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[00:00:00] **Emily Brennan:** I'm Emily Brennan, communication manager and host. In this series, we explore the intersection of future skills and innovation, uncovering how emerging technology is shaping the workforce landscape. In today's episode, we turn our focus to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, IFATE, and their crucial [00:00:30] role in aligning skills development with labour market needs.

[00:00:34] We'll discuss how their work intersects with the Workforce Foresighting Hub, driving innovation and responding to industrial demands across multiple sectors, and the opportunities for both industry and government to adapt to these new demands. Thank you again for joining us for this podcast episode.

[00:00:52] I'm delighted to have two new colleagues with us today. And we'll start with some introductions. Could I come to you first, Jonathan?

[00:00:58] **Jonathan Mitchell:** Yes. Hi, [00:01:00] I'm Jonathan Mitchell. I'm one of the Deputy Directors at the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. And my work is concerned with future skills and innovation and how we detect labour market change and make sure that that is reflected in the skills products that we approve.

[00:01:17] **Emily Brennan:** Brilliant. Thank you very much. And Richard.

[00:01:19] **Richard Clewley:** Yeah. I'm Richard Clewley, um, senior policy advisor, and I work alongside Jonathan in future skills and innovation. And I, my work focuses on the system [00:01:30] responses and technical qualifications and skills training that we want to flow from all of this lovely insight that we generate.

[00:01:36] **Emily Brennan:** Brilliant. That's fantastic. Thank you very much. Um, so this is a really exciting episode. We haven't, um, had this sort of insight or discussion before as part of this series. So first of all, maybe for, um, some of the viewers who aren't familiar, what is it that I fake do?

[00:01:55] **Jonathan Mitchell:** So, um, IFATE's existed since 2017 [00:02:00] and at its absolute heart, the job, uh, that we, that we exist to do is to make sure that the skills products that we approve that are nationally funded and a part of

the English skills system, um, are specified to meet the requirements of employers and also learners, but probably it's fair to say principally employers.

[00:02:22] Um, And, um, our work has been to embed a set of reforms that [00:02:30] have, uh, brought employer requirements absolutely into the heart of that. So my colleagues at IFATE will work with groups of employers Um, from across the economy really, um, they will sit down with them. They will establish what their skills requirements are in a particular set of occupations.

[00:02:48] We'll sort of write all of that down and print it out into a nice set of occupational standards. And from that flows the learning outcomes of apprenticeships, technical qualifications of various different [00:03:00] kinds, um, and support to the rest of the skills system as well. That's, that's our absolute job. And if you think that in the last kind of.

[00:03:08] what's it, seven, eight years now. Um, we, we have been doing that work. They're getting on for 700 different occupational standards that employers have specified with us. There's a range of technical qualifications of different types, level three, such as T levels and levels four and five, such as HTQs. Um, we, we have, I think, [00:03:30] laid the foundations in the last sort of seven or eight years.

[00:03:33] of a quite coherent skill system that is founded on the requirements of employers, um, and that does therefore, you know, stand a fighting chance of meeting those employers, uh, needs.

[00:03:47] **Emily Brennan:** The Workforce Foresighting Hub, um, has been set up to look at that future skills piece, um, and the alignment with emerging technology.

[00:03:54] Um, how does the work of the Workforce Foresighting Hub tie in with your work?

[00:03:59] **Jonathan Mitchell:** So I [00:04:00] think I think we're at an interesting moment, um, right now for the skills system and indeed for IfATE itself. So I think one of the things that's worth me saying is that, you know, uh, it is known that the days of IfATE are numbered and the days of Skills England are approaching over the horizon.

[00:04:16] Um, and with that is coming a sort of subtle but important shift, I think, in terms of, um, in terms of how the system is going to be set up to respond to the priorities [00:04:30] of the nation. So as I said, as I described

earlier, you know, we've taken a lot of, um, our lead from what employers have come to us and sat down in a room with us and said, this is what, this is what we need right now.

[00:04:40] Um, but I think that the government's aspiration is to add a slightly more strategic approach to that aligned to an industrial strategy. So really think about where is the opportunity for growth for the country. And, um, And, you know, how can that be met or where is that contingent on, on, on the evolution of the [00:05:00] skill system?

[00:05:01] Um, and the Workforce Foresighting Hub is a, is actually, you know, a really, a really critical part of that. Um, because one of the things that employers are really good at doing is saying, this is what we need right now. Probably yesterday in reality, this is, these are the skills that, that will enable us to meet the objectives, the capabilities that we have, um, or want to want to realize.

[00:05:25] Um, but because they are, you [00:05:30] know, overwhelmed by their need to address today's problems. And, you know, let's face it, it's been, it's been a tough few years for employers and they've had quite a lot to, to, um, arrest their attention. They don't always have what it takes to really be able to look at that longer horizon where new technologies are coming.

[00:05:52] They're very possibly aware of those technologies, but actually converting the implications of those technologies into the skills that [00:06:00] they will need to have in their workforce. Well, you know, it takes, it takes us a bit of time to do that with the skills they need today when we're sitting down with our trailblazer groups or route panels.

[00:06:09] So it's asking a lot from employers to be able to do that. to do that as effectively, um, as the sort of space carved out by the hub to give that the depth and breadth of thought that it has. And I think the other really critical thing to say about that is that in many areas, you know, and we're seeing that with the [00:06:30] reports coming forward from the hub right now, those are the areas in which we can expect to see, um, The government really wanting to catalyze growth and all of that kind of thing.

[00:06:42] Um, and you know, you might have seen in the industrial strategy, green paper that, you know, one of the things that's absolutely clear is that ability to convert innovation into commercial benefit for the, for the, for the. the populace, um, is a real aspiration there. [00:07:00] Um, we know that the UK is pretty good at innovation.

[00:07:04] We also know, um, that we have a more uneven, kind of history of being able to convert that innovation into commercialized benefit. And some of that at least is contingent on having the right skilled workforce. So from my point of view, seeing that kind of general shift from the way that.

[00:07:26] That our priorities are set from a [00:07:30] completely demand led, I think, approach to, to one that blends demand and strategy and, um, the hub's ability to bring together technologists, innovators, employers, of course, and others to spend the time it takes to do that thinking is, is really, really important and clearly enables us to, to, to detect, and then of course, you know, in the work of Richard, respond to what, um, what those changes [00:08:00] will, the demands those changes will place on the skills system.

[00:08:02] **Emily Brennan:** Yeah.

[00:08:03] **Richard Clewley:** Yeah. And I think to add to that, the challenges of the awarding sector as well. And I'm really, I'm really pleased and really enthusiastic about the educator role in the hubs outputs because the awarding organizations and higher education providers Also often end up acting on weak signals because it's difficult to aggregate and even acquire those [00:08:30] employer signals of demand for workforce, perhaps even in over a short time horizon, let alone over long time, longer time horizon.

[00:08:38] So, It's, it's great that the educator side is captured and then fed in because that's critical to providing the system responses that we want to, and I've had many conversations already on the back of, um, hub output with awarding organizations and higher education providers that are really excited about the connection with the occupational standards and the [00:09:00] educators viewpoint being factored in from scratch.

[00:09:03] **Emily Brennan:** That's great.

[00:09:04] **Jonathan Mitchell:** I just add to that as well. I think the, um, You know, so I've been on this journey, funnily enough, right since the sort of first twinkle in the eye of the, uh, workforce foresighting hub. So I was lucky enough in my first few years at IfATE to, uh, to go on a bit of a study tour with Paul Shakespeare and others, you know, to, to go and have a look at some of the ways in which this was being done in Switzerland and Austria and Germany and [00:09:30] other places.

[00:09:31] Um, And right from that very moment, you know, the, the value of what the hub was aiming to do was so evident. I think at that time, you know, it

felt to me at that time that we were so busy trying to kind of lay the foundations of the whole system that could be quite honest with you. It might have been, might have felt in some ways like a bit, bit, bit more than we could really cope with at that moment.

[00:09:55] But you know, it's been lovely to have come along that journey. Um, with all [00:10:00] of these great partners and we've never really lost the contact between IFATE and this, this piece, because we knew in the end, you know, the job of IFATE or in future skills, England will not just be to kind of create a system, but also to maintain it and that, you know, we, we are a hundred percent ready to operate in that space and the hub has also reached a sort of place of maturity where, you know, it is supplying the things that we need.

[00:10:26] Thanks As part of that very early stage, you know, [00:10:30] right from that, uh, you know, those first few days in Switzerland, um, the, the, um, you know, Paul already had in mind the idea of the kind of skills value chain. Um, we know, uh, we have a role to play in the middle of that value chain. You know, it's not just as Richard was just saying, it's not just about detecting the change, but it is also about.

[00:10:52] making something happen as a result. Um, it'd be lovely to have some really fascinating insight. It is all fascinating, but, actually, [00:11:00] unless this converts into actual system responses, we might as well have not bothered. So, um, we can see our role in the skills value chain. There are other roles further down that chain, which, you know, which also need to come to pass.

[00:11:13] Um, but we, we absolutely want to play that role and get the best that we can out of this brilliant work that's being done.

[00:11:20] **Emily Brennan:** So, How is your work evolving? Um, and how is that developing with the systems that the Workforce Foresighting Hub has been able to [00:11:30] develop?

[00:11:30] **Jonathan Mitchell:** This is really the critical bit of this.

[00:11:33] I think, you know, when we started in 2017 at IfATE, um, we were, we inherited a sort of approach to the creation of occupational standards and the maintenance of those that was quite, quite an analog one. And to be honest, we. We're still running that to one degree or another. Um, one of the things that's become apparent since then, and perhaps particularly in the last sort of 18 months, two years or so, [00:12:00] is that there is now scope with artificial

intelligence, with the ability to manipulate, data at quite a scale and things like that to move from an approach where we're sitting down in a room with 10, 15, 20 employers and saying, what do you need?

[00:12:15] Um, to being able to draw on a much deeper, broader, richer, more up to date, longer term, you know, body of data, um, to be able to detect the changes that are [00:12:30] happening and, and, and. flow those into the responses that we, that we, we need to have, we've been wanting to do that for some time. And so what we, what we saw as an opportunity here, and I think to be fair, it was an opportunity that had been foreseen by the workforce foresighting hub, who are supporting some of the work that we are doing, um, was a whole load of insight and evidence beginning to emerge at what we, what we've been calling horizon two, that more, more distant horizon that was.

[00:12:59] Coming [00:13:00] together in a very valuable data cube. And that is at the heart of the hubs and foresighting process. And we knew that we wanted to add to that, not just that kind of horizon to database a bit more at what I would call horizon one. So what is actually happening in the labor market right now, even.

[00:13:20] You know, what Richard was referring to is those sometimes quite weak signals, where stuff is starting to happen, but we haven't quite seen it played through yet, right up to, yes, actually this thing has, has already become [00:13:30] the norm in whatever occupation it might be. So bringing that open access data that the hub has had together with wider data that is about, you know, kind of labor market vacancy data, uh, various.

[00:13:46] bits and pieces from the Office for National Statistics, what used to be called the Unit for Future Skills and is now part of Skills England, Mac, you know, all these kinds of things. Being able to bring all of that together, by the way, noting that the hub itself quite welcomes [00:14:00] access to that and, you know, and to be able to triangulate some of its insights, um, is, is really important.

[00:14:06] And I think the, the key Benefit here is not expecting employers to have in their heads everything that we need to know in order to be able to make the most forward leaning system, but instead being able to say to them, this is what we actually know, um, this is the evidence we have, this is how confident we are based on the quality of that data and so forth.[00:14:30]

[00:14:30] And we therefore are suggesting, you know, that this, this, this is what needs to happen. And there will always be human validation in that

process, just as there is in the hub cycles itself. But, um, but that is the big, the big shift, I think. And we're doing that through a project called Skills Compass, but it is powerfully aligned to The sort of underpinning architecture that has been laid down by the hub on which we can build.

[00:14:56] And it is a source of actually immense pleasure to [00:15:00] me that you've got two government bodies coming together, um, to collaborate in distinct but complementary ways on something that we, that we really need to do. Um, and I don't know, Richard, but do you want to go on and say something about you know, how that sort of lands with the people that we're sharing it with in terms of sort of the awarding market and so forth?

[00:15:21] **Richard Clewley:** Yeah, I think it's, it's Picking up on something you said that, um, Jonathan, it's those patterns in the big data sets that are really, really exciting. [00:15:30] We, we can't, no matter how big our sample of employers, no matter how much manual work we put in, we couldn't get those, those patterns. And at the moment, you know, we're looking at using those patterns in two sort of primary ways.

[00:15:42] First of all, again, as Jonathan said about maintaining the edifice. We need to be able to detect those patterns and feed that data into the occupational standards. So we might need to revise occupational standards, keep that content up to date, keep it, keep them delivering skills that are in demand. We might even need [00:16:00] to build new occupations.

[00:16:01] So there might be signals for something new entirely. But also the Outside world as well from the flow of system responses. So the awarding organizations, the skills bootcamp providers, the higher education providers, we really, we really need to be able to curate and package those signals that are in the big data sets.

[00:16:22] And that's the challenge. That's the exciting thing I think about, about what, you know, where we're at at the moment and that's the aspiration of skills compass. [00:16:30] Ultimately, you know, we want to be able to publish and share the insight for the benefit of the wider skill system. Mm-hmm for the benefit of the awarding organizations and the educators.

[00:16:39] And it goes back to the skills value, train chain, um, training the trainers as well as. producing the sort of curated modular provision that we want to see. So it's, it's got all of those, all of those uses. And I think it all comes back to those, those patterns in, in the big data sets, which is [00:17:00] something

we've, we've long since left in a lusted after him with Jonathan, but now they seem, you know, they're here.

[00:17:06] Um, so it's, it's really exciting time.

[00:17:08] **Emily Brennan:** That's brilliant to hear that sort of out of one project and one program, um, you know, that sort of Innovate UK have sponsored, that there's these other opportunities that have come out. And I think that message about collaboration, because if you develop some of these programs in silos, and you don't collaborate, and you don't, um, use the network that's there, then these [00:17:30] opportunities wouldn't be there.

[00:17:30] necessarily be identified. That's

[00:17:32] **Jonathan Mitchell:** exactly it. And I do think, you know, that the, um, you know, there's a Westminster Hall debate, uh, about the sort of advent of Skills England, uh, a few days back and, you know, one of the express ambitions that was sort of laid out there was, um, for government departments to work together.

[00:17:50] There's a lot of really good ways. Excellent work going on across various different pockets of government. Um, it hasn't always been easy for IFATE [00:18:00] as it has been or for anybody really necessarily to unite that and make it coherent. But we know coherence is critical for users and for employers to be able to navigate the system and just everybody really.

[00:18:12] Um, so being able to be. a sort of illustration of where two bits of government can come together in a complimentary, non overlapping, mutually supportive way. That has been a real benefit. I mean, it is [00:18:30] literally true that we would have really struggled to deliver the skills compass element of this without, um, the, you know, the amazing support that we've received from, Uh, from, from Innovate UK, but also all the kind of component parts of that, that quite complex, uh, body.

[00:18:47] And we know that's supported by, you know, UKRI and DCIT and all of, all of those kinds of things. These are really important ground works for, um, being able to show how we can do some [00:19:00] of that stuff together. Um, so I think, you know, that it's helpful to be able to talk about this on this podcast, because, you know, without a shadow of a doubt.

[00:19:10] We need to be under no illusion that that has been hard to achieve over the last sort of 10 years in the skills system. And yet, you know, we have,

we've actually not found it that hard to achieve at this particular moment in time. And there must be some lessons we can learn from that. Yeah.

[00:19:24] **Emily Brennan:** I

[00:19:24] **Richard Clewley:** think so.

[00:19:25] And we can, we're all adding in our own expertise as well. I was, I was really excited when I, when I first [00:19:30] saw the fit surplus model, um, which kind of compares. Future occupational profiles with the reference set of the IFATE occupational standards, and then, you know, gives us a readout of the degree to which the current KSBs, the current knowledge, skills and behaviors will actually service those future occupational profiles.

[00:19:51] And it's that sort of thinking, it's the thinking that's coming together as much as anything else, isn't it, Jonathan? And those great, the great, the great idea and the, the, the [00:20:00] fully functioning idea of the fit surplus model. Fits really well with what we're trying to achieve in Skills Compass as well.

[00:20:08] So it's the complimentary nature of us all being around this round the table, bringing our expertise and then, uh, different expertise. But then the outcome being, you know, much better. Then we would have achieved on our lonesome. Yeah,

[00:20:24] **Emily Brennan:** I think you mentioned before, Jonathan, that granular detail that is achievable through [00:20:30] the data.

[00:20:31] Like you say, we refer to the fit and surplus model and the level that it goes to for an educator. That's so helpful in developing Their content, they might need some help navigating to get to that data and sort of connecting sort of various people again, that collaboration piece. But that granular detail has real value in it.

[00:20:51] It

[00:20:51] **Richard Clewley:** does. It does. And awarding organizations and providers are becoming much more adept at developing, Curricular [00:21:00] based on the knowledge, skills and behaviors. And this, the, this is just going to augment things even further and make that even quicker, which is really, really great. So anything that makes this more, uh, more efficient.

[00:21:12] Um, but I think it's also going to add precision as well, which is a key. A key thing that I think we should aspire to more precision in skills, training products and technical qualifications, and this is a great route to it by actually getting down to the granularity to [00:21:30] the individual knowledge, skills and behaviors, and we know that in the future we're probably going to have to draw across our occupational routes.

[00:21:37] to service and get outcomes in these future occupational profiles and service future industries, future sectors. But again, we can still draw on knowledge, skills and behaviors if they're coming from across the full width of 15 occupational routes. And to make that more accessible and efficient is a great step forward.

[00:21:58] **Jonathan Mitchell:** Yeah, definitely. I think [00:22:00] that's right. And the sort of data foundations of this, which may sound. in a way quite dull, but, but they are, they are so critical. They unlock so many possibilities. Um, and, you know, I think they also pose a challenge to all of us, which is how to make sure that that data lies at the heart, not just of what IfATE or Skills England might do and what the Workforce Foresighting Hub might do, but really, How can that be the place where a lot of that kind of skills thinking comes together?

[00:22:29] And it's [00:22:30] certainly what you're hearing, isn't it? You know, in the, in the conversation you're having with awarding organizations or the provider community or whatever, um, you know, they would love to think that we were all analyzing a common set of data so that we could, we could understand the conclusions each other are drawing better.

[00:22:47] And I, I think, I think that's helpful, but it also, Of course, the cycles are really important. Of course, it's critical that we spot those, um, those, uh, those emerging [00:23:00] technologies and the skills implications are going to have so that we can catalyze, um, the, you know, the commercialization of those things and therefore growth and productivity and all those kinds of, all those things are important, but actually, you know, the other thing that I think the hub managed to achieve and on which we are building right at the moment was, you a really thoughtful data architecture that, that will unlock a huge number of things in really practical terms for our own use cases that we, you know, that we will need to do as we [00:23:30] do our work on developing new standards or qualifications, whatever it might be, but also, you know, unlocking the doorway to being able to think about, well, where do individual skills Leads to most productivity growth, right?

[00:23:43] At the moment, you know, it's very easy for people to say, well, if we had more welders, it would enable X, Y, Z, but really actually we want to get right down to the, to the skills level that, that is so important. It sounds like a sort of fine distinction, but we can't do our job without it. First [00:24:00] of all, but, but secondly, You know, if you really want to maximize the kind of focus of where you're making interventions in a skills system To achieve the maximum possible level of impact it's got to be at that granular level It can't just be at the sort of macro level And that framework that the hub has created that sets the conditions in which that can be done.

[00:24:23] **Richard Clewley:** Yeah, I was really interested to read the hydrogen storage insight report from June and see [00:24:30] some really interesting connections. Um, and I'm probably not the only person that I've tried to do those connections by hand before, you know, manually. Um, so, you know, where would KSBs regarding, say, pressurized vessels, containers, where would they be on our occupational maps that they wouldn't be in a hydrogen space because we haven't specifically got hydrogen storage, but they might be in aircraft certifying technician where there's already great knowledge and a lot of [00:25:00] experience of using pressure vessels and containers for holding fuel sources and, and, and likewise, the safety skills in the hydrogen sector as well.

[00:25:10] Well, where would they be? But, but to see that, um, to, to see that automated down to the level of the, of the knowledge, skill and behavior is really exciting and holds a great deal of promise for the future.

[00:25:22] **Jonathan Mitchell:** That that's a hundred percent is. And I mean, just to put that in another way, you know, if something is detected, well, I think, I think the hub has already said.

[00:25:29] [00:25:30] It may not expect to detect any or many brand new skills at all, you know, and, and maybe that will be the case. What we, what we obviously find, I think, is that skills don't tend to emerge as new things. Rather, they are very specialist in a certain corner of the labor market somewhere, but they become, Less specialized or you know, more, um, they sort of transition across different occupations.

[00:25:58] Um, you can think of plenty of [00:26:00] examples where, where that has happened. So part of the, part of the help is to be able to detect if, if, if the hub has detected this particular need, where can we find it in the standards already? Mm-hmm . And what does that tell us about? Like, how's, how's that already being assessed?

[00:26:18] What other skills does it typically come hand in hand with all of that kind of stuff. So again, all of that is unlocked, isn't

[00:26:23] **Richard Clewley:** it? It is. And that's unlocking these perhaps not necessarily new skills, but new configurations [00:26:30] of skills. Um, and, and I think that's, that's again, the sort of exciting thing that we've seen from, Both the construction output and the hydrogen storage output, which we're currently working within IfATE at the moment to see it sort of it gives us a nice view of the distribution of where these skills currently are probably in the workforce in the in the labor market, but where they may be in the future.

[00:26:55] And as Jonathan said, matched with what paired with what and in [00:27:00] what type of configuration. And I think that's having done that manually. Myself for a variety of different, um, future potential roles and growth sectors. Um, you know, to have that data there is, is, um, very powerful indeed.

[Timecodes are reset to zero here as this was originally two separate episodes]

One thing that we've noticed from, um, the individual cycles is, um, things coming out that they weren't necessarily expecting.

[00:00:55] So there'll be, obviously they're expecting lots of technical, um, [00:01:00] requirements and, and sort of, sort of skills and capabilities. But they're also pulling out, you mentioned sort of regulatory, um, Sort of specialisms that are needed or some of those more enterprise functions around data management and, um, that they weren't necessarily expecting to see.

[00:01:17] But there is then commonality across sectors because we're seeing it coming out across multiple different cycles in biopharmaceuticals to floating wind to hydrogen that you referred to [00:01:30] already. And that's been really interesting to see those sort of cross sector. Um, disciplines.

[00:01:37] **Richard Clewley:** Yeah, where, where else in the economy is this skill already?

[00:01:40] And, and yeah, we've got things like regulatory compliance actually really well covered on the occupational maps, but it might not be, it might not immediately jump out to somebody who is constructing modular provision for something like hydrogen, where, you know, there's a great deal of, of compliance and, um, safety and regulatory, [00:02:00] um, concerns and demand.

[00:02:02] So yeah, I think that's the really, again, a really interesting piece of information to know where that skill is now on the occupational maps. And we don't need to reinvent it. Um, we can actually redeploy to, to this, you know, new, um, and, and I think, you know, regulator, I've been working in the health and medtech sector recently as well to look at skills and future skills demands in, in health and medtech and yeah, [00:02:30] regulatory Uh, and compliance comes up, you know, very, very heavily, heavily there, too.

[00:02:36] Again, we've already specified it. We've already got some degree of employer led and employer specified definitions in the form of knowledge, skills and behaviors. So why not redeploy those as a starting point for the modular, modular provision that we know we'll need to increase, say, the volume of that sort of role in the in the job market?

[00:02:57] Yeah.

[00:02:57] **Jonathan Mitchell:** Yeah. And I think just to that, I mean, you [00:03:00] know, it's a It has the potential to be a profoundly two way street. The sorts of things that we Will detect or see or play into or get sort of receive demand for itself You know, we hope will help support the hub in sort of identifying those areas where it needs to take action So, you know, I mean I I suppose there's a risk.

[00:03:23] It sounds like we're just very excited about being able to use all of other people's hard work. And I am excited about that. I'm very, you know, very [00:03:30] enthusiastic about it, but I think there is also, there's also a quid pro quo there, um, that enables us to, um, to help the hub sort of identify those areas of sort of critical, um, demand and, and for us to think about how we best handle that together.

[00:03:47] Um, which, which I think is, just has another benefit.

[00:03:51] **Richard Clewley:** It does. And I think that's, that kind of keys into the way we're seeing the scale of value chain as well. We saw that there's a, there's a. There's a bi directional flow [00:04:00] there. So it's not just from upstream innovation to downstream delivery. We can actually gather information that's useful at downstream delivery and perhaps and send it back up the chain towards innovation.

[00:04:11] And so it's a, it's a, it's a two way flow, flow of intelligence. And, and, and yeah, I think, you know, onto Jonathan's point there, I think it's, it's, this is, this is helping the connectivity of the skills value chain. It's that convene,

curate. catalyze and deliver. [00:04:30] And it's that, that connection. It's those connections that are being forged with the, with the data.

[00:04:34] **Emily Brennan:** So going forward, what needs to happen to ensure this change to the skills system? What, what support is needed from government to support this, um, progress?

[00:04:49] **Jonathan Mitchell:** I think we need, in some ways, still quite early days in some, some parts of this, um, certainly needs, To continue to prove [00:05:00] the concept, right? The ability to take the insight that the hub is producing and convert that into meaningful responses at the right moment, actually have impact, be able to measure that impact and all that kind of stuff.

[00:05:10] So I think that's, um, certainly one part of it. I think that there is. a lot here about, um, about bringing, um, not just, um, the Department for Education and effectively [00:05:30] DCIT and UKRI and everything underneath that, you know, sort of together, but actually really now beginning to use that as a kind of basis for, for bringing more government departments to play in the same space.

[00:05:40] Quite clearly other government departments have an interest in skills. Um, and as I've said already, it is the sort of stated ambition of Skills England to make sure that that is unified. Um, and I think, you know, that, that is a, that is a really important part of that. I think not only understanding of what the hub [00:06:00] exists to do and how it is doing it and its methodologies and, uh, and the value it provides, that is important.

[00:06:06] Um, but so too is the space where people can apply their own data to what already exists. To take advantage, not only of what the hub is producing, what I think might have added in terms of live labor market demand, what they themselves know of and think is important, um, that is a real opportunity, I think, and whilst we're some way off.

[00:06:28] realizing that opportunity [00:06:30] right now. Um, there's no doubt in my mind. Um, that, that, that is part of the key to securing a slightly more unified approach, um, to addressing sort of skills challenges. So I said, I certainly think there's all of that. I mean, I think it's also just about us talking about it, right?

[00:06:48] You know, that's why we're here right now. Um, yeah. Uh, you know, people would expect us, they would expect UKRI, they would expect Innovate UK, they would expect IFATE to be thinking about what the

[00:07:00] skills needed for tomorrow and how can we make sure that we're ready for that moment when, when the moment comes.

[00:07:05] They might not, um, necessarily know how that's being done and that it is being done and, um, and what participation we need, including in the hub cycles, um, to make sure that it's done to the best possible effect. Um, so I do think, I think there is, there is quite a lot there about being able to sort of share what we're learning, um, to keep, [00:07:30] to keep going at it and, and, and, and to make sure that this is seen as the space where people can come and make that change happen.

[00:07:39] **Emily Brennan:** Yeah. And collaborate.

[00:07:40] **Richard Clewley:** Yeah. And I think the, Certainly the, the education and awarding sector, um, are really keen to have this one point of contact with, you know, the readout for, for, for skills. It's frustrating, frustrating and time consuming and resource intensive to be [00:08:00] going through. Tens of different reports that could be distributed across a wide variety of, um, gov.

[00:08:07] uk or, or other, um, other websites. So yeah, it's that, that centralization, that unifying force, I think is, is really important. And I think we're at a really important moment. In that unification of, of skilled data.

[00:08:24] **Emily Brennan:** So the two projects together have huge potential. Um, what are the [00:08:30] benefits to sort of the wider industry and government missions?

[00:08:33] **Jonathan Mitchell:** So, you know, as I think, I think we've, we've already said, you know, the, the aspiration to see an industrial strategy led. skills response, I suppose, for want of a better expression, um, is what is well understood. Um, and, you know, I, I, I freely admit, would be helpful to an organization like iFATE. It's sometimes quite difficult to know where to, where to pitch, um, [00:09:00] the weight of its work at any particular moment when there are a lot of competing voices.

[00:09:07] So, um, with the hub in particular and particularly thinking about that sort of slightly further horizon, uh, work, it is very much about the, sort of the economy's ability to convert its strengths in innovation into, um, sort of commercial [00:09:30] gain effectively. Um, and there are a whole range of reasons, um, why that can be a very difficult thing to do.

[00:09:39] Um, but, but not least among them is the sort of gaps that we have in skills. Um, and particularly at certain levels. Um, so I think we know that the sort of high technical gap is a real challenge, uh, for, um, this, the economy in this country. [00:10:00] Um, we're only some way towards, towards resolving that the stronger, the evidence and the clearer, the priorities, um, the easier it is for government bodies like I fatal skills, England or whoever, um, to meet those needs.

[00:10:15] And some of that. You know, it comes from the sort of work that the hub is doing. I think, I think the, the, the other thing that we, that we might want to think about is, um, the sort of place of, uh, you Enterprises of different kinds, um, [00:10:30] within, within the economy. So, um, you know, I think one of the things that we hear a lot, um, and I think it is right is that there is scope for smaller employers to, um, play a greater role in the skill system and also.

[00:10:47] Smaller employers have quite a lot of skill system, uh, needs that arguably they might feel are not, are not being met. What's quite interesting about that is that there are, of course, a very large number of smaller [00:11:00] employers who, um, who are operating in the sort of middle lane of their industry, whatever it might be.

[00:11:06] But there are many also who are actually the employers right there at the cutting edge and the innovators, the ones, the ones who, uh, who are trying something new. Um, Those employers, I think, arguably, you know, suffer not only from the system not always being able to be quite as forward leaning as it needs to be, but also with from all of the other [00:11:30] challenges that smaller employers, you know, certainly report that they encounter in terms of engagement with the skills system.

[00:11:36] Um, and at least being able to. understand and better meet the needs of such employers, particularly where they are at that, that sort of leading edge of technological change, um, is probably a key, uh, element of solving at least part of that challenge that they face.

[00:11:53] **Emily Brennan:** So what are some of the other benefits then, Richard?

[00:11:57] I think

[00:11:57] **Richard Clewley:** if we take, um, take, for [00:12:00] instance, a growth sector like health and med tech, for example. So, um, health and med tech, um, is largely, um, largely populated by smaller enterprises. Um, some of

the, uh, some of them are clinician led, um, and, uh, They are, uh, operating with with minimum resources for those sorts of, um, for those sorts of businesses, it can be very difficult to, um, to, to, to find the [00:12:30] resources and time to, to interact with the skill system and articulate the skills needs, and that can affect the growth of the sector, but it can also affect even the, you know, the future of the individual business.

[00:12:41] So I think that an opportunity that we've got here is to be able to. Um, to be able to signal, um, for those growth sectors, if you like, aggregate the views of those growth sectors and signal to the awarding organizations and to the providers what sort of skills are [00:13:00] required to keep that, keep that growth going and keep that growth, keep heading towards that, um, that critical mass, really, where the, where the business can start to grow and self sustain.

[00:13:12] And I think health and medtech is a good example. There's a lot of clinician led businesses. Um, and it can be, it can be challenging for them to recruit into, uh, into, into roles and, and it can be challenging for them to interact with the skill system. So articulate what they need to [00:13:30] local colleges and, and the local provider network.

[00:13:34] But I think having that, Having that insight, um, available and signalling that and working with the, uh, awarding sector and providers will, uh, will allow us to really use the awarding sector apparatus for the benefit of these growth sectors. And I think it will, will help, help increase the flow of skills that we want from, um, from, from, [00:14:00] uh, technical education products and skills training.

[00:14:02] **Jonathan Mitchell:** Yeah, I think just to add to that, one of the things I thought was a real. Sort of flash of inspiration within the, the work that was done and sort of how the hub conducts its cycles was the focus. We've talked about the granularity, the importance of us getting right down to the knowledge, skill and behavior and things like that is important to us.

[00:14:22] But the focus on, um, uh, employer capabilities as the way of getting at [00:14:30] that, um, which I think is really helpful. It is quite easy for us. to expect a reasonably good answer from employers about what it is they want their business to be able to do next week, next year, next five years, whatever it might be.

[00:14:45] Um, that, that isn't too difficult, but it is, it's quite an art actually to convert that from, um, this is, you know, I want to be able to build this type of wind turbine or that, you know, um, to therefore I am going to [00:15:00] need.

You know, dynamic cable installers who can do exactly X, Y, and Z. Um, that is a, um, that is asking quite a lot of some employers who, whose key job is not really to, to, to worry about that.

[00:15:13] And, and especially arguably in an age in which many employers have through no fault of their own, become quite used to being sort of consumers of trained resource, right? So they don't necessarily feel like they've had to think about a lot of that, that kind of stuff. So I think that's one really quite interesting [00:15:30] way in which I think sort of the way in which the hub is set about extracting the sort of insight that it, that it, that it That it needs, um, might well influence, you know, some of the ways in which we set about doing that ourselves.

[00:15:44] Um, and again, you know, I just, I, you know, I've never thought we were entirely perfect. I think it's great to see these, these different ideas come forward to be shared and to help us all do our own jobs a little bit better. So. That I think [00:16:00] will really help.

[00:16:01] **Richard Clewley:** Yeah, I think that aspect of the foresighting methodology is actually really interesting because it's a, it's, it's, um, it starts off in quite an indirect way.

[00:16:09] So if we take health and medtech, what, what changes, what does the health and medtech business need to do? Might need to develop an app, might need to develop a piece of hardware, might need to develop a piece of wearable tech, might need to look at a disposable device. Right, so what skills would. Go, what skills would flow from those organizational [00:16:30] capabilities?

[00:16:30] So then if we go for the developing, um, uh, developing an app or let's have a look at the software or developing a piece of wearable tech. Let's have a look at. So it's a really, really nice. the methodology that I think can help uncover the skills that we that we need to, to, you know, to, um, to continue to grow our growth sectors.

[00:16:51] And we all want the growth sectors to do well for the future prosperity of the economy. So it's, I think that's a really sort of neat aspect of the, of the project. [00:17:00] Of the foresighting methodology.

[00:17:01] **Emily Brennan:** Brilliant. So thank you so much gentlemen for joining us on the podcast. It's been really, really interesting.

[00:17:06] I really appreciated hearing your views and I'm really excited to hear more about the project going forward as well. Um, if people do want to find out more about the hub, um, or ifate, um, and ongoing projects, then please reach out to us, um, on our website. Um, and we will be glad to get back in touch with you.

[00:17:24] Thank you very much. Thank you for listening to the Workforce Foresighting Hub podcast. If you would [00:17:30] like more information, please look at the podcast show notes or visit our website and follow us on LinkedIn. Thank you very much.