

Workforce Foresighting Hub Episode 7: IfATE – How to shape the future workforce

[00:00:00] **Emily Brennan:** Welcome to the Workforce Foresighting Hub podcast. 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 [00:00:30] crucial 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. 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.