

## **Death of Jobs, Maybe?**

*You will read an article online about the concerns due to automation in the workplace by Seamus Nevin. Answer the questions that follow this article.*

We are living in a time of major change in the labour market. Recent studies have predicted that over the next 20 years, 15 million UK jobs, about half the total, are at risk of being lost to automation.

Whereas previous job-replacing technological change was limited to tasks requiring human brawn, the next wave of technology looks like replacing human brains.

If managed well, this revolution is not necessarily a cause for concern. Since the first Industrial Revolution, every new labour-saving technology has been met with anxiety about the impact on jobs, but concerns over mass unemployment have never materialized. In fact, technology has been a net creator of employment. Efficiencies gained through new technologies reduce the cost of production, which, when passed on to the consumer, increases spending power, stimulating demand and creating new jobs. Rather than making humans redundant, technology has simply shifted work to other areas.

The fact that 20 million jobs disappeared in Britain between 1980 and 2000 shows that predictions of 15m automated jobs would not be unprecedented. The lesson from the 1980s, however, is the importance of enabling those who have lost their job to re-skill to find alternative employment.

The UK education system began to take its present form with the establishment of our current exam system in 1858. At its core, this system is characterised by competition between classmates, with students learning and being assessed as individuals. Yet, as technology and globalisation progress, working with others is becoming increasingly important. In an era of skilled factory work, this mass public examinations system was designed to assess and rank school leavers on their ability to recall information and apply the standard methods required to satisfy the needs of 19th-century employment. Yet today, method and recall are the very things that are easiest to automate.

Instead, "soft" skills such as resourcefulness, creativity, and emotional intelligence are the likely domains where humans will retain a comparative advantage because these are skills where computers complement our abilities rather than a substitute for them. Even though today, online communication over

vast distances is possible at almost zero cost, face-to-face interactions are still the key engine of collaboration and growth.

Many people today, particularly younger generations, will work in jobs that do not exist yet, in industries that haven't been created. Most will change jobs multiple times, and brief periods of unemployment for people at all levels will become more common. Consequently, there is a need to ensure better career guidance.

A young person today begins to make choices in education that affect the skills for their career as much as a decade before entering the workforce, by which time, technology and consumer preferences will have altered significantly. In the UK school system, where learner choice is increasingly important, it is vital that students, teachers, and parents, can access quality and timely information on the likely skills needed by employers in the future. Big data will no doubt prove pivotal in this.

The onus will also be on employers, who bear the responsibility for helping young people learn about employment. The UKCES employment and skills survey found that while 66% of employers think work experience is important, only 38% offer it. There need to be much stronger links between schools and employers. There is also a need to support in-work progression. Government estimates show that around 30% of graduates are still in entry-level positions five years after graduating. Career guidance must develop a focus not simply on helping people to work but also on helping those already in work to progress.

Affordability is the biggest barrier to workers enrolling in part-time or further education. Thankfully, this is one area where automation offers not a problem but a solution. The growth of MOOCs, personalised learning algorithms, and computer-based collaborative and virtual reality tools are enabling people to access independent vocational learning "anywhere, anytime" in a way that can be adjusted to meet the student's individual needs, interests, and abilities. Computer-based learning is not a perfect substitute for traditional university education. Nevertheless, the cost savings, convenience, and flexibility it affords have the potential to revolutionise education and training.

That said, while on-the-job training and e-learning offer part of the solution, on their own, they will not be enough. The government should also explore tax incentives to encourage continuous engagement in education for adults. A tax nudge would be simple to introduce, but more importantly, it would represent an initial step in aligning the UK's fiscal policies with some of its most significant employment challenges.

If the UK is to build a competitive economy for the 21st century, a shift to lifelong learning will be crucial to ensure workers have the skills they need to succeed in the new world of work.

*This online article is available [here](#).*

Answer the following questions.

1. The author does not feel that people should be worried about technology replacing humans.

True       False

2. Technology, according to the author, has increased unemployment.

True       False

3. The author feels that "method" and "recall" are useful skills in a digital environment.

True       False

4. The author thinks that people who develop offline communication skills will be successful in the future.

True       False

5. Because technology changes quickly and individuals change jobs quickly, there is no reason for educational organisations to consult with businesses.

True       False

6. The author feels that face-to-face higher education is superior to online learning platforms.

True       False

7. The author suggests that the government pay adults to continue to go to school during their working careers.

True       False