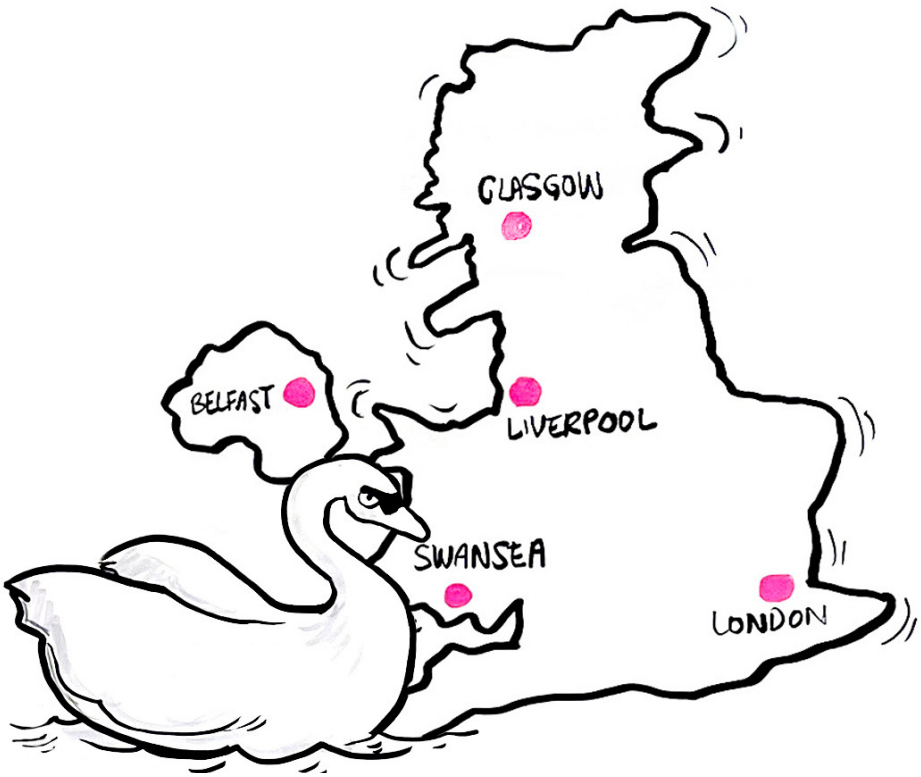
People's AI Stewardship Summit

Swansea, April 30th, 2025



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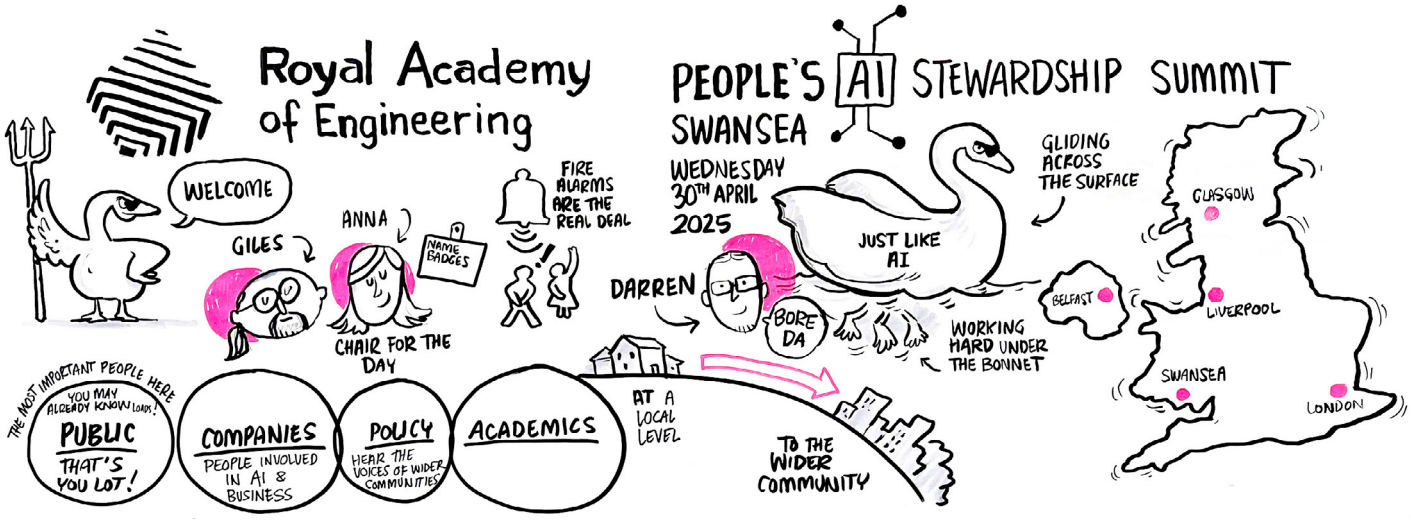
Royal Academy of Engineering

Welcome from the Academy



The latest People's AI Stewardship Summit took place in Swansea, bringing together diverse voices to explore how artificial intelligence might shape work and skills in Wales.

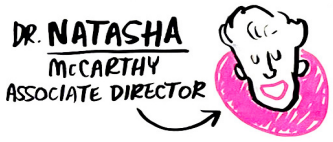
After a warm welcome, we were introduced to the groups in the room:

- The public — some familiar with AI, others less so.

> *"You're the most important people here today."*

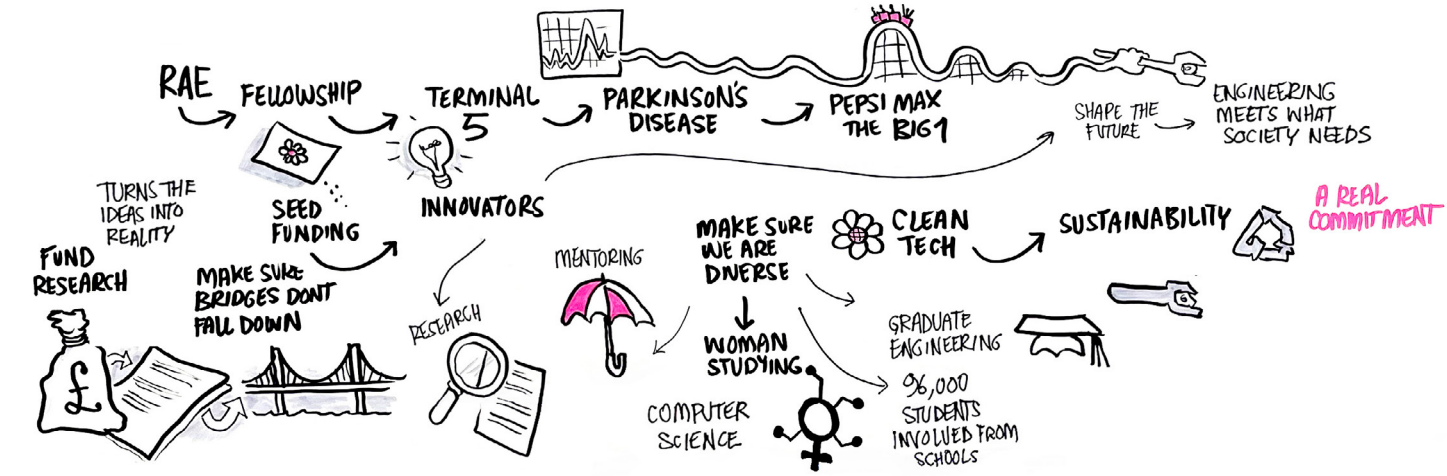
- Experts — including people working in AI-related businesses, civil society organisations, policymakers and researchers.
- Facilitators — including Welsh-language support.
- And the team from the Royal Academy of Engineering ("The Academy").

About the Academy



Dr Natasha McCarthy, Associate Director of Policy, introduced the Academy and the purpose of the summit.

The Academy is a UK-wide fellowship of engineers, and a charity focused on ensuring that engineering serves society. It supports engineers working on every aspect of engineering and technology, including major infrastructures. It also works to improve diversity in engineering and fund opportunities for students and early-career professionals.



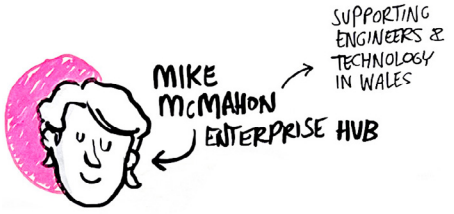
With its amazing network, the Academy is uniquely placed to shape the future of engineering and ensure technologies bring local benefits. As with earlier summits in Belfast, Glasgow, and Liverpool, the Swansea summit aimed to create space for open dialogue between the public and those developing, regulating, and deploying AI.

Natasha encouraged participants to share their views, whether hopeful, sceptical, or somewhere in between.

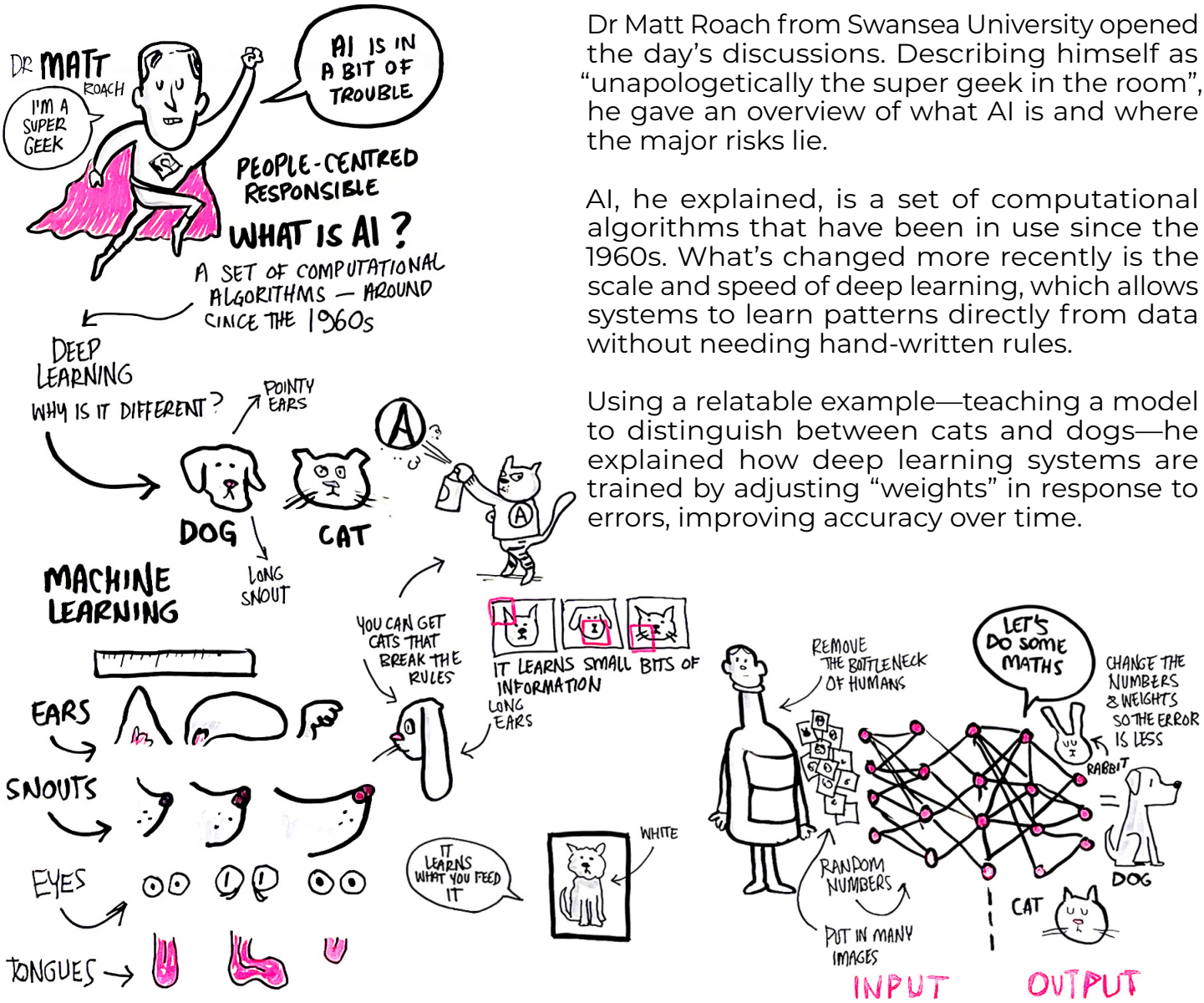
> *"We want people who don't work in AI to talk to those who do."*

Enterprise Hub Wales

The summit took place at Tramshed Tech—also the new home of the Royal Academy of Engineering's Enterprise Hub in Wales. Mike McMahon introduced the Hub's mission to support exceptional entrepreneurs with high-potential ideas. Officially launched in 2023, the Hub provides funding, mentoring, and business development support across Wales.



Setting the Scene



Dr Matt Roach from Swansea University opened the day's discussions. Describing himself as "unapologetically the super geek in the room", he gave an overview of what AI is and where the major risks lie.

AI, he explained, is a set of computational algorithms that have been in use since the 1960s. What's changed more recently is the scale and speed of deep learning, which allows systems to learn patterns directly from data without needing hand-written rules.

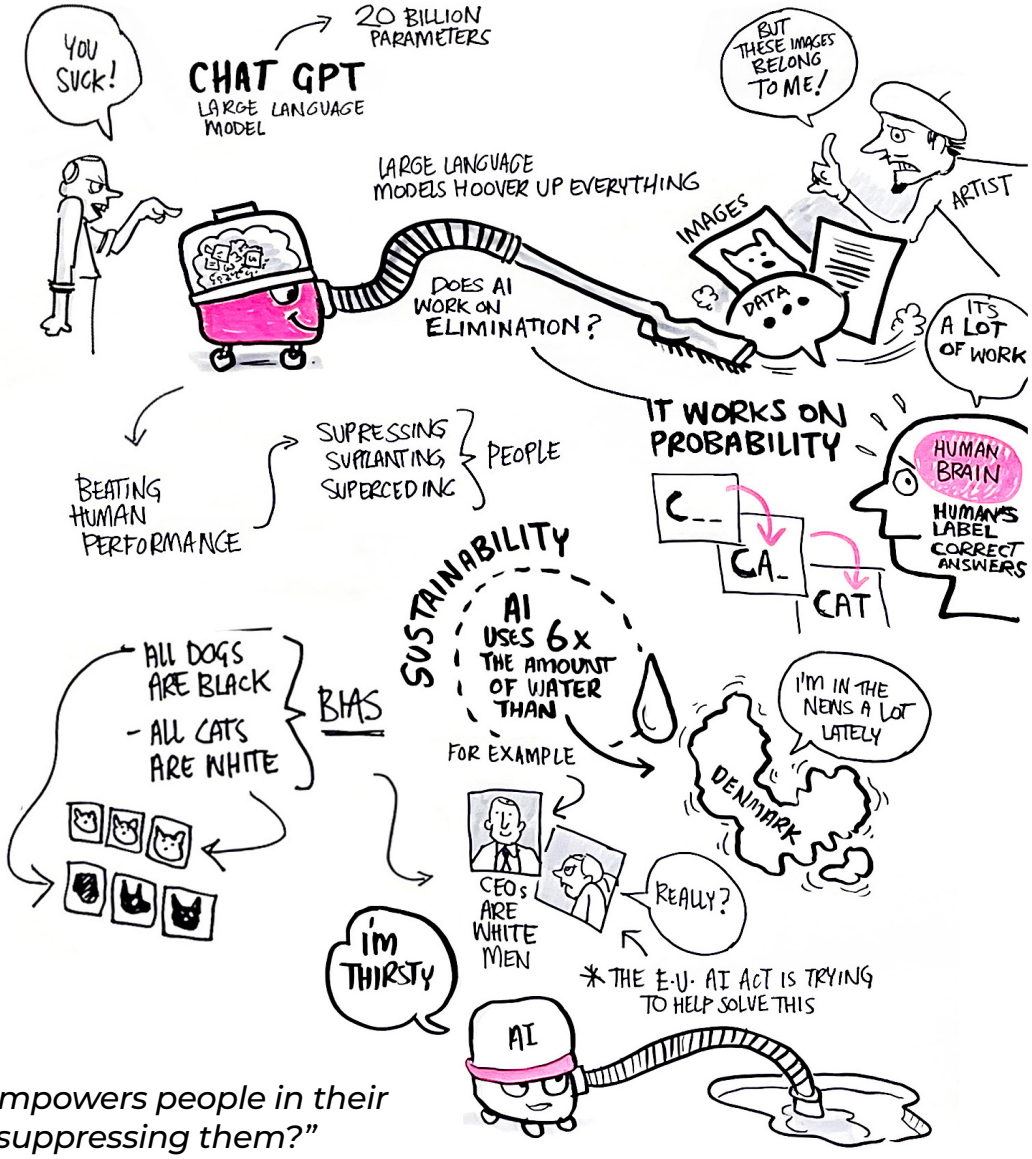
Using a relatable example—teaching a model to distinguish between cats and dogs—he explained how deep learning systems are trained by adjusting "weights" in response to errors, improving accuracy over time.

"Deep learning does away with the human endeavour."

He also highlighted key concerns. "AI reflects our assumptions." It can reinforce bias; for instance, a model might associate leadership with white men if the majority of images labelled as 'leaders' that it is trained on are white males.

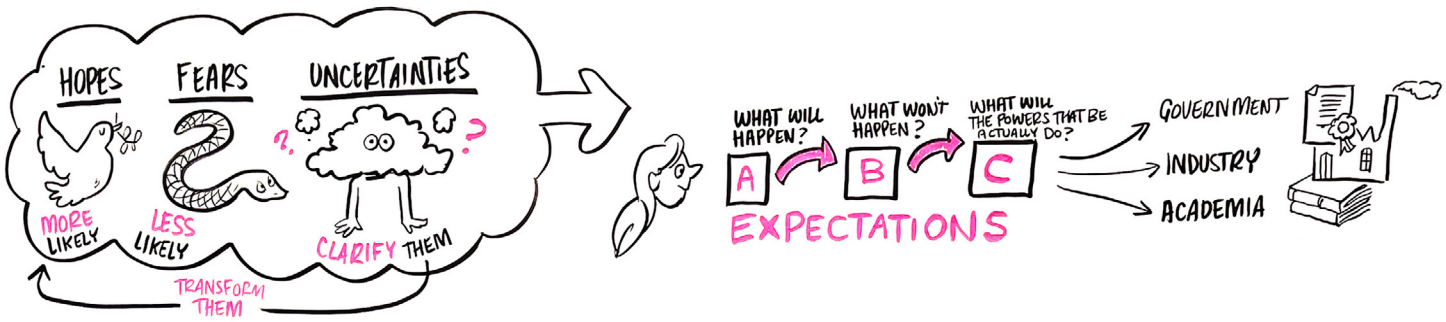
Large models also use significant computing power and water, with AI-related infrastructure predicted to use six times as much water as Denmark in 2027.

Dr Roach closed with a prompt to guide the discussions ahead:



"How do we ensure AI empowers people in their daily lives, rather than suppressing them?"

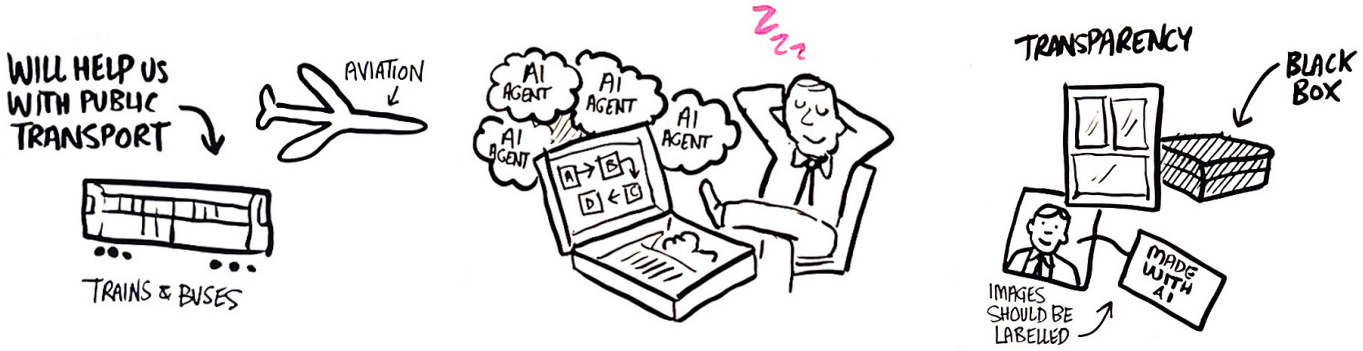
Interactive Session: Mapping Hopes, Fears and Uncertainties



The next part of the day involved a series of interactive tasks.

First, participants mapped their hopes, fears, and uncertainties about AI. Each table focused on one of two themes: the future of work or the future of skills.

AI and the Future of Work



Hopes

Participants hoped AI could take on repetitive or laborious tasks, leading to better-quality outputs, shorter working weeks, and more time for creativity or care work. They saw opportunities for delivering better services and support for neurodivergent workers.

Uncertainties

There was concern about dependency on AI tools, particularly if they become expensive or opaque over time. Who is accountable for AI-generated work? Should clients be told when AI is used? What happens if AI becomes self-referential?

> *"If AI draws from itself, will it get more incorrect or just self-confirm?"*

Fears

Participants voiced fears about AI shrinking teams, normalising mediocrity, or eliminating jobs outright. Receptionists and factory workers were mentioned. One concern was that work might become more intense if AI automates only the easier tasks, leaving humans with the most demanding ones. The fear of bias came up repeatedly, especially if AI is developed without input from social sciences or the humanities.

AI and the Future of Skills

Hopes

On skills, there was enthusiasm for AI's potential to personalise learning, support underserved learners (e.g., those with dyslexia or limited digital literacy), and improve healthcare through faster screening and diagnosis.

Uncertainties

Some groups raised concerns about dependency—whether AI might reduce curiosity, creative thinking, or discussion. And will some of the population be left behind if they don't adopt AI?

Fears

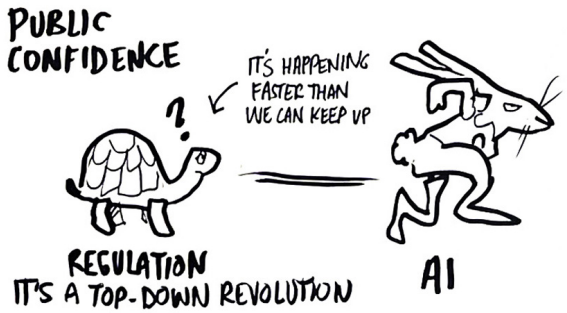
In creative industries, some participants worried about artistic work being scraped without consent. There were also fears of power becoming concentrated, overqualification without practical skills, and lack of emotional skills. "Smaller brains," one participant noted, fearing over-reliance could blunt critical faculties.

Expectations: What Should Be Done?

Groups were then asked what government, industry, academia, and civil society could do to support hopes and reduce risks.

For the Future of Work

Some called for regulation, including legal frameworks, sector-specific standards, and a national register tracking AI use.



Several felt AI shouldn't be used to filter CVs or make hiring decisions without human involvement. There was support for involving workers and the public in decisions about adopting new tools. Suggestions included clearer codes of conduct for employers and stronger copyright protections for creative work.

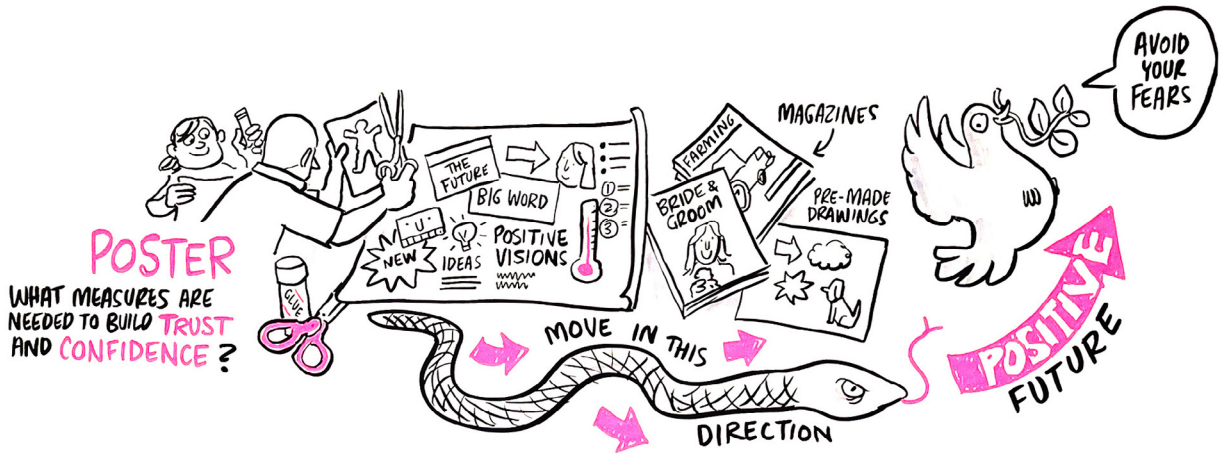
Others suggested support for displaced workers through community projects or universal basic income.

For the Future of Skills

AI literacy was seen as important across all levels, alongside better public understanding of its limitations. Some emphasised the need to preserve creativity and curiosity in education rather than focusing only on optimisation.

One attendee suggested protecting STEM education in case AI "goes down." Another said academia should ensure that uses of AI are clearly explainable and accountable.

Visioning: Positive and Constructive Futures for AI

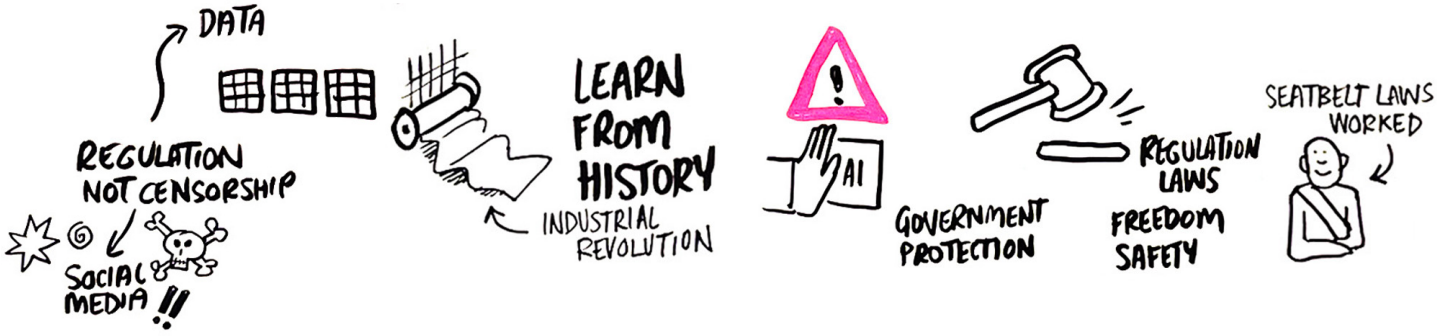


Participants created posters to share their visions for AI. Themes Included:

Regulation and Responsibility

Attendees imagined a future where clear laws protect people from misuse without stifling creativity or progress. If AI is here to stay, governance must move with it—not behind it. They didn't want regulation to become censorship, but also didn't want to see decisions on AI, its development and uses left unchecked.

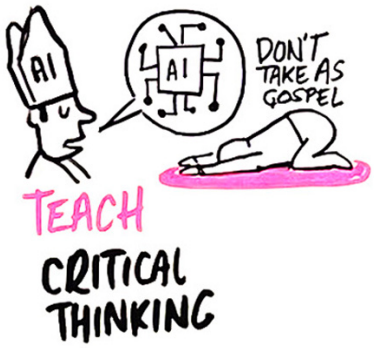
Some suggested we involve historians, learning from past experiences, like the adoption of seat belts and the industrial revolution in Wales.

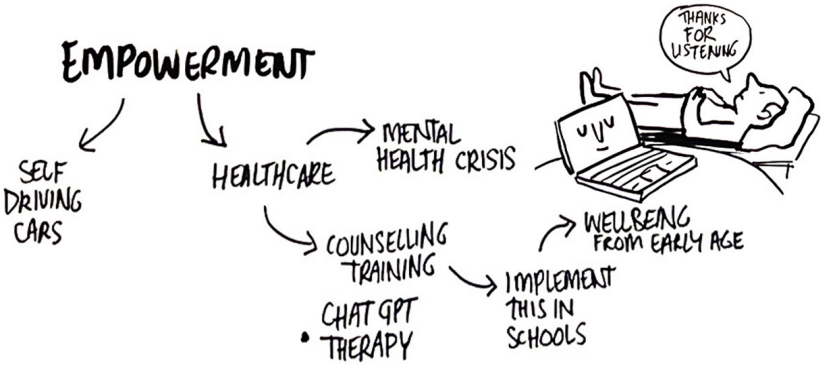


Education and Critical Thinking

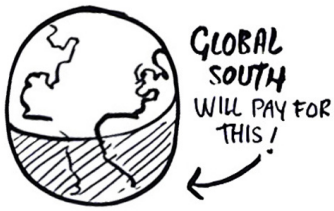
Many posters called for critical thinking in schools: helping students question AI, spot fake content and stay safe online.

One participant training in counselling recalled a student saying that an AI therapy tool had offered them the best help they'd ever received. Her message was hopeful: AI might expand support where human systems are overstretched.



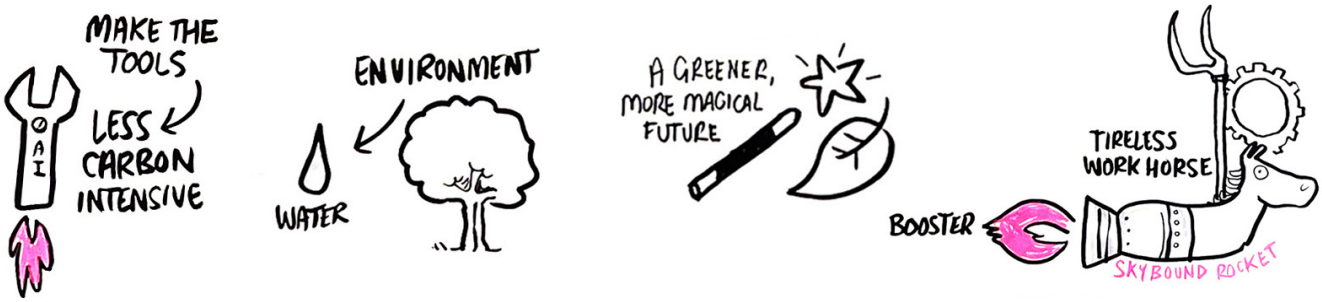


Environment and Global Impact

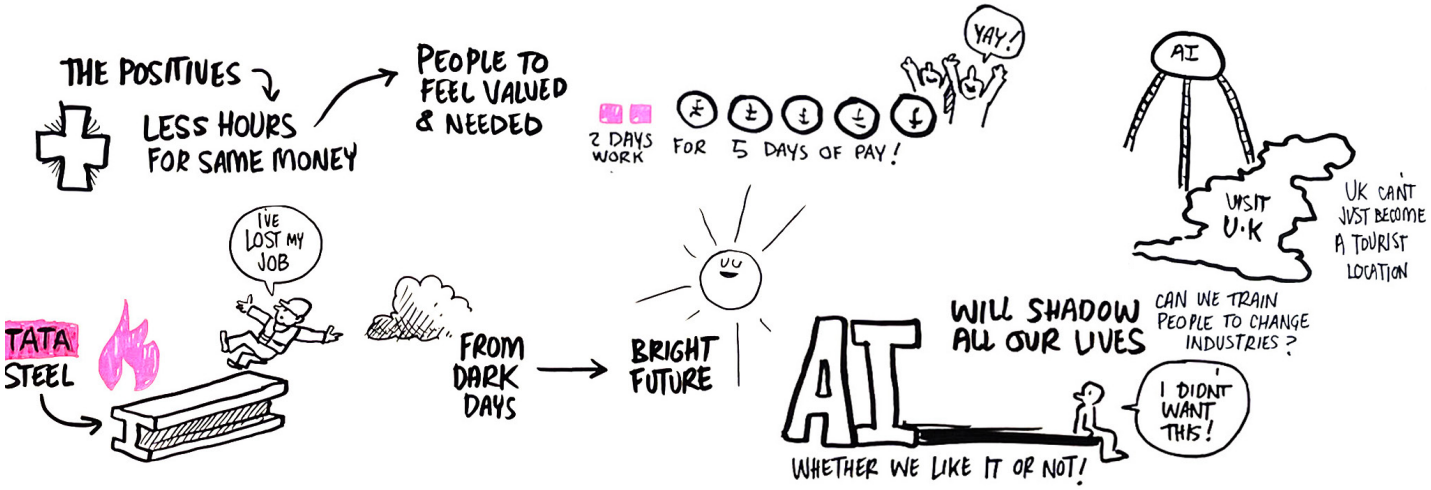


Several groups touched on AI's carbon and water use, pointing out that poorer countries might bear the brunt of that impact.

Rather than resisting AI entirely, groups focused on making it more sustainable through design choices, regulation, and open conversations about costs and trade-offs.

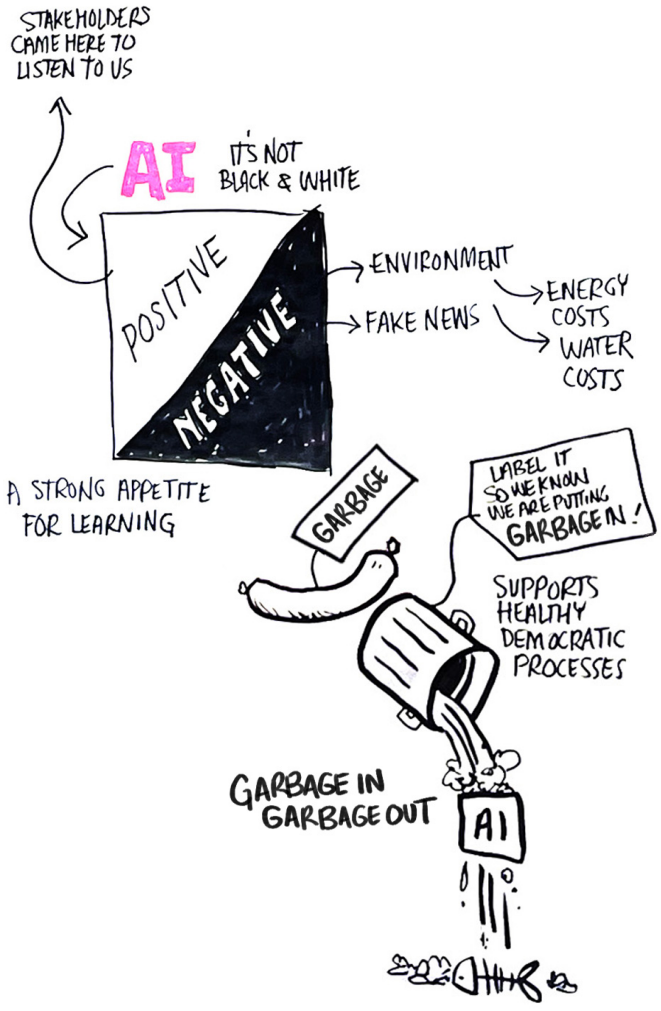


Work, Identity, and Social Change



Many posters reflected optimism about reshaping work. One well-received suggestion was that AI might allow us to work two days and get paid for five. Another group said that while AI might change our jobs, it shouldn't replace people's sense of being needed and valued. The mention of Tata Steel redundancies grounded the conversation in authentic, local experience. Can we anticipate such shifts and train people to move industries?

Open Discussion

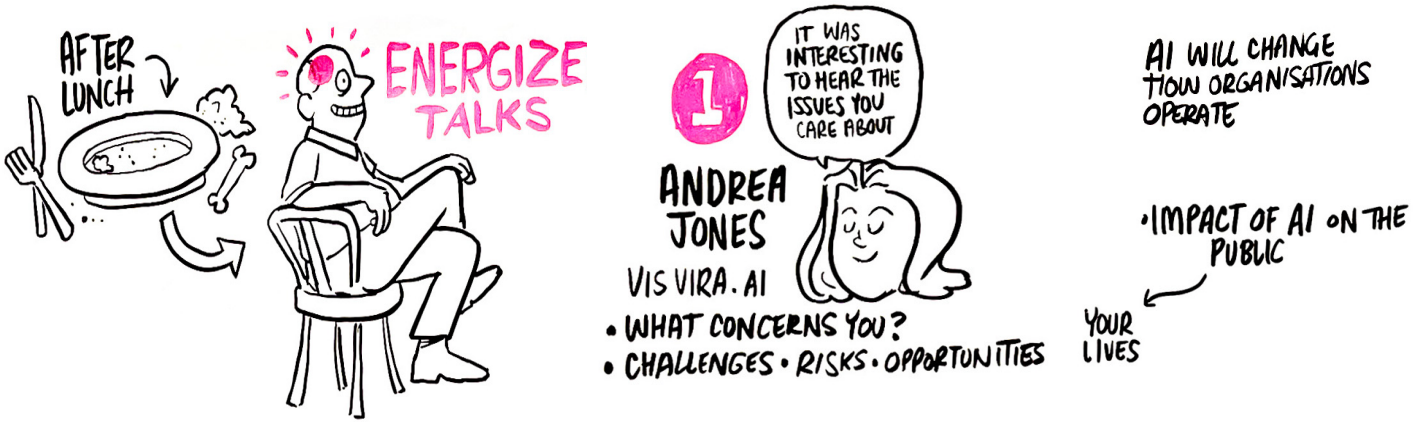


In the following discussion, participants reflected on how their views had changed. Some expressed growing concern, especially after learning about the extent of the environmental impact. But others felt reassured by seeing how many people cared and that experts were listening.

Opinions were mixed on how much regulation is needed, though most leaned toward stronger rules. Some worried that regulation would restrict innovation. One expert offered a different view: that regulation could actually foster innovation by imposing more explicit constraints within clear guidelines.

There was also debate about labelling. Should people be told when AI is involved in decision making, service delivery or product creation? Most leaned towards yes, but some stakeholders were more sceptical. One participant said people should be able to judge the message, not the method. Another suggested that labelling might be positive, helping people realise all the hidden ways AI is already benefiting them.

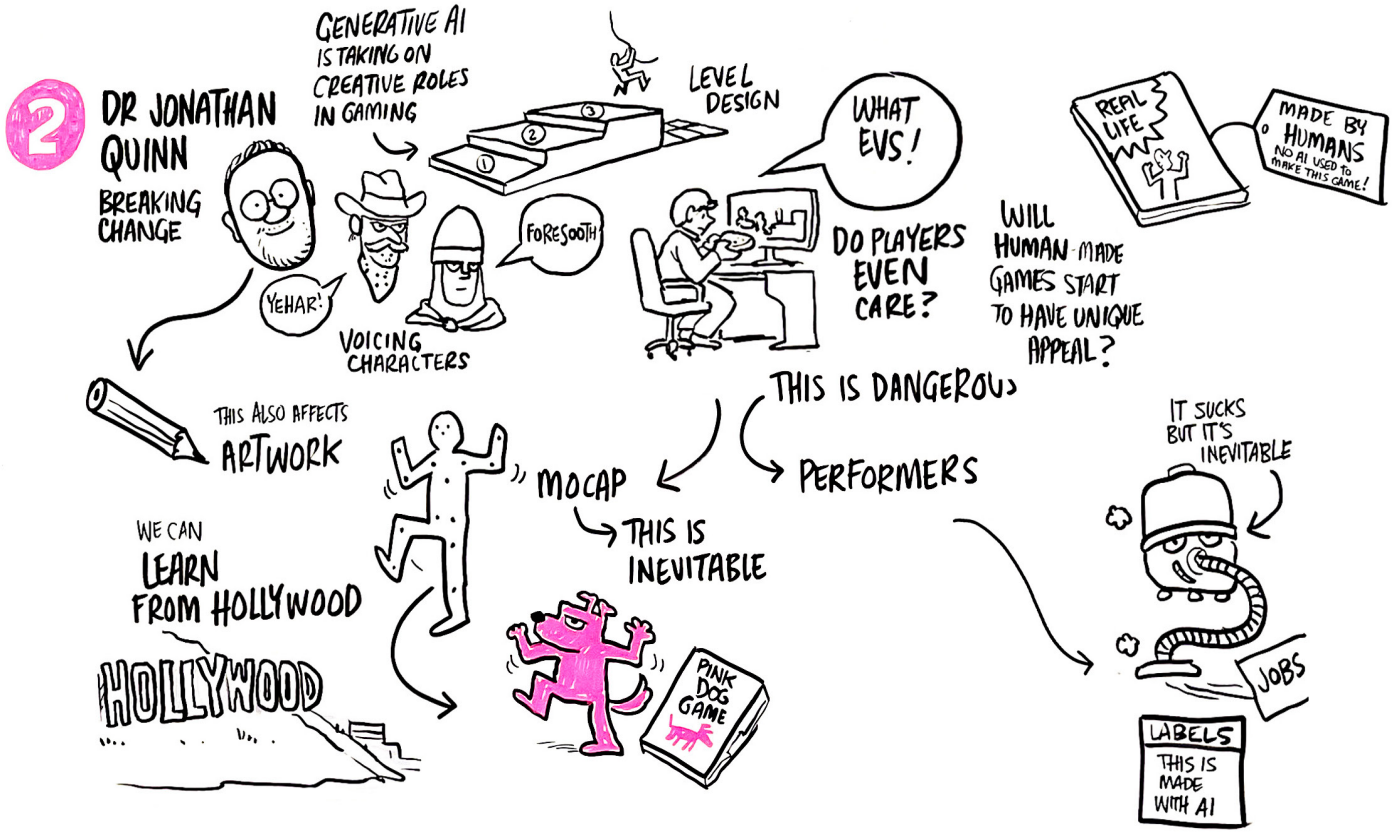
Lunchtime Learnings

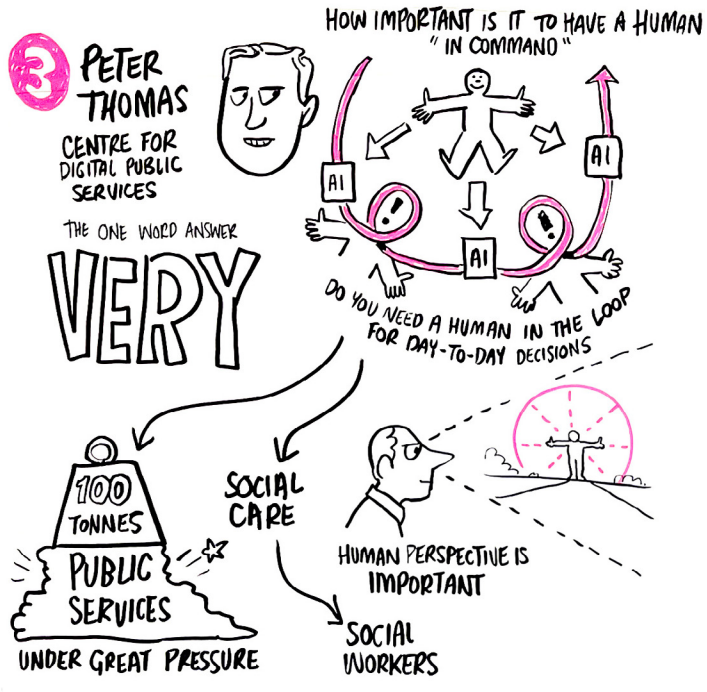


Four stakeholders shared insights from their lunchtime conversations:

Andrea Jones (VisVira.AI) asked: How will AI change how public and private organisations operate and behave—and what challenges, risks, and opportunities does that raise? Her group had an interesting discussion, touching on how AI is beginning to shift organisational behaviours and priorities across sectors.

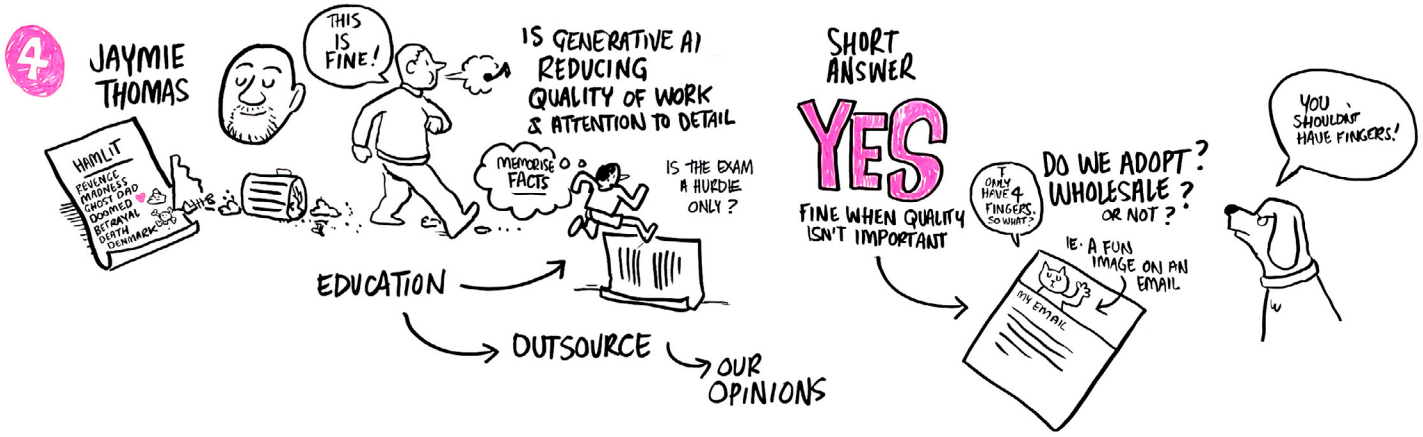
Dr Jonathan Quinn (Breaking Change) asked: As generative AI takes on more creative roles in games, do players care? Some in his group felt this shift could be damaging; others saw it as inevitable. There was interest in whether human-created content could become a mark of value and whether models from industries like Hollywood might offer ways to respond.



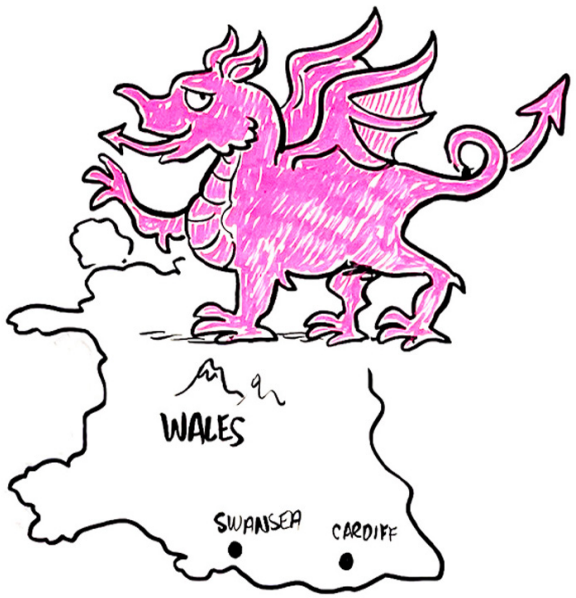


Peter Thomas (Centre for Digital Public Services) asked: How important is it to have a "human in command" for strategic AI decisions and a "human in the loop" for operational ones?
His group strongly supported the idea that human judgment should remain central—particularly in sensitive areas like social care. They felt that while AI can assist, human oversight is essential for trust, accountability, and nuance.

Jaymie Thomas (AI Wales) asked: Is generative AI reducing the quality of work and our attention to detail? Participants said AI is useful for low-stakes tasks—like creating quick visuals or placeholder text—but raised concerns about overuse. The group reflected on how students might be tempted to outsource thinking, especially when the goal is to pass a test.



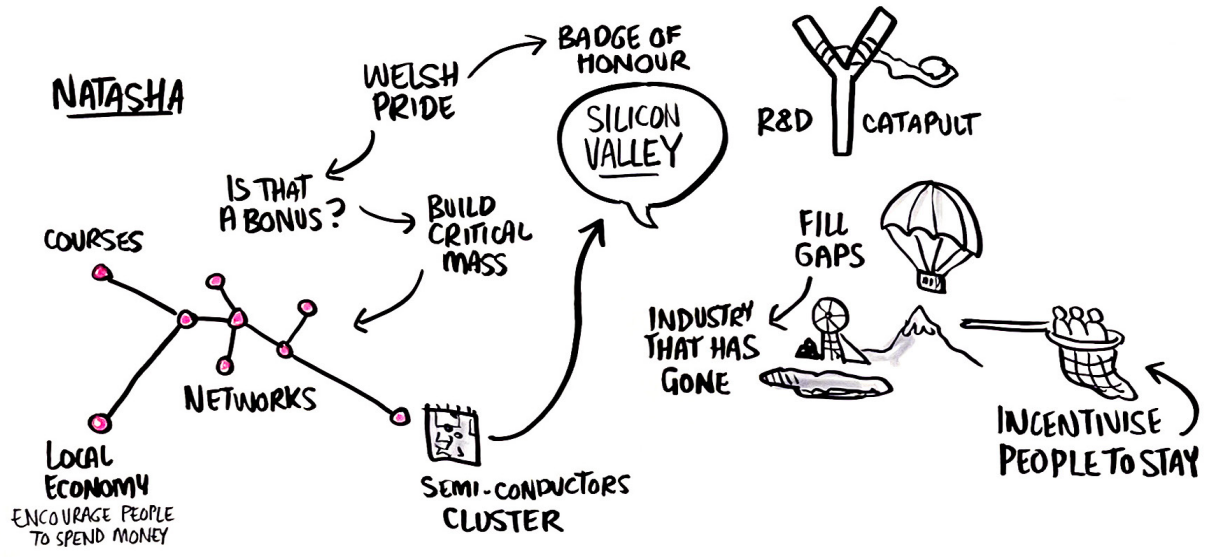
Final Group Discussions: Three Key Questions



In the final session, participants explored three questions.

1. How can we ensure that the benefits from AI developed in Wales have a visible local impact?

Participants liked the idea of seeing "Created in Wales" on AI products. However, some are worried it might raise doubts about quality unless Wales builds a strong reputation. Getting to that point, they said, would mean building critical mass —

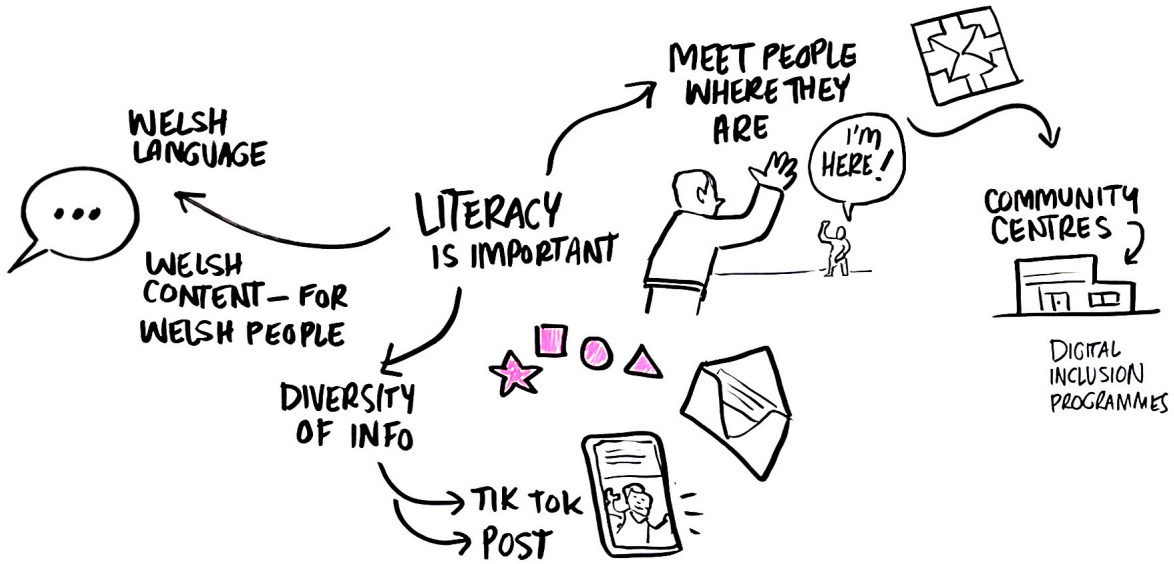


— more people working in AI, more public awareness, and better visibility for initiatives like AI Wales.

Participants questioned whether current job and funding structures do enough to ensure that people building AI in Wales live and spend locally rather than working here briefly and moving on. They highlighted semiconductor manufacturing and R&D centres as existing strengths to build on.

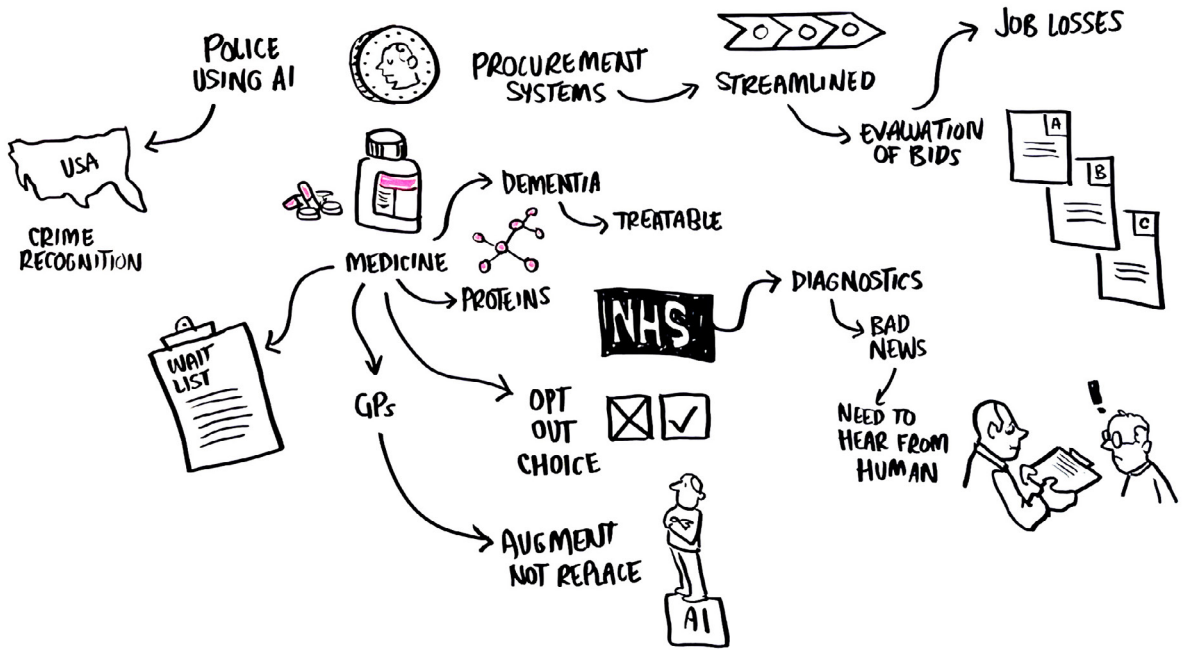
2. How can AI literacy be increased across the Welsh population, including for natural Welsh speakers?

Participants stressed the need for accessible, community-based AI education—not just formal learning. Materials should be simple, multilingual, and reach those offline.



They emphasised the need to meet people where they are, such as in community centres, and to build on the success of previous digital inclusion programmes.

While some content is being adapted for Welsh, participants said translation isn't enough, but instead, there was a desire for Welsh content for Welsh people.



3. What role would you like to see AI play in public services?

AI could streamline bid evaluations and support more efficient public service operations. There was interest in AI's potential for medical research and diagnostics; DeepMind's AlphaFold was cited as an example of how AI could accelerate breakthroughs in diseases like Alzheimer's.

At the same time, participants raised concerns. Facial recognition technology, especially in policing, was flagged as controversial and legally ambiguous.

In healthcare, the group explored how AI could help tackle GP workloads and waiting lists but questioned whether patients would want to be diagnosed or given sad news by a machine. There was agreement that AI should augment, not replace, staff.

Thank You for Coming

Thank you for your keen participation in the People's AI Stewardship Summit.

Your perspectives—whether hopeful, critical, or questioning—will be considered and used to inform how the Academy and our stakeholders continue to explore AI's role in society.

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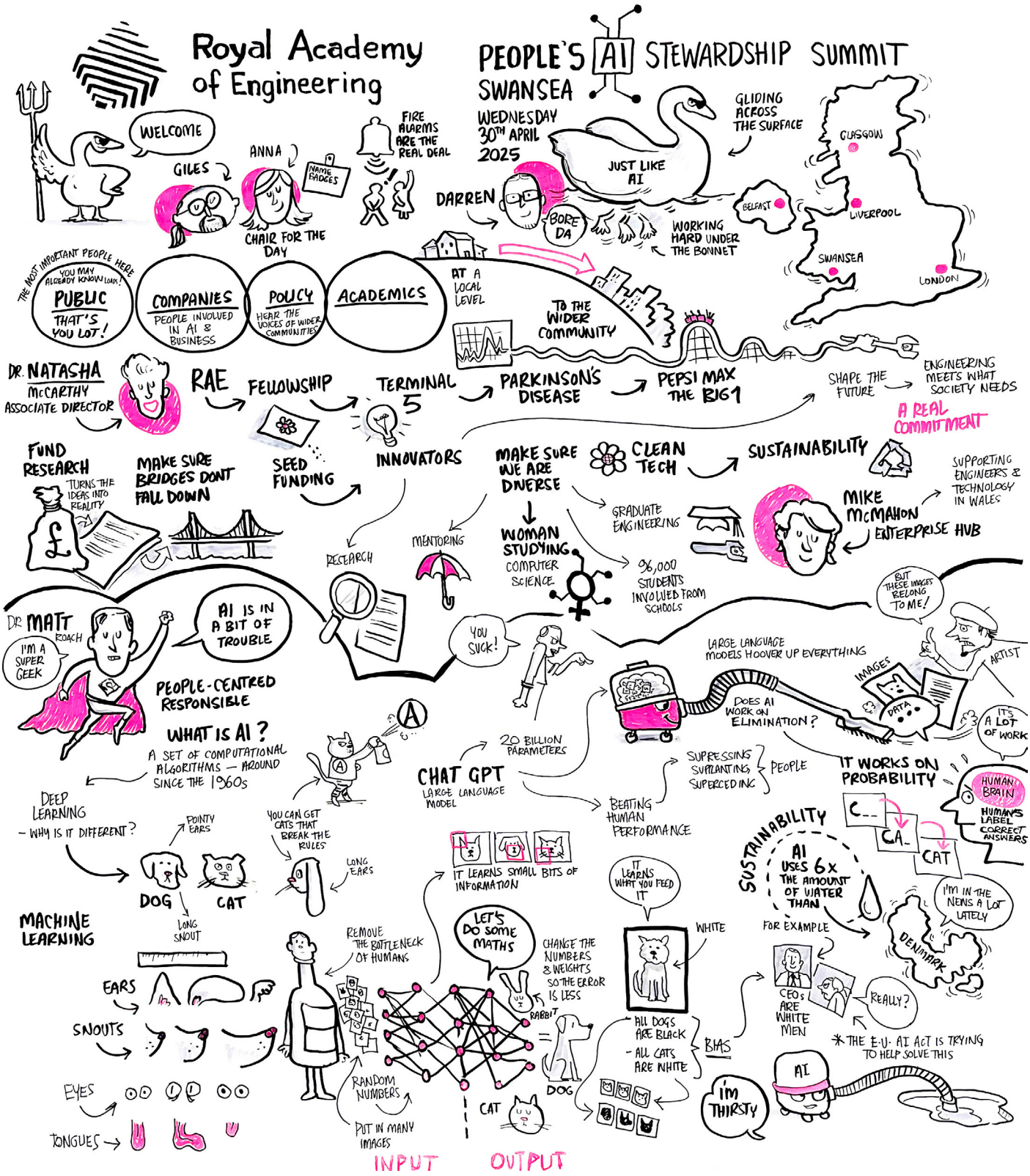
The Big Picture



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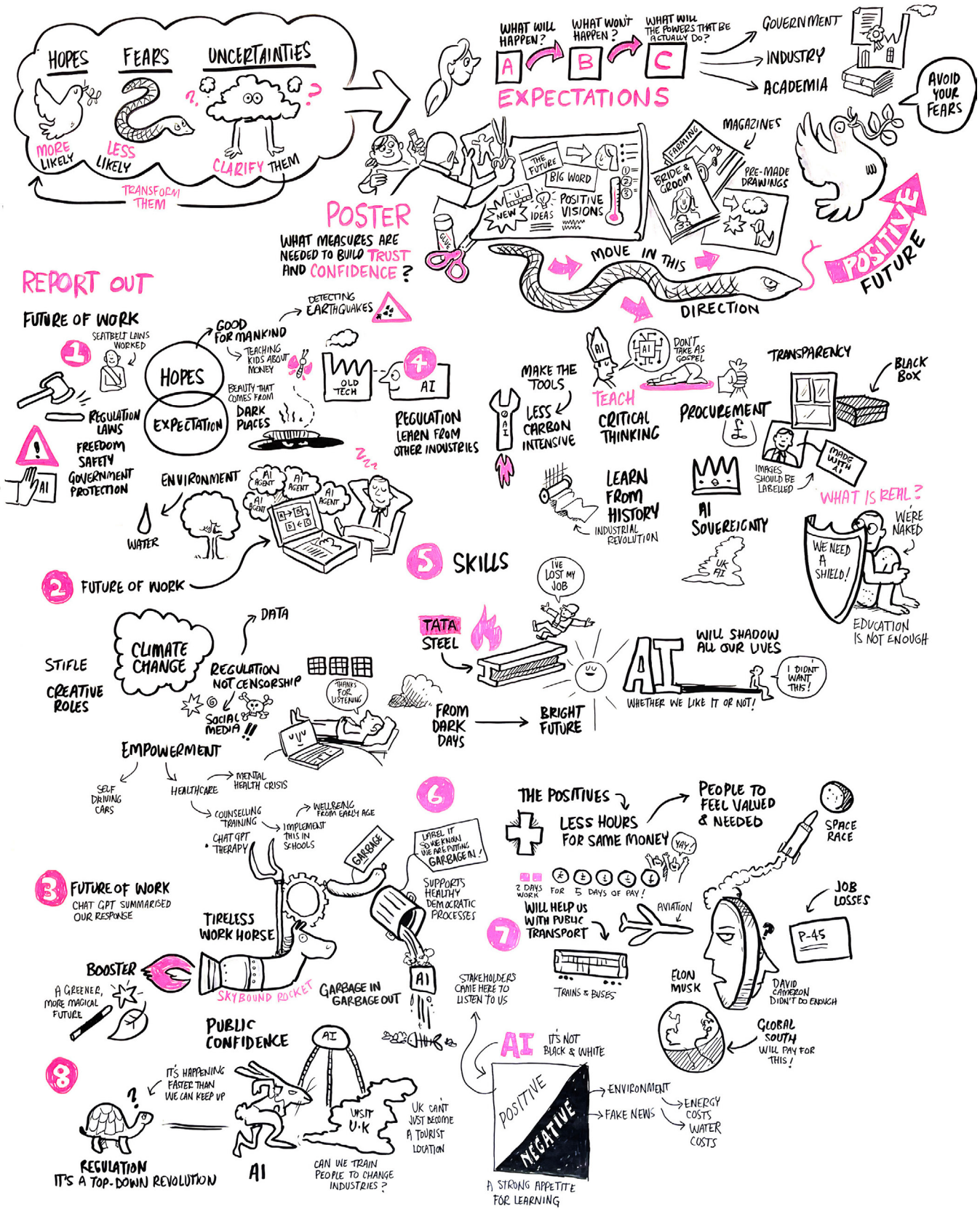
The People's AI Stewardship Summit
January 30th 2025

The Big Picture



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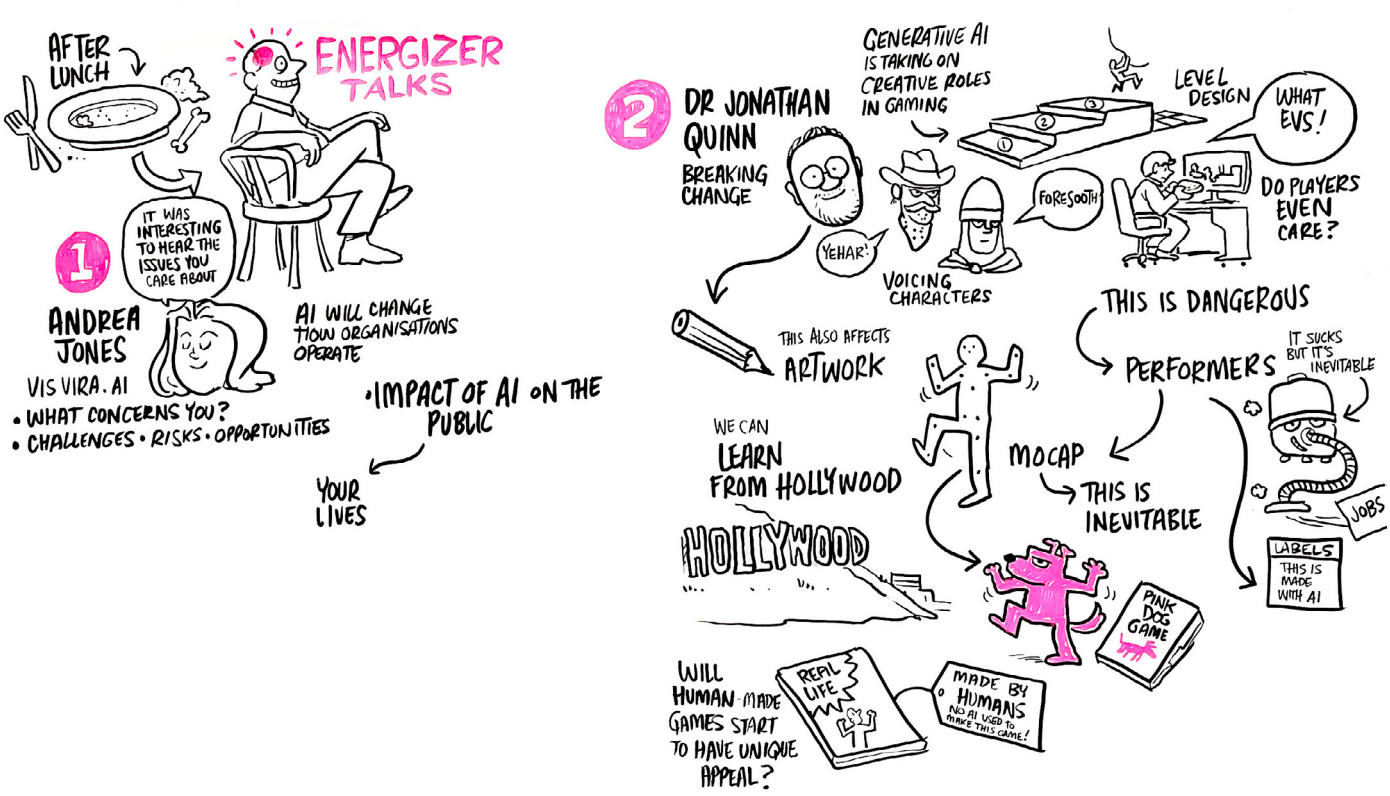

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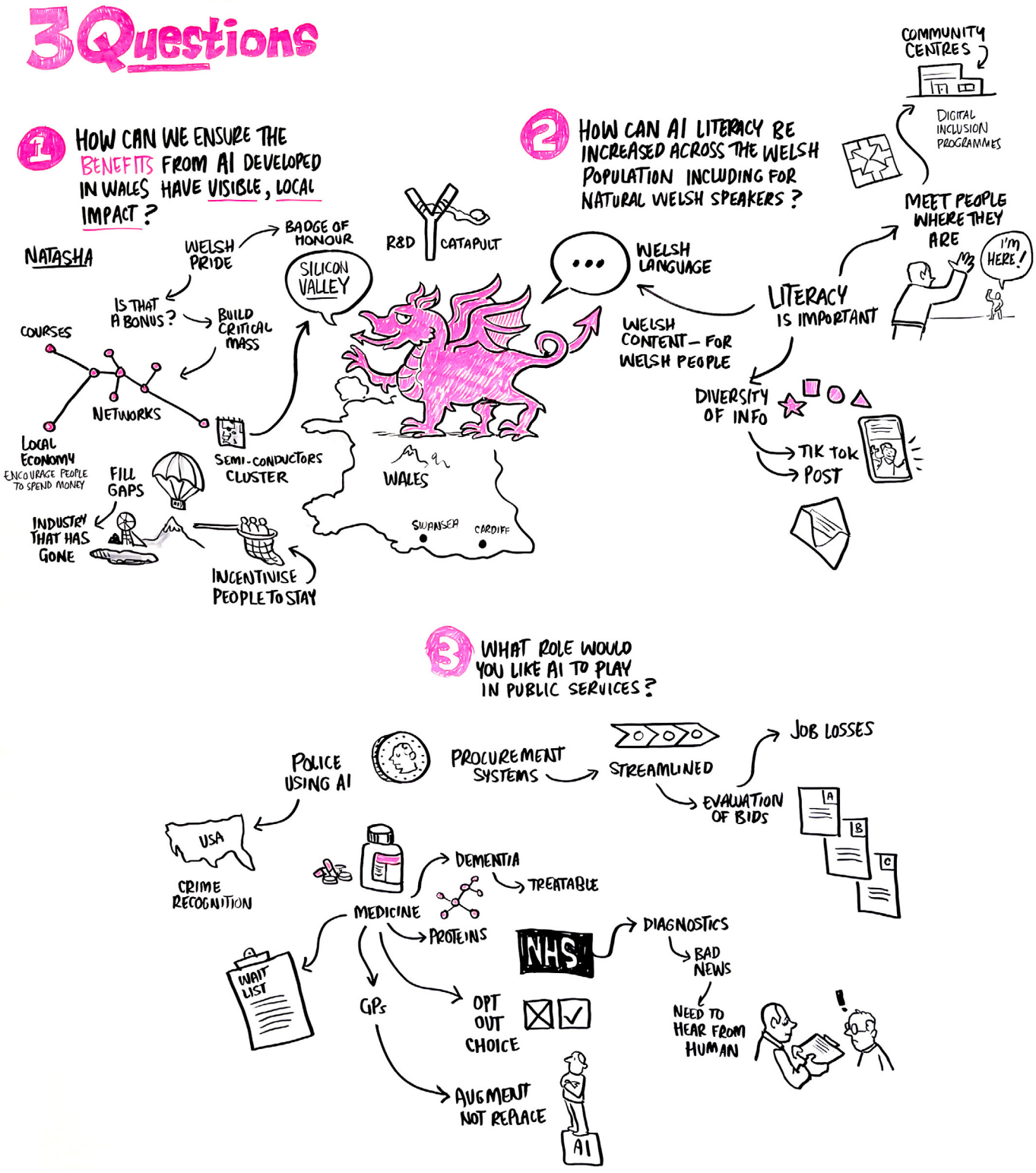

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