

Future of work, wellbeing and technology

Ideas exchange summary



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

—
Sydney Policy
Lab



“The Sydney Policy Lab creates that virtuous gathering of talent and experience and insight, all with different perspectives, to come and create solutions to the most intractable problems that our society faces.”

Mark Scott
Secretary NSW Department of Education and Training



The Sydney Policy Lab creates space for experimentation, bringing people together to address some of the most pressing challenges of our time.

At its launch on 17 August 2017, around 100 leading practitioners and thinkers gathered to take part in an ideas exchange on the topic of the ‘Future of work, wellbeing and technology’.

The ideas exchange convened a diverse group of high-level thinkers from multiple sectors, agencies and backgrounds. They ranged from government leaders to robotics and AI experts, education specialists, scientists, psychiatrists, union representatives, lawyers, ethicists and more. They came together to test priorities, ignite new ideas at the intersection of disciplines and expertise, and explore creative solutions.

The event was designed to:

- identify the burning questions that leaders and influencers currently face
- find ways of working with different ideas and voices
- spark new thinking about existing challenges and new approaches to them
- build and strengthen relationships between people who seek to achieve creative and effective policy solutions.

Delegates examined scenarios and potential impacts and explored what can or should be done. Voices filled the room with debate and discussion and some of those sound bites form the basis of this report.

Why the theme ‘Future of work, wellbeing and technology’?

So much has been written, reported, announced and hypothesised about trends and possible futures and what this means for humankind – yet people are still grappling with how to prepare themselves and their organisations for the rapid and uncertain developments they are facing.

This is not a new phenomenon. At multiple points in history, people have confronted change and redundancy and uncertainty stemming from the nature of work, technology, lifestyles and life opportunities changing. The difference now is the scale and accelerated pace of change, which make the critical dilemmas loom larger and urgency feel greater.

But these developments are not an inevitable and ‘natural’ force; they occur through the decisions of individuals and groups of people. Policymakers, industry leaders, educators and people across the broader community all have an important part to play in charting Australia, and the world, along a positive course of development and transformation.

Seven areas of exploration were identified after consulting people from different sectors. On the day, delegates formed groups around these topics. These topics and the facilitators are listed below.

The contents of this report are drawn from delegates’ discussions and do not represent the views of the University of Sydney.

Scenarios for the future: Imagining 2030

Delegates were asked to stretch their imaginations beyond their normal discussions and views, to consider the world of 2030 and potential utopian and dystopian scenarios for their topic. These could be speculative, contentious and provocative.

Each of the seven groups discussed their vision for 2030. One half of each group identified what could be done to increase the likelihood of a positive scenario unfolding, or even accelerate its arrival. The other half identified the barriers and challenges that would stymie the best case scenario – what things would need to be overcome?

Each group approached this differently, and all came up with thought-provoking ideas. The common thread throughout all groups was what sort of a life do we want to be leading in 2030? What does a good and meaningful existence look like, for individuals and for society?

Topics and facilitators

Automation and AI

Sandra Peter, Director, Sydney Business Insights

Wellbeing and Mental Health

Ian Hickie, Mental Health Commissioner

Future of school education

Dahle Suggett, former deputy secretary, Victorian Department of Education and Training

A life of learning

Philippa Pattison, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)

Inclusive Futures

Colm Harmon, Head of School of Economics

Rethinking work and personal lives

Marian Baird, Professor of Gender and Employment Relations

Legal matters

Joellen Riley, Dean, Sydney Law School



Automation and AI

We need more ethics in education, not more coding. More than ever, we need young people to learn the humanities: philosophy, literature, history and ethics so they can make better decisions about the application of automation and AI.

How can we guard ourselves and our decision making against the in-built biases in algorithms? Who is responsible for addressing bias in chatbots and other AI creations? Governments, industry or other?

People are more powerful than robots and we can program them to do what we think is right, but by 2030, robots will be programming themselves. Can we trust the robots? Who will be accountable if something goes wrong and the robot malfunctions or does something that accidentally harms someone?

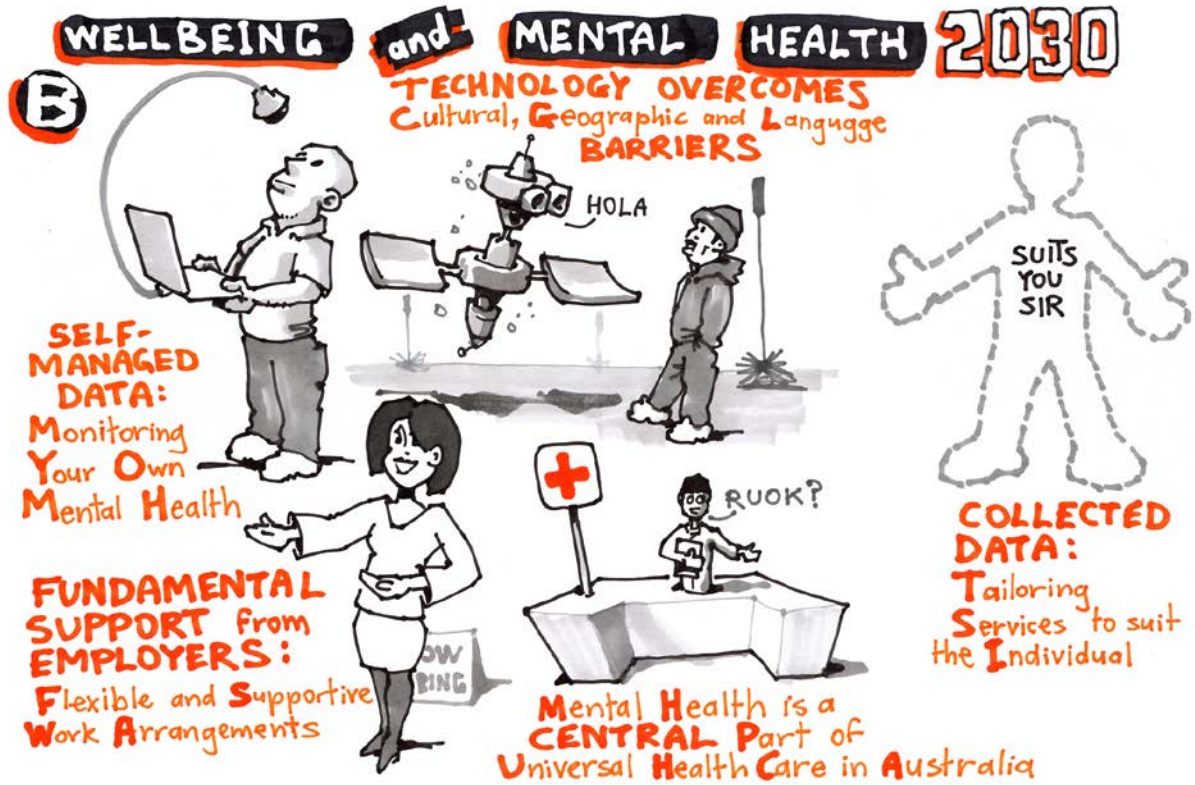
If people don't feel in control of their own data and lives, will we be on a track to a revolution?

Market forces might result in a more efficient robot that is cheaper to produce, rather than a more ethical robot that takes a longer time to develop.

What sort of lives will we be leading in 2030? Will we be out of work, lacking purpose and lonely, a generation of people turned inwards towards their technology.

In this world will your best companion be your in-house robot? Perhaps this robot will provide friendship, or it could check on your mood and encourage you to go outside for a walk or take your medication.





Wellbeing and mental health

There has been a downward trend in wellbeing. We need to do better than just surviving.

Technology can be a powerful tool to improve mental health and wellbeing. We need to invent technology to support the future we want, a future where technology connects people and supports participation.

With the explosion of mental health and wellbeing apps and no regulation, is it possible for people to have control over their data and privacy?

To develop good technological solutions, we can't just have engineers and technologists. We need multidisciplinary teams, including sociologists, ethnographers, social scientists and psychologists.

A whole-of-life approach is needed to support mental health and wellbeing throughout an individual's life. What is the role of policymakers, industry and community groups to achieve effective and integrated service delivery over a person's life? What needs to change?

To achieve a mentally healthy workforce, we need education for young people that develops social and soft skills. These skills are essential for better emotional and cognitive functioning as adults.





Future of school education

What if school was a concept, rather than a physical space? Learning could happen through networks, in collaborative groups, across geographies, at times that suit students, teachers and parents.

Technology should be leveraged to deliver personalised learning, where every child is known and cared for and education is tailored to individuals.

We should be teaching values, ethics, creativity and soft skills, the things that robots and AI will not be able to do well.

Teachers need more support and time to learn and extend their skills, especially to keep up with the fast pace of change. We also need to give them more voice in policy processes, as their front-line insights are valuable to incorporate into policy decisions.

With an education system that is so resistant to change, how can we achieve transformation at scale? Incremental change will not be enough to prepare the next generation for the challenges of the future.

Education is no longer the sole domain of educators. We need to completely reimagine the role of industry and community in revolutionising the education system.

Exams can cause stress, sometimes don't focus on the right things and may be ineffective. They can promote unhealthy competitiveness and gaming of the system by some students, parents and teachers, and could detract from young people developing passion for learning.





A life of learning

Education is seen as a means to an end. But what end? What are we educating for? How can we use lifelong learning to help people achieve purpose as well as building individuals' skills and capabilities?

How can we design a model for lifelong learning that reduces societal inequality?

Responsibility for funding lifelong learning should not sit with learners alone. What is the role of government and employers, particularly when people change jobs with increasing frequency?

Australia currently offers tax incentives to people to complete study that is relevant to their current job. In the context of future disruptions, maybe there should also be tax incentives to re-skill in new areas?

Future models for lifelong learning will require collaboration and connectivity between sectors (such as government, education providers and industry) and more flexible pathways to learning, including shorter and more focused 'chunks' of learning.



Inclusive futures

In 2030, will we be faced with a trade off between efficiency and equity?

We need clearly defined metrics and quantification of fairness. Policy responses need to be targeted and bolder to achieve results.

We need inclusive policymaking to create inclusive futures. This should be community-led and incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences throughout the entire process.

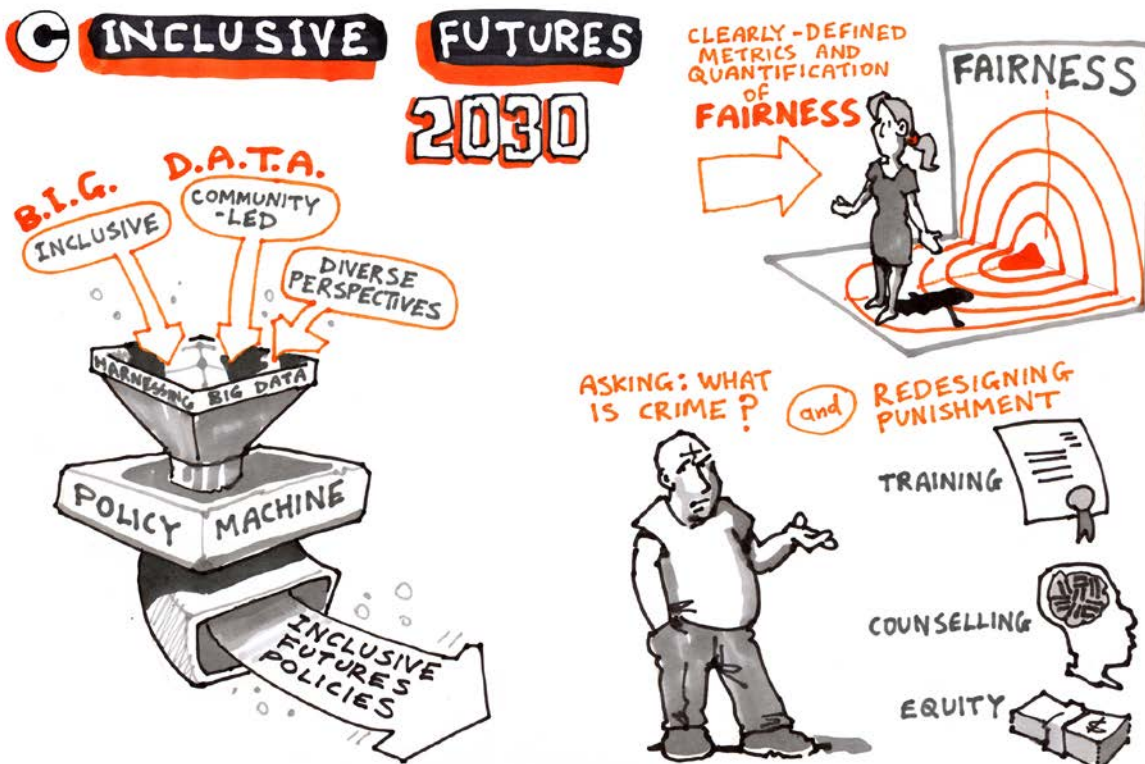
How can we better harness big data to understand and address social inequality?

Should we redefine crime and redesign 'punishment'? If people are caught driving without a licence, instead of punishment they could be provided with driving lessons and support to obtain their licence.

Social inclusion is not the norm and is getting worse through a growing technological divide.



Ideas exchange summary



Future of work, wellbeing and technology



Rethinking work and personal lives

Greater flexibility is needed in work arrangements to take caring responsibilities into account. Progressive workplace policies are sometimes stymied by cultural norms and practices that prevent both women and men taking advantage of the policies.

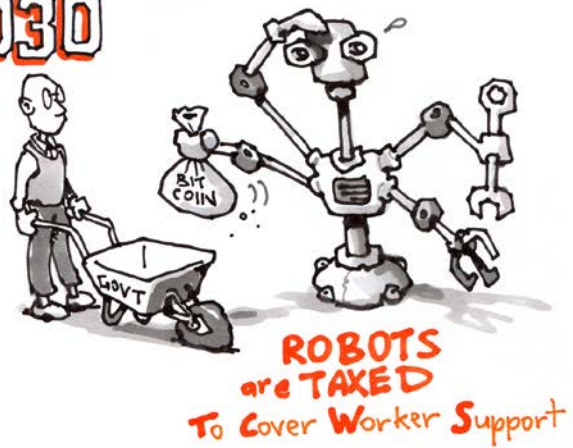
We need to fix gender roles – including reframing masculinity and normalising men’s role in family caring responsibilities so that flexible work practices, paternity leave and so on become the norm.

What role should the state play in regulating the balance between work and personal lives? Should we go down the path of France and ban emails at certain times?

Single sex schools and school uniforms serve to embed and perpetuate gender divides during formative years.

Carers are undervalued and overlooked. Taking up flexible working arrangements can negatively impact on people’s work and on their future promotional opportunities, creating a disincentive to do so for both women and men.





Legal matters

How do you build a sense of values, community and culture? It's not just about regulating companies and startups, but also building this sense of humanity.

With more 'gig-based' work combined with highs and lows of the economy, should we really be focusing on regulating companies to try and achieve job security and income security for employees? Or would it be more effective to focus on broader social safety nets like affordable quality healthcare, education, transport and housing?

The traditional market economy is not transparent, but companies like Airtasker, Airbnb and Uber have the capacity to provide this transparency because all transactions are digital. You can get information on performance of workers, behaviour of users, and financial flows for taxation purposes.

What should be the status and rights of agency workers, casual workers and the self-employed (including those in the 'gig economy') for the purposes of tax, benefits and employment law, and who should be responsible for their protection?

How can legal systems support and keep pace with the changing nature of work and technological advancements?



Delegates

Automation and AI

- **Sandra Peter** (Facilitator), Director at Sydney Business Insights, University of Sydney
- **Guglielmo Briscese**, Senior Advisor, UK Behavioural Insights Team
- **David Burfoot**, Senior Consultant, The Ethics Centre
- **Sascha Callaghan**, Lecturer of Health Law and Ethics at the University of Sydney Law School
- **Paul Daniell**, Director of Countering Violent Extremism Policy and Programs, Department of Premier and Cabinet
- **Gail Fulton**, Director of Business Development and Commercial, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
- **Francis Le**, Leader, Strategic Analysis, NSW Department of Education and Training
- **Justin Merrell**, Group Environment Manager, Qantas
- **Salah Sukkarieh**, Professor of Robotics and Intelligent Systems, Australian Centre for Field Robotics, University of Sydney

Future of school education

- **Dahle Suggett** (Facilitator), Public Policy and Education Researcher and Consultant
- **Michael Anderson**, Professor of Education (Arts and Creativity) University of Sydney School of Education and Social Work

- **James Curran**, Associate Professor in Computer Science, Chief Executive Officer, Grok Learning, University of Sydney
- **Rose Luckin**, Professor of learner centred design, University College London
- **Richard Miles**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education – Enterprise and Engagement), University of Sydney
- **Philippa Pattison**, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), University of Sydney
- **Tiffany Roos**, Division Head: Research and Data, Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales
- **Seckin Ungur**, Public Sector Practice Leader, McKinsey & Company
- **Leigh Woodgate**, Executive Assistant, The Ethics Centre

Future proofing: a life of learning

- **Philippa Pattison** (Facilitator), Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), University of Sydney
- **Catherine Althaus**, Associate Dean (Academic), Australia New Zealand School of Government
- **John Buchanan**, Professor and Chair of Business Analytics at the University of Sydney Business School
- **Bronwyn Ledgard**, Leader, Strategic Analysis in the National Initiatives and Performance Directorate, NSW Department of Education and Training

- **John Lloyd**, Public Service Commissioner, Australian Public Service Commission
- **Leslie Loble**, Deputy Secretary External Affairs and Regulation, NSW Department of Education and Training
- **Davor Miskulin**, Head of International Business Development, Burning Glass
- **John Neil**, Co-Head Advice and Education, The Ethics Centre
- **Tim Payne**, Director of Higher Education Policy and Projects, Office of the Vice-Chancellor, University of Sydney
- **Amy Russell**, Chief Advisor to the Chief Executive, NZ Tertiary Education Commission
- **Stephen Rutter**, Head of Experience, Sydney School of Entrepreneurship

Inclusive futures

- **Colm Harmon** (Facilitator), Head of and Professor at School of Economics, University of Sydney
- **Garner Clancey**, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Sydney
- **Matt Clarke**, Deputy CEO, National Employment Services of Australia
- **Felix Delhomme**, Social Justice Officer, St Vincent de Paul
- **Jessica Dominguez**, Senior Policy Officer, Department of Family and Community Services
- **Susan Goodwin**, Associate Professor at the University of Sydney School of Education and Social Work

- **Dorothy Hoddinott**, Principal, Holroyd High School
- **Roman Marchant Matus**, Lecturer and Data Scientist, Centre for Translational Data Science, University of Sydney
- **Emma Nicholson**, Director, Family and Community Services
- **Jenna Palumbo**, Director of Social Investment and Innovation, Department of Premier and Cabinet
- **Rae Cooper**, Associate Professor in Work and Organisational Studies, University of Sydney
- **Adam Hall**, Australia Leader for Future of Work Solutions, Willis Towers Watson
- **Elizabeth Hill**, Chair of Department of Political Economy, University of Sydney
- **Nonie Malone**, Director, Foresight Consulting Pty Ltd
- **Felicity Menzies**, CEO, Stephenson Mansdell Group
- **Amy Persson**, Executive Director of the Family and Community Services and Service Innovation Branch, NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet
- **Susan Price**, Director of Diversity and Inclusion, PricewaterhouseCoopers
- **Troy Roderick**, Strategic Advisor, Male Champions of Change
- **Nicholas Rowley**, Associate Professor, Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney
- **Lucy Brogden**, Commissioner, National Mental Health Commission
- **Jane Burns**, Founder and Director of Innowell Pty Ltd and the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, University of Sydney/Project Synergy
- **Rafael Calvo**, Professor at the School of Electrical and Information Engineering, University of Sydney

Legal matters

- **Joellen Riley** (Facilitator), Dean and Professor at the University of Sydney Law School
- **Anna Booth**, Commissioner, Fair Work Commission
- **Ashley Brinson**, Executive Director, The Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering
- **CJ Foo**, Chief Operations Officer, Airtasker
- **Leigh Johns**, Commissioner, Fair Work Commission
- **Jessika Lofstedt**, Manager, Public Policy and Government Relations, Uber
- **Alana Matheson**, Deputy Director of Workplace Relations, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- **David Richardson**, Senior Economist, Australian Industry Group
- **Nick Devereaux**, Principal Advisor and Manager of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Unit, Australian Human Rights Commission
- **Ian Firth**, State Inspector in the Psychosocial Services Team, Health and Return to Work Directorate, SafeWork NSW
- **Elizabeth Greenwood**, Policy Manager, Workers Compensation, WHS and Regulation, NSW Business Chamber
- **Agnieszka Tymula**, Senior Lecturer in Neuroeconomics at the School of Economics, University of Sydney
- **Peter Worland**, Executive Director, Uniting

Wellbeing and Mental Health

Rethinking work and personal lives

- **Ian Hickie** (Facilitator), Co-Director of the Brain and Mind Centre and Professor of Psychiatry at the Central Clinical School, University of Sydney
- **Tanya Bowes**, Director of Corporate Affairs, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
- **Marian Baird** (Facilitator), Chair of Discipline of Work and Organisational Studies and Professor at the University of Sydney Business School

Speakers

Keynote

- **Mark Scott**, Secretary, Department of Education

Introduction to Sydney Policy Lab

- **Michael Spence**, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, University of Sydney
- **Duncan Ivison**, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), University of Sydney

Collaborating for impact

- **Felix Delhomme**, Social Justice Officer, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW
- **Alana Mann**, Chair of the Department of Media and Communications in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
- **Jane Burns**, Founder and Director of Innowell Pty Ltd and the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, University of Sydney

Rapporteurs

Automation and AI

- **Liz Hannan**, Government Relations Manager, University of Sydney

Future of school education

- **Sara Brown**, General Manager at the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), University of Sydney

Future proofing: a life of learning

- **Jessica Keath**, Manager, Research Development (Health and Medical Research), University of Sydney
- **Robert Slonim**, Professor of Economics, School of Economics, University of Sydney

Inclusive futures

- **Kirsten Andrews**, Head of Media and Government Relations, University of Sydney
- **Anna Noonan**, Business Development Manager at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Sydney

Legal matters

- **Linda Scott**, External Engagement (Industry) Manager at the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), University of Sydney
- **Kimberlee Weatherall**, Associate Dean (Research) and Professor, University of Sydney Law School

Rethinking work and personal lives

- **Katie Richmond**, Partnerships and Bid Development Manager, Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), University of Sydney

Wellbeing and Mental Health

- **Joanna Bayliss**, Senior Project Officer at the Charles Perkins Centre, University of Sydney
- **Stephanie Wood**, Project Officer at the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research), University of Sydney

Sydney Policy Lab

Leadership Team

- **Adam Elshaug**, Professor of Health Policy and Co-Director of the Menzies Centre for Health Policy
- **Kirsten Andrews**, Head of Media and Government Relations
- **Marian Baird**, Professor and Head of Discipline, Work and Organisational Studies
- **Louise Beehag**, Program Manager
- **Andrew Black**, Director Research Development and Collaboration
- **Robyn Dowling**, Professor and Associate Dean Research
- **Liz Hannan**, Government Relations Manager
- **Duncan Ivison**, Professor of Political Philosophy and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research
- **Allan McConnell**, Professor of Government
- **Robert Slonim**, Professor of Economics
- **Kimberlee Weatherall**, Professor, University of Sydney Law School

For more information

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