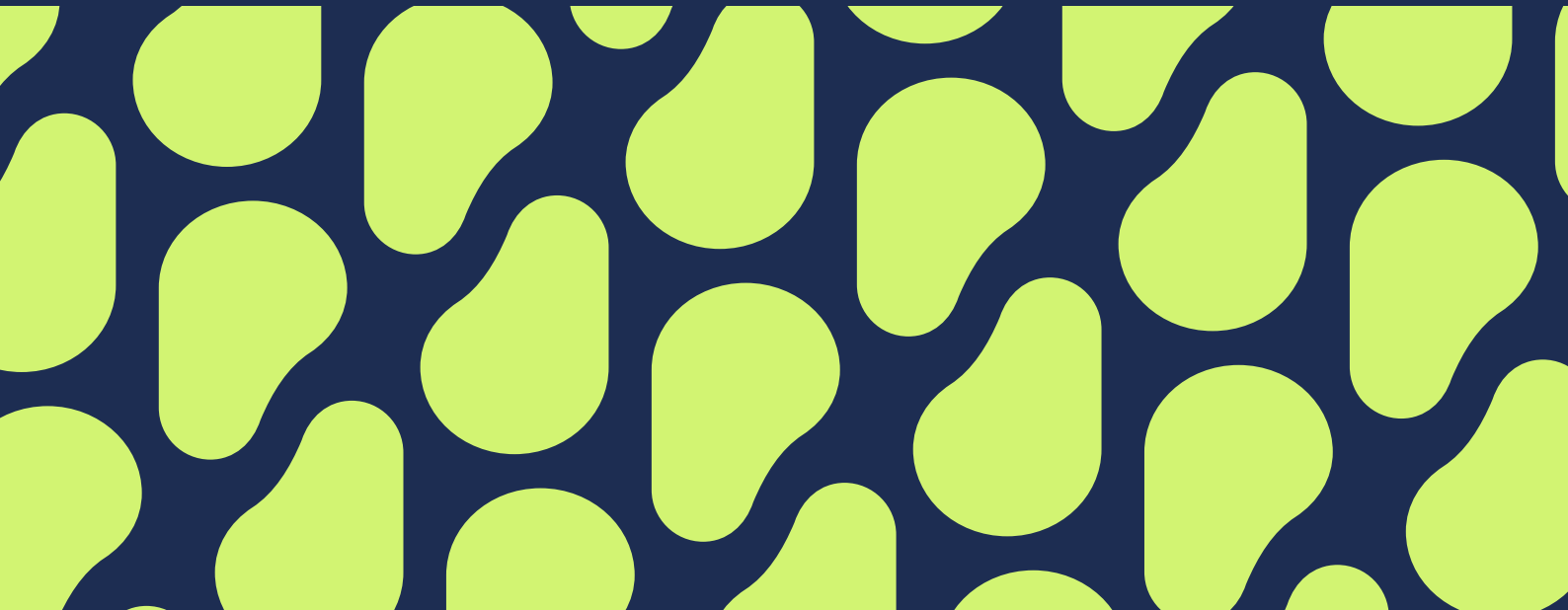


The future of literacy: The human advantage

**How literacy skills drive success
in a digital-first workplace**



Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	4
The future of literacy is characterised by risks and opportunities	4
What is the context?	5
The increasing importance of literacy in a digital-first workplace	5
Critical evaluation vs copying: A growing concern	6
Essential literacy skills for the AI-driven workplace	7
Nuanced written communication and prompt engineering	7
Critical evaluation and synthesising information	8
Oracy skills	8
Creativity, innovation and human-AI collaboration	9
Adaptability, lifelong learning and the role of reading for pleasure	10
Employer responses to changing skills	11
Risks and opportunities	12
Digital inclusion	12
The curriculum	12
Policy: Reframing the narrative	13
How can we make change happen?	14
For business	14
For educators	15
For policymakers	15
Methodology	17

Acknowledgements

This paper was written by Corrine Harms, Deputy Head of Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability at KPMG in the UK, who was seconded to the National Literacy Trust for this project.

The National Literacy Trust would like to thank KPMG for their support in curating the report, as well as the following individuals – who participated in interviews – for their time and valuable contributions:

- Fiona Benoist, Director of IT Service and Platforms, Irwin Mitchell
- Fiona Evans, Chief Executive, Into Film
- Jess Falconer, Senior Director of Global Leadership and Organisation Development, Audible
- Donna Ford-Clarke, VP, Vocational Qualifications, Pearson
- Briony Grogan, Director of People and Culture, Pan Macmillan
- Nik Jones, HR Director; Louise Mackenzie, Organisation Development Manager; and Louise Hanlon, Community and CSR Manager, London Luton Airport
- Robyn Richards, People Director, The Very Group
- Asim Siddiqi, Tech Talent Leader, PwC

All views expressed herein are those of the National Literacy Trust and do not represent the views of KPMG in the UK or any organisations who were interviewed for this paper.

Introduction

The National Literacy Trust's Future of Literacy series explores the literacy skills children and young people will need to thrive at school, in work and in life – not just now but 30 years from now.

The series draws on the charity's extensive literacy expertise and convenes unique insights from its network of educators, businesses, public sector and third sector organisations, as well as parents and young people, to shape the future of literacy collaboratively.

The human advantage: How literacy skills drive success in a digital-first workplace is the second paper in the Future of Literacy series, where we explore what it means to be literate in a rapidly evolving digital-first world.

Through conversation, feedback, research and insight, this paper examines the current literacy landscape to better anticipate and equip children and young people with the literacy skills they will need to learn and thrive in the modern world – in school, work and beyond.

It is based on semi-structured interviews with business supporters spanning the retail, law, publishing, professional services, culture, media and travel sectors¹.

The future of literacy is characterised by risks and opportunities

A recurring topic noted throughout the paper is the pace of change and the extent of disruption.

Grappling with technological changes as they occur in real time is a risk: businesses, educators, policymakers and civil society have a key role to play in ensuring that young people in the education system today are supported to develop the literacy skills they will need for the workplace of tomorrow.

That means acting quickly, iterating the approach as technology continues to adapt and disrupt, and closing the gap between business and education sectors.

To realise that goal, this paper will:

- Identify the essential literacy skills demanded in the digital-first workplace, giving practical examples of how these are shaping the world of work in 2025.
- Draw on key research insights from the National Literacy Trust into how young people and teachers are currently engaging with AI² and into young people's confidence in their practical speaking and listening skills³.
- Summarise the systemic barriers to digital inclusion and the limitations of past policy approaches.
- Propose recommendations to ensure that all young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are adequately prepared with the literacy skills needed to thrive in the modern workforce.

¹A full list of participants may be found in the acknowledgements section

²National Literacy Trust (2025) [Young people and teachers' use of generative AI to support literacy in 2025](#)

³National Literacy Trust (2025) [Children and young people's speaking and listening in 2025](#)





What is the context?

For this paper, we have benefited from the time, expertise and insights of the National Literacy Trust's business supporters when considering how technological change in the workplace is informing the literacy skills needed for employment, both now and in the future.

Many of the businesses who contributed to the research are signatories of the Vision for Literacy Business Pledge⁴. The Pledge, which was developed by the National Literacy Trust and KPMG in 2015 and now stands at 111 supporters, provides a framework for businesses to play a leading role in the future of literacy.

Technology is fundamentally transforming the modern workplace, with artificial intelligence, particularly generative AI, a significant driver of this change. In recent years, generative AI has shifted from a niche innovation to a near-ubiquitous presence, transforming how information is produced, accessed and utilised.

Emerging technology such as agentic AI – AI systems that take autonomous actions rather than simply responding to prompts – have the potential to further disrupt and transform the workplace. The speed of change, exemplified by the onset of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in the early 2010s, was a consistent characteristic in the workplaces of those interviewed, spanning the retail, law, publishing, professional services, culture, media and travel sectors.

At the heart of the Future of Literacy project is the commitment to ensuring that no young person is left behind by this technological shift. It is vital that we come together across multiple sectors in both business and education to explore how we can practically achieve this ambition through upskilling, and empowering the next generation with the full spectrum of literacy

skills we believe will unlock success at all stages of their growth, learning and futures. Supporting the next generation to develop their literacy skills lays the foundations for a skilled workforce and a healthy, productive and inclusive economy.

The increasing importance of literacy in a digital-first workplace

Research with young people and teachers has highlighted concerns that AI has the potential to devalue literacy skills or even render them obsolete. In the National Literacy Trust's latest research into young people's and teachers' use of generative AI, two in three (66.5%) teachers expressed fears that AI might decrease the perceived value of developing writing skills, with one teacher commenting: *"One child told me they didn't need to learn to write as a computer would do it for them when they left school."*⁵

However, while one in four (25.1%) young people admitted to 'just copying' AI outputs for homework, more of those who enjoyed reading and writing reported the most interactive and critical use of AI tools (including checking outputs and adding their own thoughts) compared with those less engaged with literacy. This suggests that strong literacy skills remain essential to the effective and reflective use of generative AI.

Similarly, drawing on employer perspectives, this paper contends that the transition to a digital-first workplace increases the need for high-level literacy skills. Technology presents significant opportunities for innovation, efficiency, personalisation and enhanced collaboration, but strong literacy skills are the key to using these tools to their full potential and navigating potential pitfalls.

Some interviewees suggested that even if the fundamental importance of literacy skills remains unchanged, the contexts in which these skills are applied will continue to evolve, and that will lend a sense of renewed relevance to their use. What's clear is that while literacy adapts and responds to societal changes, it also actively shapes society by changing how we communicate, learn and interact with information, impacting both education and work.

⁴National Literacy Trust and KPMG UK, [Vision for Literacy Business Pledge](#)

⁵National Literacy Trust (2025) [Young people and teachers' use of generative AI to support literacy in 2025](#)

Critical evaluation vs copying: A growing concern

Our paper starts with one of the critical tensions at the heart of AI: AI has the potential to augment human capabilities but it may also lead to intellectual dependence. Findings from the National Literacy Trust's 2025 report into the use of generative AI to support literacy highlighted this tension, revealing a worrying trend where the ease of accessing AI-generated content can undermine the development of essential learning and critical evaluation skills, such as editing and interrogating content⁶.

This particular finding resonates strongly with the businesses interviewed. Employers across sectors emphasised that the human role in an AI-augmented workplace is increasingly that of a 'reviewer' and critical evaluator. Employers noted that while AI can draft communications or summarise data, the skill in being able to take the initial AI response and amend it to suit the required outcome is critical. This foregrounds the need for strong reading comprehension and inference skills, and the ability to recognise where something doesn't sound relevant for the audience in question (dubbed 'how things will land') and the wider business strategy.

Irwin Mitchell, which operates in the law sector where "the addition of one very small word can change everything", stressed that the responsibility and accountability for any submission, even if AI-drafted or transcribed, "still sits firmly with the lawyer, not with the technology product". The requirement for nuance and high-level interpretation requires effective supervision, particularly for trainee lawyers.

The challenge extends beyond accuracy to the deeper analytical and contextual understanding that some AI tools, or indeed those working with them, may currently lack. Publisher Pan Macmillan describes AI as a good starting point but one that requires "refining, analysis, judgment, context [and] questioning". The skills of an editor, such as understanding what will resonate with an audience, teasing out

character development or adding a unique human spin, are indispensable. Without this human lens, AI-generated content can lead to unnecessary content or lack the nuance required for effective communication.

Encouragingly, two in three (65.5%) young people agree that 'even when we have AI, it is important to learn how to write'.⁷ This sentiment was mirrored by businesses, who continue to value robust written communication. Audible, for example, maintains a mandate for all '1/3/5 pager' decision-making papers: AI may be able to filter ideas, but the human must add the nuance and context to make the paper valid and meaningful. This reinforces the argument that AI is a tool to be leveraged, not a replacement for traditional literacy skills.



The (second) skill I think is really important is judgement literacy, knowing when to rely on tech and when human judgement or human interaction or human intervention is essential.

That is going to be key. You know that there is a tendency to kind of go, oh, well, ChatGPT told me this. It must be true. You can't. You can't live your life like that.

Asim Siddiqi, Tech Talent Partner, PwC



⁶National Literacy Trust (2025) [Young people and teachers' use of generative AI to support literacy in 2025](#)

⁷National Literacy Trust (2025) [Young people and teachers' use of generative AI to support literacy in 2025](#)

Essential literacy skills for the AI-driven workplace

A key area of enquiry for this paper was to begin to define the literacy skills needed for employees to effectively leverage AI, navigate complex digital environments and contribute meaningfully to the workplace.

These essential skills can be categorised as follows.

Nuanced written communication and prompt engineering

The ability to articulate and express meaning clearly and precisely remains paramount. While generative AI can generate text, its output quality is proportional to the clarity of human input. Employers highlight that for as long as prompt engineering⁸ is required, reading, writing and understanding is critical as AI works most effectively when prompts are clear and well-articulated. This skill is crucial for guiding AI tools to produce relevant and tailored results.

⁸Prompt engineering is the process of writing, refining and optimising inputs to guide generative AI systems in producing specific high-quality outputs. It involves creating effective prompts that enable AI models to generate relevant responses based on given inputs. [IBM, 2025]



To get the best from AI, clear articulation of purpose, context and desired outcomes is important. While prompt engineering is expected to become obsolete as AI advances, the reality today is that strong reading, writing and comprehension skills are more important than ever. AI performs better when prompts are clear and purposeful – and creating such prompts requires both a clear understanding of what you want and the ability to express it well.

Donna Ford-Clarke, VP, Vocational Qualifications, Pearson



Critical evaluation and synthesising information

Many employers consider this workplace era as the Information Age, where vast amounts of information can be accessed and generated more quickly and easily than ever. While AI tools can sift through output, the ability to critically evaluate those results has become a skill of increasing importance. Furthermore, the ability to interpret and question data, understanding potential biases and discerning correlation, not causation, is an essential skill.

Many characterised the digital-first workplace as one in which speed and productivity is valued, although there was recognition that fast thinking isn't always conducive to critical literacy. Businesses are looking for employees who understand when it's appropriate to slow down, be reflective and take the necessary time to review AI outputs and think critically about their meaning and purpose.

One employer surfaced this tension: *"It's incredibly difficult because we live in a world where we have to do things in a really short period of time. I think everyone intends to set out and say 'I'm going to question [the outputs]'. But when the rubber hits the road, you've got to report tomorrow.... how do you build the resilience, the strength of character to say I kind of don't care about that? I have to do these basics and I'm not just going to accept the output."*



“

This is the downside of technology, isn't it? [...] Where you're presented with something and you accept it without getting aware of the sources. You know who said this? What did the other person say? What's the background behind this? And if you think about social media as part of that technology, things are often presented to us in a bitesize format. A tweet or a short status update, and you can skim through that or even read a headline and take that to be factual rather than actually getting behind it and understanding what is going on.

Briony Grogan, Director of People and Culture, Pan Macmillan

”

Oracy skills

Effective verbal communication and active listening have a renewed importance in an AI-augmented world and are key literacy skills that need to be developed, honed and encouraged.

The ability to iterate products, ideas and services based on feedback requires strong listening skills and being able to attune to the voice of the customer or client. Employers stress the importance of crafting clear, concise messages and adapting communication styles for different audiences and platforms, particularly in hybrid working environments where it can be more difficult to infer tone and intention. Some employers also acknowledge that certain environments require formal business language, and developing the skill to understand those different contexts is important.

Oracy skills were not conceived as simply one-way 'broadcasting' or presentation skills. There was also real value placed on the nuance of speaking to others, discussion, communicating ideas, balancing arguments and articulating points clearly. Effective speaking and listening skills, and being able to consider how people receive and share information, were deemed increasingly important.

Managers are trained to operate in a more emotionally literate way, drawing on the deeper speaking and listening skills that characterise a coaching mindset, as well as the ability to recognise and act upon non-verbal cues that may be harder to discern in online working environments. One interviewee made the point that technology should make us “more human, not less”, and that communication needs a “humanity layer”.

Strong speaking and listening skills can bring wide-ranging benefits, shaping how children and young people learn, how they relate to others, and how they thrive in adult life. Research links these skills to improved academic progress, social and emotional development, workplace readiness and civic engagement. Despite these benefits, there is currently no national guidance on the components of oracy or how it should be taught.

The current government has set out an ambition to change this through reforms to the national curriculum in England. In response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review, it has committed to introducing a new national oracy framework and delivering a combined oracy, writing and reading framework, reinforcing literacy as the foundation for learning, wellbeing and future opportunity.

The need for a stronger focus on oracy education is clear, particularly at the phase when young people transition from primary to secondary education. The National Literacy Trust’s latest research in this space found that young people’s confidence in their practical speaking and listening skills drops in their early teen years, which is at the same stage that teachers report formal oracy activities aren’t encouraged as much⁹.

The implementation of oracy reforms to the national curriculum in England will be critical for ensuring generations to come can find their voice and reach their potential with the words to shape their world.

⁹ National Literacy Trust (2025) Children and young people’s speaking and listening in 2025

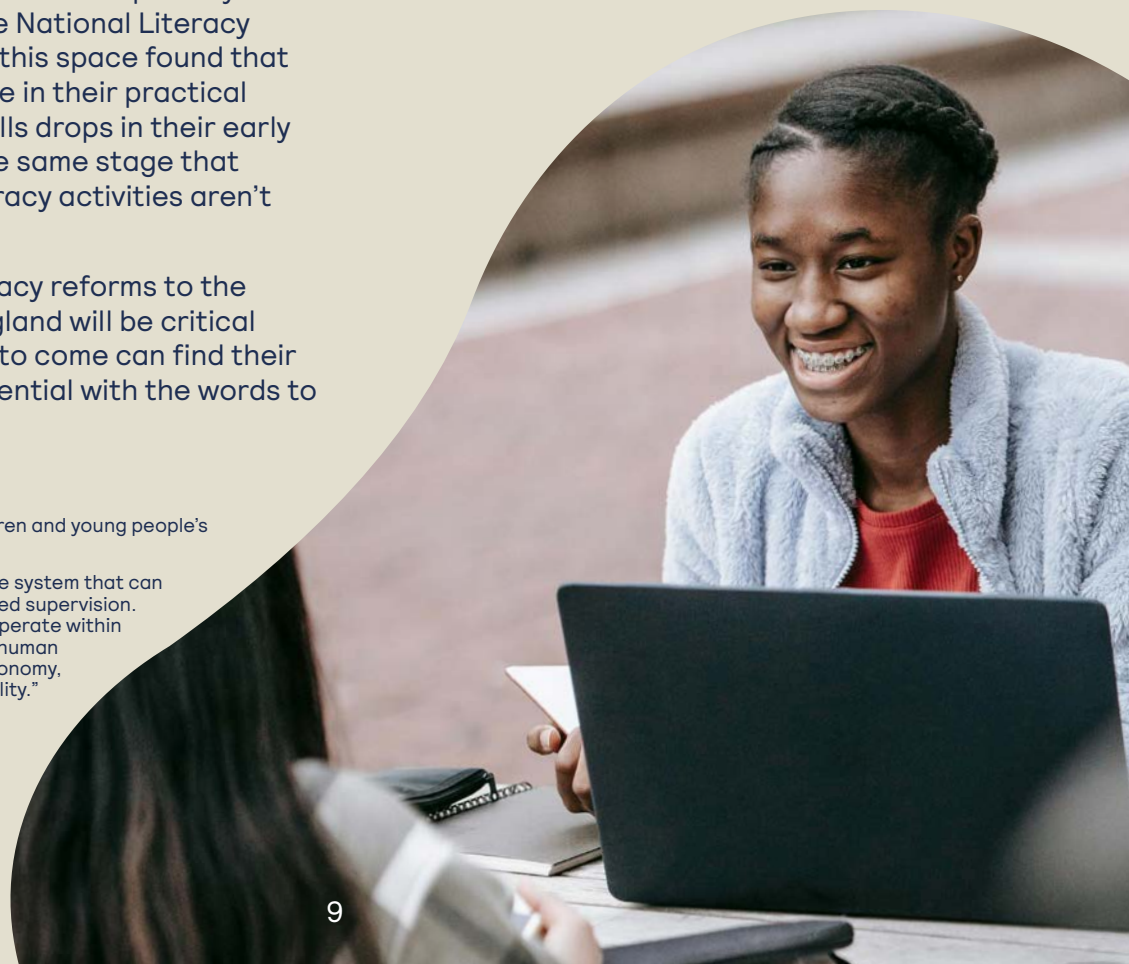
¹⁰ “Agentic AI is an artificial intelligence system that can accomplish a specific goal with limited supervision. Unlike traditional AI models, which operate within predefined constraints and require human intervention, agentic AI exhibits autonomy, goal-driven behaviour and adaptability.”
[IBM. What is Agentic AI?]

Creativity, innovation and human-AI collaboration

AI is seen by many employers as a tool that can augment human creativity, provided individuals possess the literacy skills to direct and refine it. Businesses actively seek out employees with capacity for “creativity, innovation, scouting for new opportunities, looking at ways of doing things differently” (Jess Falconer, Senior Director of Global Leadership and Organisation Development, Audible).

AI can be viewed as the “starter when a task is hard to do” but employers stress the need for a “human lens” to avoid “generic or unnecessary content”, and to “put your own spin on something” (Briony Grogan, Director of People and Culture, Pan Macmillan).

This collaborative approach positions AI as a powerful co-pilot, but one that currently requires human direction, namely the ability to ask the right questions to unlock its full potential, underscoring the necessity for effective written communication skills. The degree of human direction required may change as agentic AI emerges but it is clear that skills – and the adaptability to evolve them – will be of paramount importance¹⁰.



Adaptability, lifelong learning and the role of reading for pleasure

There was a high degree of consensus among employers that the rapid pace of technological change necessitates a workforce that is adaptable and committed to continuous learning. Research highlights the significant economic cost of poor transition skills and the importance of fostering a culture of lifelong learning¹¹.

Some employers hypothesised that this learning agility might be developed through reading for pleasure. When children and young people engage with reading that is personally relevant and meaningful, they demonstrate intrinsic motivation to learn, doing so out of genuine interest rather than obligation. Developing this skill, sometimes dubbed a 'lifelong learning mindset'¹², is likely to be one of the key determinants for success in a continually changing workplace. Promoting regular reading for enjoyment offers a powerful and practical way to lay those foundations.

We expand on the power of validating and embedding multimodal reading in homes, schools, workplaces and the community in the first paper in our Future of Literacy series. The paper explores, among other layers, how reading across print, digital, audio and visual formats can provide a gateway into reading, particularly among more reluctant readers, and proliferate benefits for young people's reading enjoyment, breadth of reading, literacy development, critical thinking skills, confidence and wellbeing.

¹¹Pearson (May 2025) [Lost in Transition: Gaps in Career Paths Costing the UK Economy £96 Billion Annually](#)

¹²McKinsey & Company (2019) [Seven essential elements of a life-long learning mind-set](#)



Employer responses to changing skills

Against the backdrop of a rapidly changing skills landscape, businesses are implementing strategies to support and upskill their workforces. Training and development offers include:

- Internal and external learning products that provide a personalised learning journey. Many stressed the importance of guiding employees on “knowing where to start” and providing tailored learning pathways. They acknowledge there can be varying appetite, confidence and level of skills when engaging with new technologies, which require individualised ways of learning.
- Formal learning is complemented by behavioural change tools such as technology champions and employee forums. Encouraging experimentation and knowledge sharing about the uses and benefits of technology are viewed as important. A large part of a business’ success in reskilling and shifting capabilities is about how it builds employees’ agility and adaptability.
- Employees may be encouraged to set a personal development goal around technology, which may – directly or indirectly – support career progression.

“

We encourage a growth mindset: skilling and encouragement of that natural curiosity; testing; failing fast, being supported to embrace change.

Robyn Richards, People Director, The Very Group

”

KPMG’s 2025 CEO Outlook report for the UK¹³, which is based on responses from 1,350 chief executives, revealed that:

- **AI is a top priority:** 81% of chief executives say AI is a top investment priority for their organisation. UK CEOs anticipate spending 10% or more of their annual budget on AI.
- **Businesses are preparing for AI’s impact on jobs:** 71% are redesigning roles and career paths to reflect AI collaboration, while 52% are engaging with external AI experts to help their workforce embrace AI.

“

The experience for our passengers is becoming increasingly digital, with options to pre-book many elements of travel – but the role and invaluable contribution of frontline employees (such as security and guest experience teams) remain critical. As an employer we ask our employees to demonstrate our values (friendly, professional and trusted) every day at work, so we use assessment centres that focus on communication (speaking and listening) and real-life style scenarios. Having strong speaking and listening skills gives our employees the ability to navigate the complex variety of situations that they will face every day and remain at the heart of great customer service.

Nik Jones, HR Director, London Luton Airport

”

¹³KPMG (2025) KPMG 2025 CEO Outlook – UK

Risks and opportunities

Our interviews and research for this paper not only set out to understand the literacy skills that employers are seeking in a digital-first workplace but also to consider the context in which the business sector and employment landscape are operating within. In turn, this reveals the risks and opportunities when building literacy skills for a digital-first age.

Digital inclusion

Many employers were clear that young people are an asset to their businesses. This generation of 'digital natives' can suggest ways of doing things differently because they tend to think with a digital-first perspective.

However, significant digital barriers persist, with a divide in terms of who has access to technology and the reality of data poverty. While the ubiquitous nature of the smartphone means many young people do have at least some access to technology, our focus remains firmly on equity, asking ourselves:

- Which groups might be more cautious engaging with technology?
- How are people supported to experiment and upskill through growth opportunities, empowerment or safe ways to develop resilience through trial and error?
- Where might ethical or sustainability concerns impact AI adoption, and what is the role of employers and regulators in building trust?

Research shows leveraging diverse literary forms – from audiobooks and ebooks to comics – can boost literacy engagement, particularly for reluctant readers, and can serve as a gateway to accessing other forms of literacy¹⁴. However, this must be carefully managed to avoid exacerbating digital and learning divides. Furthermore, disparities exist in which some education providers are integrating AI into their classroom practice while others lack the time or resources to grapple with it.

¹⁴National Literacy Trust (2025) [The future of literacy: Multimodal reading](#)

¹⁵Sutton Trust (2025) [Artificial advantage](#)

¹⁶Department for Education (November 2025) [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Building a world-class curriculum for all: Final Report](#)

¹⁷See e.g. Ofcom (2024) [Evaluation toolkit: Outcomes, indicators and survey questions bank](#)

Private school teachers are more than twice as likely to have had formal AI training than state school teachers (45% vs 21%) and significantly more likely to have had informal training (77% vs 45%)¹⁵.

The curriculum

Preparing children from their earliest years with the literacy skills needed for life and the modern workplace requires a reimagining of educational practices. The Curriculum and Assessment Review in England¹⁶ and wider curriculum reviews in the other UK nations offer a clear opportunity to promote consistency and ensure that literacy education keeps pace with technological and societal change.

Technology is a vital tool that can enhance and support everyday learning, work and life. It is not a replacement for key competences. In fact, core skills are now more important than ever and must be boosted to ensure that nobody is left behind as technological advancements continue.

Curriculum and assessment reforms across the nations must acknowledge this shift by prioritising oracy, critical media and digital literacy skills. This includes the ability and motivation to evaluate multimodal information, understand the digital ecosystem (e.g. the economic models of platforms, media companies, content providers and information sources)¹⁷, decision-making and reasoning skills, as well as the ability to communicate with and listen to people on a human level.

Embedding these skills across the curriculum will enable young people to think critically, communicate effectively and participate fully in society, shaping their futures as informed, responsible and active citizens.

The focus on oracy, media, critical, digital and financial literacy skills in the recent Curriculum and Assessment Review for England, as well as the UK Government's response to the review¹⁸, are promising.

The implementation of these curriculum reforms in partnership with the education, private and charity sectors – especially when faced with a climate of rapid technological progress – as well as detail on how they will be rolled out, delivered and supported in schools will be critical.

Everyone has a role to play and a long-term commitment to partnership working between policymakers, employers, families, carers and communities is essential in shaping the future of literacy, implementing inclusive reforms and securing sustained impact for this generation – and generations to come.

Policy: Reframing the narrative

In the last decade, governments have recognised the need to tackle digital inclusion and improve educational technology, particularly since the widening of inequities during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, given that 1.5 million UK households were still without internet access as recently as 2021¹⁹, challenges remain.

Policies have tended to treat traditional and digital literacies as separate, missing the opportunity to recognise them as one evolving skillset that can unlock future opportunities²⁰.

A prevailing theme that emerged from the business interviews was the interconnectedness of traditional literacy (reading, writing, speaking and listening) with digital literacy, emotional literacy and critical literacy.

With the publication of the Curriculum and Assessment Review for England – and the current government signalling forthcoming strategies on digital education skills and AI – we now have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver a unified vision for the future of literacy.

¹⁸UK Government (November 2025) [Government response to Curriculum and Assessment Review](#)

¹⁹Ofcom (2021) [Digital divide narrowed by pandemic, but around 1.5m homes remain offline](#)

²⁰National Literacy Trust (2025) [Blog: Ten years of policy: a review](#)



How can we make change happen?

By explicitly recognising the role of overlapping literacies and how they work together – in classrooms, workplaces and communities – we can break down barriers to opportunity, empower people to navigate information and technology with confidence and ensure everyone can thrive in the digital age.

Our exploration, grounded in insights from leading businesses and enriched by the National Literacy Trust's latest research into generative AI, reveals a clear picture: the workplace is undergoing a period of rapid technological change and literacy skills are evolving and adapting to meet this challenge.

There is a demand for employees with advanced literacy skills, which includes the nuanced communication required for effective prompt engineering; the critical thinking to review and contextualise AI outputs; the oracy skills to present, discuss and articulate complex ideas; the listening skills that help build empathy and detect nuance; and the related skills of digital and emotional literacy. These are the human skills that add value, nuance and ethical oversight to AI's capabilities.

In addition, the literacy skills needed to think critically, articulate ideas clearly, build empathy, navigate disagreement, self-advocate and connect meaningfully with others are not just useful in the workplace, but are essential skills for a well-rounded citizen in a rapidly shifting society. Young people must feel empowered to influence, advocate, communicate and make sense of the world around them, at home, in their communities and in the workplace.

For business

Interviewees shared many examples of a range of initiatives designed to support young people's literacy and employability skills. When working with students of all ages, there is an opportunity for business to be even more explicit as to how literacy and AI skills co-exist in the workplace. While the transformative potential of generative AI is widely recognised, the evidence of this report – that strong literacy skills remain essential to its effective and reflective use – is less well understood.

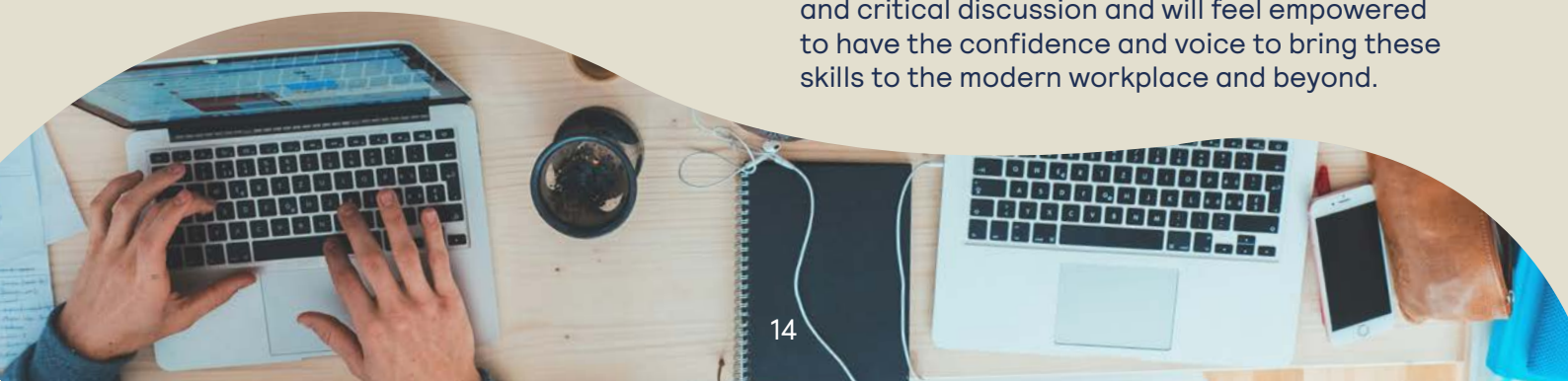
This is why we are calling on businesses to:

1. Strengthen employability programmes by linking a wider range of literacy skills to the world of work

Existing employability and work-experience programmes should go beyond interview preparation, presentation skills and CV writing. They should incorporate the development of a wide range of literacy skills mentioned in this paper and demonstrate how these skills can support workplace readiness. For example, there should be a focus on essential communication skills like speaking and listening, which are vital for employment and civic engagement.

2. Partner with the National Literacy Trust to deliver our new national Young Voices programme

The programme aims to grow the next generation of confident communicators and future leaders. Young people will develop oracy skills such as active listening, presentational talk and critical discussion and will feel empowered to have the confidence and voice to bring these skills to the modern workplace and beyond.



3. Invest in continuous literacy upskilling across the workforce

Investment should be directed toward the ongoing development of literacy and communication skills within both current and future workforces. Employers, educators and policymakers must collaborate to provide sustained opportunities for upskilling, including developing confident communicators and ensuring individuals at all career stages can meet the evolving literacy demands of modern workplaces.

For educators

The majority (89.2%) of teachers surveyed in the National Literacy Trust's latest research²¹ on the use of generative AI to support literacy agreed that students should be taught how to engage critically with AI, but 2 in 3 (66.9%) teachers felt they needed more training and support themselves.

We recommend that educators:

1. Establish clear boundaries and critical understanding of AI use in education

Schools should draw on existing support and resources to set clear parameters for the responsible use of AI in learning. Students should be supported to understand when and how to use AI critically, developing the digital literacy skills needed for ethical and effective use in education, life and future workplaces²².

2. Develop oracy expertise and grow confidence in teaching oracy effectively

Strong oracy teaching empowers students to express themselves clearly, think critically and engage meaningfully with others. By deepening an understanding of oracy and refining classroom practice, educators will be better equipped to support learners in building vital communication skills that enhance academic achievement, civic engagement and workplace readiness.

3. Foster a culture of reading for pleasure to strengthen lifelong learning

Reading for pleasure should be actively encouraged across all educational settings. The intrinsic motivation to read builds curiosity, creativity and knowledge – skills that underpin the lifelong-learning mindset required by employers.

4. Strengthen collaboration between education and employers

Educators should share knowledge with employers, enabling employability or work-experience programmes to align with what students learn in the classroom. This integration helps young people see how the literacy skills they learn at school are applied in real-world work contexts.

For policymakers

What it means to be literate is changing. Technology continues to reshape how we access, create and share information. To ensure that everyone can thrive in an increasingly digital society, it is vital that policy and practice keep pace with technological change and respond to both the opportunities and the challenges that digital advancements present.

This is why we are calling on policymakers to:

1. Introduce statutory guidance through a national AI framework

Building on its *Generative artificial intelligence (AI) in education* policy paper for England²³, the government should move beyond setting out its position and introduce statutory guidance through a national AI framework. This standardised framework should provide clear and practical guidelines on the safe, ethical and proficient use of AI in teaching and learning.



²¹National Literacy Trust (2025) [Young people and teachers' use of generative AI to support literacy in 2025](#)

²²See e.g. Department for Education (2025) [Using AI in Educational settings: support materials](#)

²³Department for Education (August 2025) [Generative artificial intelligence \(AI\) in education](#)

Implementation is key and this guidance must also cover measures to mitigate algorithmic bias, safeguard student data, address the digital divide and ensure consistency in critical digital-literacy education.

2. Embed critical digital literacy within education strategies at all levels

Critical digital literacy should be embedded across curricula as a core inter-disciplinary skill. This would empower children and young people to identify misinformation, evaluate sources and understand how digital texts influence opinion and behaviour. By treating critical digital literacy as fundamental to citizenship, employability, wellbeing and future life chances, young people would be better prepared to participate confidently in education, the world of work, democracy and our increasingly digital society. The Curriculum and Assessment Review in England looks set to provide an opportunity to achieve this, but implementation will be key.

3. Break down barriers to opportunity by addressing the digital divide

The digital divide remains one of the most significant barriers to literacy and learning. Policymakers at national, devolved, regional and local levels must provide the necessary infrastructure – particularly in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage – to eliminate the postcode lottery of digital access, promote inclusivity and ensure equitable opportunities for critical digital literacy education. Working with digital service providers will be key to ensuring digital inclusion for all.

4. Support educators through professional development

Teachers and practitioners play a central role in fostering positive digital engagement. Continuous professional development should equip educators with the confidence, skills and resources to use digital resources efficiently. This includes streamlining tasks such as lesson planning, reviews and marking, integrating technology into classroom practice, promoting critical media literacy, and safeguarding wellbeing in all online spaces.

5. Commit to partnership working to empower communities

Critical digital literacy development extends beyond the classroom. Promoting family learning programmes, library initiatives and community workshops that encourage shared reading, discussion and analysis of online content is key. Measures like these help young people make sense of the digital world in trusted local spaces. Broader public awareness campaigns would complement this activity and empower families to guide digital engagement safely, positively and effectively. Everyone – families, carers, schools, libraries, civil society, businesses and communities – has a role to play to ensure the next generation is set up to succeed academically, professionally and socially.

6. Work in partnership to put oracy at the heart of curriculum reforms

We welcome the government's positive response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review in England's agreement that oracy is an essential skill and so should be embedded into the curriculum – with the primary oracy framework and coherent literacy framework in secondary education.

Other governments should, as part of their curriculum reform thinking, also include oracy firmly in their curricula. Where oracy is to be embedded, policymakers should work across the education, private and charity sectors to build on the great work and thinking that is already in train and happening in many schools across the country to meet future employment needs.



Methodology

Interviews were conducted with eight organisations during the summer of 2025. Businesses were asked a range of questions covering three key areas:

1. The changing role of technology in their workplace.
2. The literacy skills required in a digital-first workplace.
3. The interconnectedness of business and educators in the development of literacy skills.

Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically and comments are included within relevant sections of the report. This paper, and the views expressed herein, remain those of the National Literacy Trust alone and do not necessarily represent the views of the companies listed.

The voices of young people – and the way in which they themselves are changing and expanding our definitions of literacy – are not included in the scope of this research but they are an important area for further enquiry.

In keeping with the thematics of this paper, AI was used to summarise interview notes and support early drafting.



The logo for the National Literacy Trust, featuring the organization's name in a bold, sans-serif font. The text is white and is contained within a dark blue rectangular box that has a stylized, open book-like shape at its top and bottom edges.

National Literacy Trust

Change your story

About the National Literacy Trust

Literacy changes everything. It opens the door to the life you want. It's the key to knowledge, confidence and inspiration. It's better results at school, and better jobs. If you grow up without the tools to communicate, without books to read or opportunities to write, it's harder to get where you want to go. We're a charity helping people overcome these challenges and change their life chances through the power of words – reading, writing, speaking and listening. From first words, through school days to training, jobs and beyond.

Together, we're helping people change their stories

Visit literacytrust.org.uk to find out more, donate or sign up for a free email newsletter.

You can also find us on social media.

