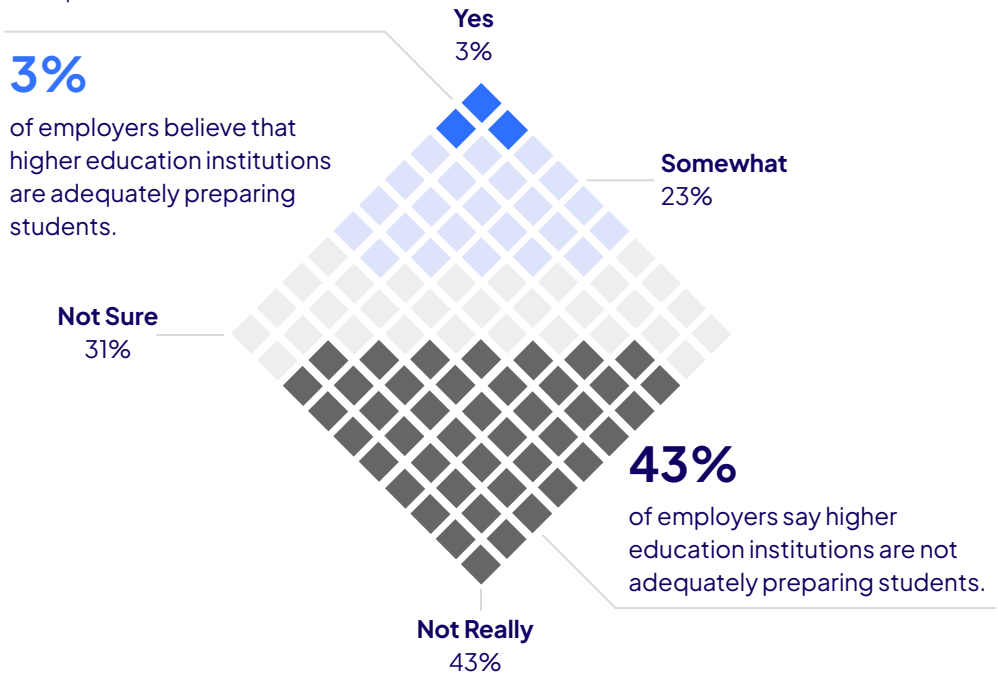
Noticeably, domain expertise ranks much lower, with only 19% of employers listing it as a top priority. This suggests that when hiring graduates, employers are placing greater value on human competencies over deep subject-matter knowledge.

Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

Is Higher Education Preparing Students for Work? Employers Are Not So Sure

Employers' Views on the Adequacy of Higher Education in Preparing Students for AI

Question: Do you think higher education institutions are doing enough to prepare students for using AI in the workplace?



Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

Employers are expressing deep scepticism about how well higher education is preparing students for the realities of today's workforce. Only 3% of employers believe that higher education institutions are adequately preparing graduates, while 43% say they are not.

Meanwhile, 31% remain unsure suggesting that many employers do not see a clear connection between academic learning and job-readiness.

Students themselves echo this concern. 72% believe institutions should provide more AI literacy courses and training on how to use AI tools effectively, according to the Digital Education Council Global AI Student Survey 2024.

A key factor behind this disconnect is the slow and often rigid process of curriculum development in higher education. This raises important questions about the current role and future relevance of higher education. As the workplace continues to evolve rapidly, institutions must rethink their purpose, ensure they can continually align with industry needs, and redesign the curriculum development process to ensure continued relevance and impact.

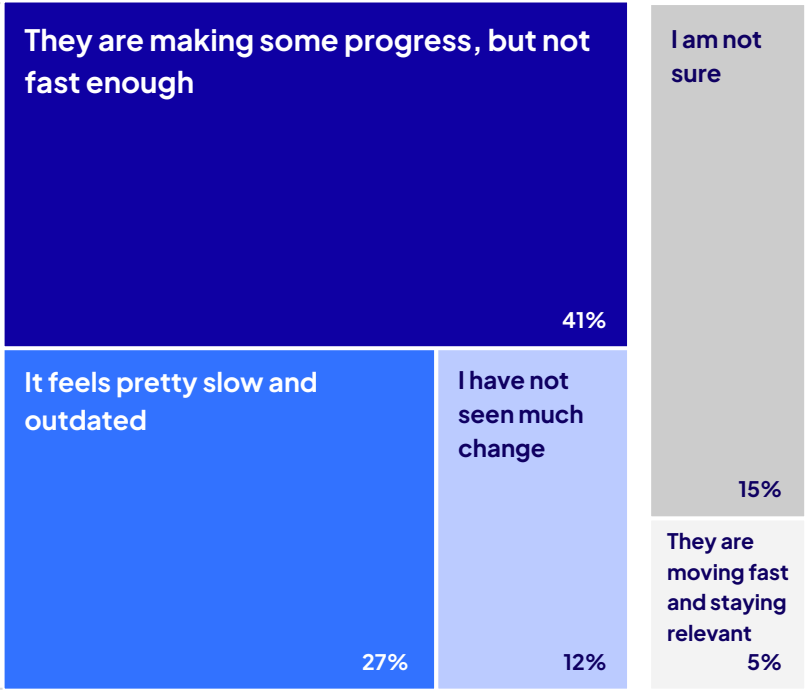
High Expectations Meet Sluggish Progress

Employers' Perception of How Well Higher Education Keeps Up With Industry Needs

Question: How well do you think higher education institutions are keeping up with today's industry needs?

80%

of employers say higher education is not keeping up with industry change.



Source: Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

Employers feel that higher education institutions are not keeping pace with industry change. Only 6% believe higher education is moving fast enough and staying relevant, while a combined 80% believe progress is either too slow or largely absent.

As technological advancement accelerates the pace of change in industry, higher education systems are struggling to keep up.The result is a clear growing misalignment between what higher education currently delivers and what the workforce now demands.

Employers Demand a More Future-Ready Model of Higher Education

Employers' Views on Higher Education Priorities for an AI-Driven Workforce

Question: What should higher education institutions prioritise to better prepare students for a future of work shaped by AI?

AI Literacy	Higher education should prioritise AI literacy training for students, focusing on both general literacy and domain-specific application.[1] Institutions must also invest in upskilling faculty who play a critical role in guiding students in meaningful engagement with AI.
Developing Critical Thinking	Although long seen as a core competency, critical thinking must be further emphasised and redefined in the age of AI, incorporating the ability to evaluate and build upon AI output. As human work shifts toward higher-value tasks, this skill becomes increasingly essential.
Ethics & Responsible AI Use	Higher education should integrate ethics and responsible AI practices into the curriculum, covering topics such as data privacy, bias, inclusivity, transparency, and responsible AI deployment.
Human-Centric Skills	Despite being a longstanding focus, employers remain unsatisfied with only 25% believe graduates enter the workforce with strong communication and collaboration abilities[2]. These skills should remain a top priority, especially in AI-augmented roles.
Practical Experience & Industry Integration	Expand opportunities for applied learning through internships, partnerships with industry, and scenario-based projects, ensuring students gain hands-on experience with AI tools and real-world contexts.

Employers' expectations of higher education are clear: AI literacy is a core skill; critical thinking must be further emphasised and redefined for the AI age; ethics and responsible AI practices should be embedded across curricula; human-centric skills—such as communication and collaboration—need strengthening; and practice-based learning must be prioritised to better bridge the gap between theory and real-world application.

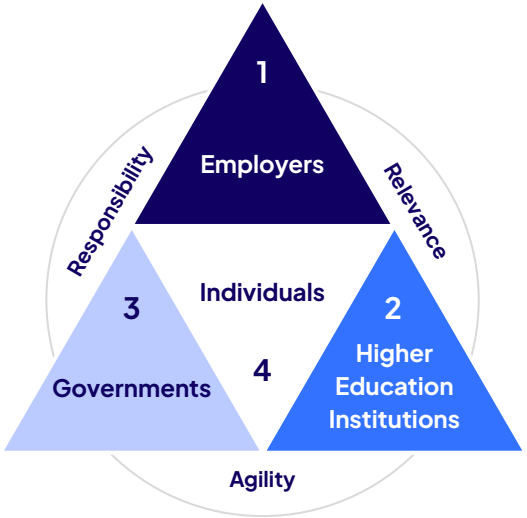
However, closing these skills gaps is not the responsibility of higher education alone. It will require shared commitment and collaboration across institutions, industries, and governments to ensure graduates are prepared to thrive in an AI-powered future.

1. Digital Education Council AI Literacy Framework.
2. Digital Education Council, AI in the Workplace 2025.

Shaping the Future of Work: Everyone Has a Role to Play

1. Employers

- **Invest in AI training**, sustaining productivity gains by getting employees on board with AI
- **Design human-AI workflows** that elevate judgment, ethics, and creativity. Move beyond viewing AI as a cost-saver.
- **Participate in shaping graduates** and collaborate with higher education institutions
- **Build responsible AI** cultures and governance



2. Higher Education Institutions

- **Embed AI across curricula** and implement AI literacy training for all.
- **Accelerate curriculum adaptation,** responding faster to industry changes and new technologies.
- **Actively engage in conversations** with governments to shape policies.
- **Co-create with industry,** making industry a co-author, not just a guest speaker.

4. Individuals

- **Take full ownership** of adaptability and recognise lifelong learning as a necessity
- **Build learning agility**, the new professional currency, moving ahead of linear career progression.
- **Sharpen human-centric skills** such as judgement, creativity, and communication — ones that AI can't replace.

3. Governments

- **Plan and fund AI upskilling programmes.**
- **Revise regulation** to enable faster curriculum change.
- **Enforce responsible AI practices and hold employers accountable**, ensuring that decisions benefiting corporate efficiency minimise harms such as mass displacement.

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Digital Education Council Publications

The Digital Education Council publishes a range of reports and delivers exclusive monthly Executive Briefings to its members.

Recent publications include:

- DEC Global AI Faculty Survey
- DEC Global AI Student Survey
- DEC AI Literacy Framework
- DEC Ten Dimension AI Readiness Framework

Our members use them as working documents to guide their institutional transformation in response to evolving trends in education and skills.

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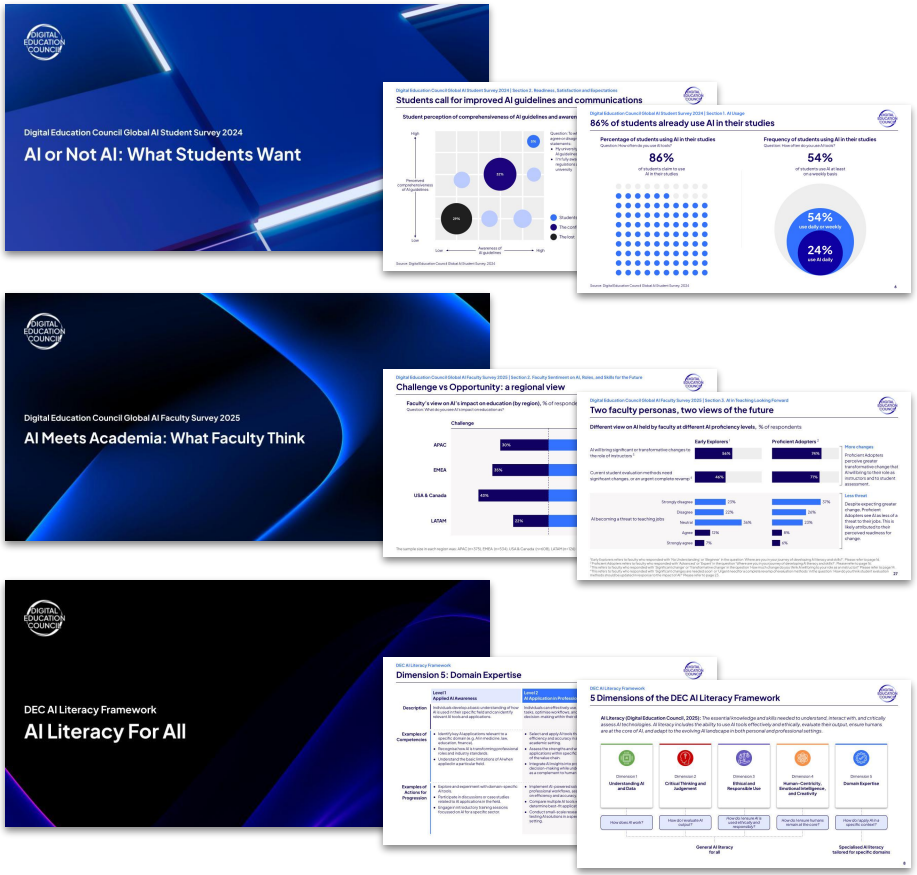
Recent Publications



DEC Publications

Digital Education Council Executive Briefings

The Digital Education Council delivers monthly Reports and Executive Briefings to its members.

These Reports and Executive Briefings share key insights, practical frameworks and usable tools to support AI adoption, governance, and sustainable innovation in higher education.

Our members use these as key working documents to help them work through the transformation in the world of education and skills.

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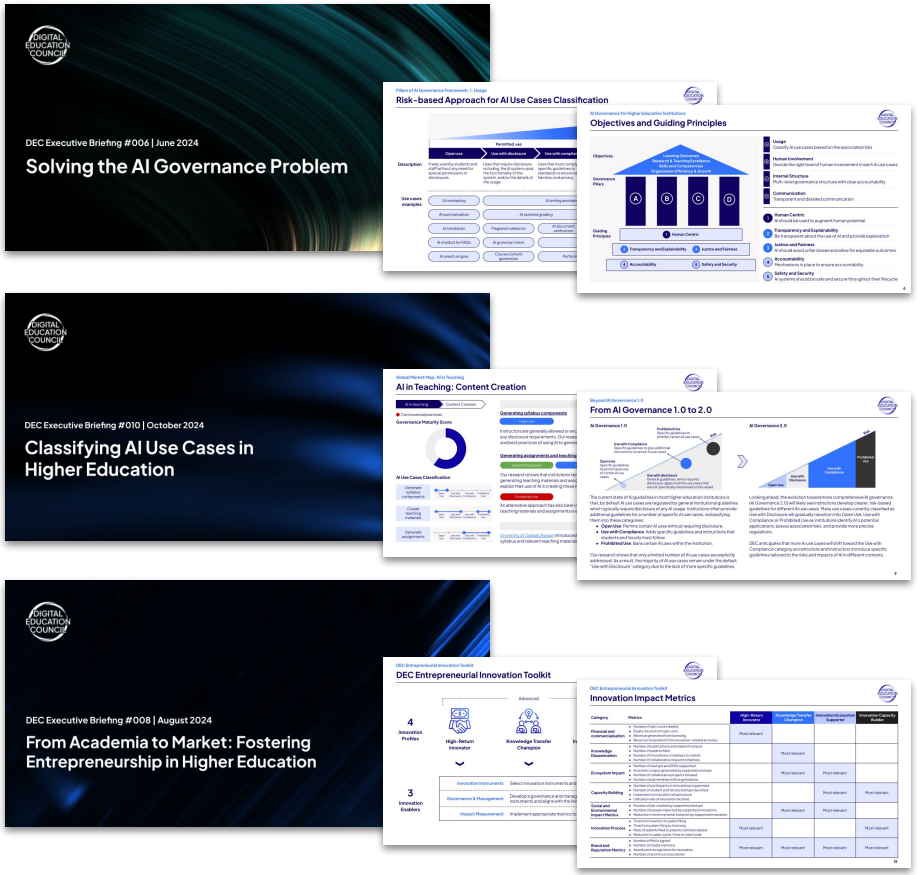
Examples of Executive Briefings



Digital Education Council Meetings

Working Groups

DEC Working Groups serve as a global platform for collaborative discussions for DEC members, fostering knowledge sharing and establishing best practices to drive innovation. The Working Groups are focussed on practical outcomes and run on a one-year cycle.

DEC Global Summit

The DEC Global Summit is an in-person and outcome-focussed event exclusively for DEC members. The Global Summit is a key opportunity to address global challenges and explore actionable strategies for positive integration of digital and artificial intelligence technologies.

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