INSIGHTS SUMMARY

HOW CAN WE PREPARE THE WORKFORCE FOR AN AI-DRIVEN FUTURE?

GLOBAL GOALS / HYBRID WORKSHOP / 23 SEPT 2025

We would like to thank the following speakers:

Greg Behrman, Founder & CEO, **NationSwell**

Chymeka Olfonse, Managing Director, Adults & Household Supports, **Robin Hood**

Caitlyn Brazill, President, **Per Scholas**

Dr. John Frey, Senior Director & Chief Technologist, **Hewlett Packard Enterprise**

Moderator: John Kenny, Vice President, Citizenship, **Barclays**

This workshop, hosted with Barclays during the Business Fights Poverty Global Goals Summit, explored how artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping work and workforce readiness. Senior leaders from NationSwell, Per Scholas, Robin Hood and Hewlett Packard Enterprise shared evidence from their organisations and networks. They discussed AI's impact on entry-level jobs, skills requirements and employer expectations, while acknowledging persistent gaps in education and access.

The conversation also surfaced tensions between efficiency and equity, and between technological acceleration and human-centred development. Insights highlighted the urgent need for practical cross-sector collaboration to reimagine training, safeguard vulnerable workers, and ensure that AI adoption strengthens resilience and creates pathways to meaningful, decent jobs.

> ***The biggest mistake that we could make right now is to view AI as an opponent. So, we've embraced a goal of becoming an AI-native workforce developer.***
>
> **Caitlyn Brazill, President, *Per Scholas***

INSIGHT 1: **REBUILD TALENT PIPELINES WITH AI-DRIVEN ENTRY ROLES**

The workshop identified a structural challenge: AI is disrupting traditional career ladders, raising risks for entry-level opportunities. Per Scholas reported that job requirements are shifting fast as manual tasks are automated, with training now focusing on using AI tools rather than replacing them. With 30,000 alumni already earning up to 2.5 times their pre-training incomes, Per Scholas is offering AI-native programs that integrate prompt engineering and AI tutoring. Yet, Robin Hood highlighted a market "softening" where trained candidates struggle to secure

placements, particularly in non-tech roles. This mismatch threatens the supply of early career talent and may stall diversity efforts. Participants stressed the need for companies to co-design alternative models, such as apprenticeships and fellowships, that combine earning with learning. The risk is a "diamond-shaped" workforce structure, where fewer entry points limit long-term progression. The desired outcome is resilient pipelines where AI augments rather than eliminates the first rungs of opportunity.

It's important for us to ensure that the most vulnerable communities understand the power of AI because its potential, when intentionally designed, broadens opportunity rather than exacerbating inequities and inequality.

Chymeka Olfonse, Managing Director, Adults & Household Supports, *Robin Hood*

INSIGHT 2: ADDRESS INEQUALITIES THROUGH BESPOKE UPSKILLING AND ACCESS

A recurring theme was inequality. Educational and digital divides – literacy, numeracy, internet, devices – remain acute in 2025, despite AI's reach. Robin Hood described New York nonprofits' split between advanced adopters and those unable to apply AI at all. Breakout discussions added risks of gender inequality from unequal digital access. Evidence showed that disadvantaged groups require tailored, context-specific upskilling. Oxford University's rapid rollout of prompt engineering training was cited as a model for meeting learners where they are. Workshop notes urged investment in relational and soft skills alongside technical capacity, to prevent exclusion through over-automation. Risks include widening distrust in institutions if AI is imposed without first understanding local barriers. Bespoke pathways, supported by community organisations, were seen as essential for turning AI into a levelling force rather than an amplifier of gaps.

INSIGHT 3: REDEFINE SKILLS FOR BLENDED HUMAN–AI TEAMS

AI is introducing not only new jobs but new team structures. NationSwell noted that managing "blended" teams of human colleagues and AI agents is an emerging skill for leaders. Breakout notes reinforced this, highlighting roles as "managers of AI" rather than direct task-doers. Dr Frey stressed demand for skills not taught in academia, such as data management, software efficiency and responsible AI use. Per Scholas is already embedding these skills into immersive training, and HPE has mandated responsible AI training for all staff. Risks include academic institutions moving too slowly, leaving non-traditional pathways as the main training ground. With fewer than 10% of AI pilots reaching production, the ability to critically assess whether AI is the right tool is also crucial. The goal is a workforce ready to lead AI-enabled teams with both technical competence and managerial adaptability.

There are lots of opportunities for non-traditional pathways with AI.

Dr. John Frey, Senior Director & Chief Technologist, *Hewlett Packard Enterprise*

INSIGHT 4: BUILD CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATIVES TO ACCELERATE LEARNING

The pace of AI change is outstripping traditional institutional responses. To manage risks and scale opportunities, participants called for cross-sector collaboratives. NationSwell's Workforce Innovation Collaborative, launched with partners including Barclays, was presented as a mechanism for joint investment, shared research, and rapid learning. Evidence showed that cohorts and communities of practice allow organisations to test use cases, avoid pitfalls and fast-track adoption. Barclays' LifeSkills programme and Robin Hood's AI Poverty Challenge illustrate how funders

and nonprofits can pilot scalable approaches. Risks are high: under 10% of pilots mature, often due to cost and poor fit. Workshop notes warned against fragmented action, which wastes resources. The intended outcome is coordinated vehicles where businesses, nonprofits and funders co-invest in AI-enabled solutions that deliver measurable workforce benefits.

In a moment like this, you really need to go together. Collaboration is the vehicle to learn, co-invest, act and manage risks while realising opportunities.

Greg Behrman, Founder & CEO, *NationSwell*

INSIGHT 5: **SAFEGUARD CREATIVITY, RESILIENCE AND HUMAN IDENTITY**

Beyond skills and structures, participants raised deeper concerns about preserving what it means to be human in an AI-shaped world. Moderator reflections pointed to the risk of a "dystopian future" where critical thinking is lost. Breakouts warned of AI undermining creativity, resilience and individuality if learning becomes over-automated. Discussion also highlighted risks of bias, misinformation and misuse of data, which could weaken trust and accountability. HPE's emphasis on cultivating "curiosity and suspicion" among staff exemplified approaches to maintaining human oversight. The challenge is to integrate AI into education and work without removing the "struggle" that builds determination and grit. The envisioned outcome is an AI-enabled workforce where human judgement, empathy and creativity remain central – seen not as expendable, but as differentiators in an automated economy.

CONCLUSION

The session pointed to three system shifts needed for an AI-driven future of work. First, reorienting training from discrete skills to integrated pathways that combine earning, learning and AI fluency. Second, moving from unequal access to tailored, inclusive models that address persistent digital and education gaps. Third, replacing fragmented pilots with collaborative vehicles that pool resources and accelerate effective practice. Across all, a system barrier was evident: entrenched silos between employers, educators and community organisations hinder coordinated responses. The next step is convening business, funders and training providers to co-design shared entry-level pipelines, anchored in measurable outcomes such as placement rates, data skills and resilience indicators.

RESOURCES

- **The Barclays Climate Tech Podcast – Episode 4 – AI: The commercial opportunity for climate tech**

  Tune in to hear from climate tech founders their lessons learnt in meeting the energy demand from AI-focused data centres and how they've used AI in their technology to support clients. https://home.barclays/insights/sustainability-insights/the-barclays-climate-tech-podcast/

- **Hewlett Packard Enterprise – AI efficiency: Empowering sustainable artificial intelligence deployment**

  Highlights sustainable AI deployment, emphasising energy-efficient infrastructure, optimised software, and operational strategies to cut carbon emissions and environmental impact while supporting responsible innovation. https://www.hpe.com/psnow/doc/a50013815enw

- **NationSwell — Inclusive Approaches to Workforce Innovation**

  Explores how organisations are embedding inclusive approaches into workforce innovation, highlighting cross-sector strategies that address disruption, scale solutions and ensure marginalised communities access AI-driven opportunities. https://nationswell.com/inclusive-approaches-to-workforce-innovation/

- **Per Scholas — The future of AI will be built on the factory floor**

  Analyses how AI adoption is transforming training needs, particularly in manufacturing and technical roles, and details Per Scholas' approach to preparing tech talent for emerging AI-enabled sectors. https://enterprise.perscholas.org/the-future-of-ai-will-be-built-on-the-factory-floor/

- **Robin Hood — Preparing Our Children for the AI-Driven World**

  Examines how AI will reshape education and workforce readiness, with a focus on ensuring disadvantaged children gain early access to digital tools and learning pathways. https://robinhood.org/news/preparing-our-children-for-the-ai-driven-world/