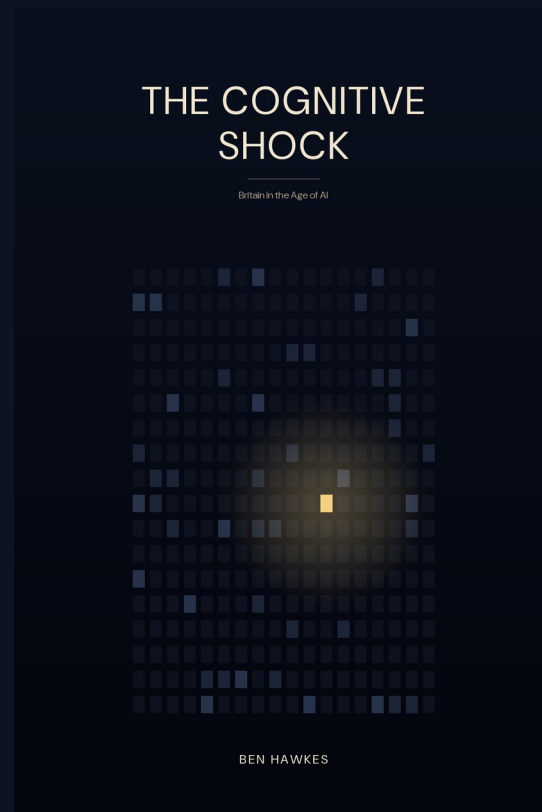


■ A BRIEFING FOR GOVERNMENT

The Cognitive Shock

Britain in the Age of AI. The scale of the problem.



Two operators, one declared interest



Ben Hawkes

Author, The Cognitive Shock. CEO, TrueMind.

25 years operating inside the British professional middle class, across finance, sport and consumer products. Wrote the book from the operator's vantage point: hiring graduates, running businesses, watching the data move.



Will Mellors-Blair

Founder, TrueMind. Co-Founder and CEO, Mindora.

Former elite footballer and researcher across AI, mathematical sciences and biotechnology. A decade in human performance, with workforce strategies delivered for Google, Salesforce, the NHS and Public Health England. Backed by the Department for Business and Trade's Global Entrepreneur Programme.

Interest declared upfront: both build companies in the category this briefing proposes. Every figure in Part One is from an independent public source, checkable regardless of who is presenting it.

■ THE LEADING INDICATOR

The most prestigious entry level cognitive job in Britain is disappearing

-70%

Fall in UK job adverts for programmers between 2019/20 and 2024/25, with the decline accelerating in the last two years.

4 to 1

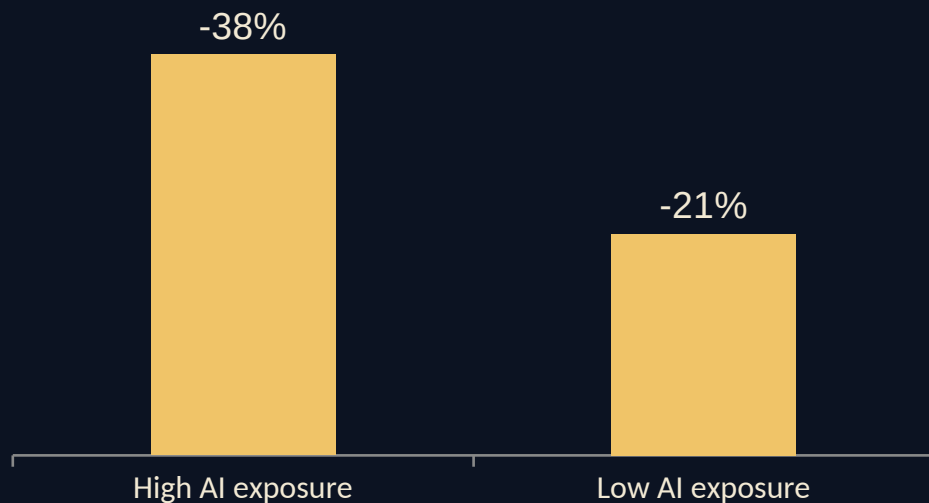
Senior programming roles now advertised for every junior role. The bottom rung of the ladder is being removed first.

2024 saw the first fall in the number of working software developers since 2006.

No recession. No banking crisis. AI became cheaper than a graduate.

■ THE PATTERN ACROSS THE LABOUR MARKET

Hiring is falling twice as fast where AI exposure is highest



The decline concentrates in software, data, design, media, research, legal, HR, finance and business roles.

Up to 3 million UK jobs in declining occupations could disappear by 2035.

These are advertised vacancies, the earliest moving labour market signal. They move years before the unemployment statistics.

Fall in UK job postings, May 2022 to May 2025

Source: McKinsey UK analysis of Indeed postings, May 2022 to May 2025; NFER, The Skills Imperative 2035 (Nuffield Foundation), 2025.

The load is rising before the shock has fully arrived

2.81m

Working age people economically inactive through long term sickness, the highest on record.

ONS, 2024

1.35m

Of those inactive through sickness report depression, anxiety or stress.

ONS, 2023

25.8%

Of 16 to 24 year olds have a common mental health condition, up from 17.5% in 2007.

NHS England APMS, 2023/24

A system already at saturation is the one expected to absorb the new load.

The young are taking the first and heaviest hit

957,000

16 to 24 year olds not in education, employment or training. One in eight of the entire cohort.

ONS, October to December 2025

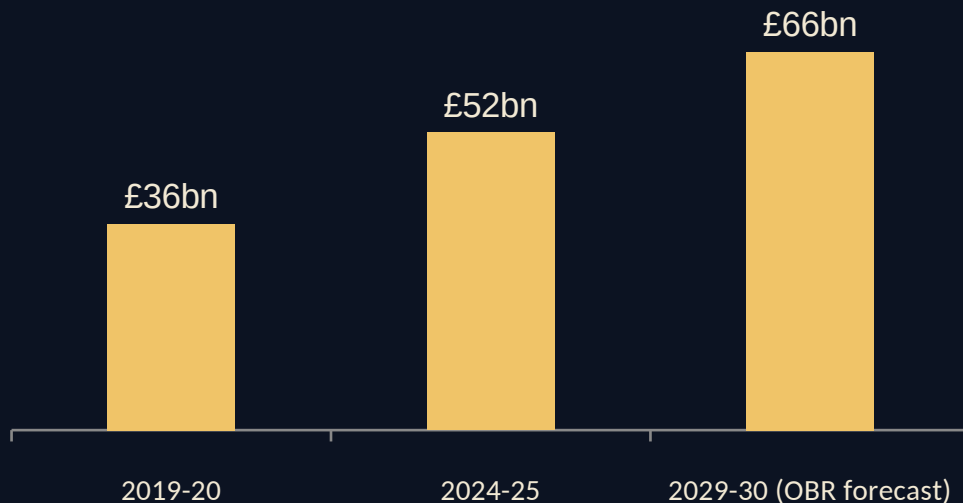
The graduate entry route is narrowing in precisely the occupations universities expanded to serve.

Entry level cognitive work is how every cohort since 1945 converted education into income. That conversion mechanism is the thing now being automated.

A cohort that cannot get its first job does not form households, does not buy houses, and does not pay the taxes the state is counting on.

An economy that stops hiring the young is borrowing against its own future tax base.

Working age health related benefits are on an unsustainable path



£36bn to £52bn in five years. £66bn forecast by the end of the decade, before any new shock is counted.

Mental health is the dominant driver of the rise.

The OBR forecast assumes the labour market carries on broadly as it is. The evidence on the preceding slides is that it already is not.

The state is funded by the people most exposed to the shock

60.2%

Of all income tax is paid by 10% of taxpayers.

HMRC, 2024-25

28.2%

Of all income tax is paid by the top 1% alone.

HMRC, 2024-25

95.6%

Public sector net debt as a share of GDP, levels last seen in the early 1960s.

ONS, November 2025

The cohort that funds the state is the cohort most exposed to the shock.

There is no demographic cushion under any of this

1.41

Children born per woman in England and Wales in 2024. The lowest figure on record for the third consecutive year, and a third below replacement level.

Why it belongs in this briefing.

Family formation tracks economic confidence among the young, and the young are the cohort losing labour market access first.

A shrinking workforce must carry a rising dependency load on a tax base that is itself under automation pressure. Each line of this briefing compounds the others.

Fewer workers, more dependants, a smaller tax base. The arithmetic only tightens.

One shock, cascading through six systems by 2035



The Cognitive Shock models a central scenario of a 20 to 30% reduction in cognitive professional employment by 2035, built from the hiring data, the adoption curves and the cost arithmetic of AI substitution.

This is the author's modelled scenario, presented as such, and distinguished throughout the book from the observed data on slides 2 and 3.

The leading indicators are not modelled. They have already happened.

■ TIMING

The window for an orderly response is the next two to three years

■ Hiring data has already moved

Job adverts lead unemployment statistics by years. Waiting for the unemployment data means starting late by definition.

■ The welfare line compounds

Every cohort that enters inactivity adds a recurring annual cost. The OBR's £66bn assumes no new shock.

■ The response takes years to build

Measurement and training infrastructure at population scale cannot be stood up in the year it is needed. It has to exist before the peak load arrives.

The observed data alone justifies preparation.

■ PART TWO

The response

The shock is not optional. Displacement is. The book proposes a three part national infrastructure, built over a decade: a Manhattan Project for the mind. Build it, and Britain becomes the world's first cognitive superpower.

1. Measure
2. Train
3. Recognise

■ THE BASIS OF THE RESPONSE

The capacities AI does not replicate become the new currency

Directed attention

Holding focus on what matters, in an environment engineered to fragment it.

Decision quality under uncertainty

Judgement when the data runs out. The models still hand this back.

Emotional regulation under pressure

Staying functional when the stakes are real and the clock is running.

Learning velocity

How fast a person acquires what the economy newly values.

Identity coherence

Knowing who you are when the job title no longer answers the question.

Agency

Acting on the world rather than being processed by it.

These are not soft skills. They are what humans will be uniquely paid for.

A Public Health England for human capacity

What is not measured at scale is not managed at scale.

The state already measures attainment, income, health outcomes, fertility and mortality at population level. It measures none of the six capacities on the previous slide.

The proposal is measurement of attention, regulation, learning velocity, decision quality, identity coherence and agency at the level of the individual, the team, the institution and the population, with a common methodology and proper privacy and consent protections.

The constraint is institutional, not technical.

How

Voice is the most efficient measurement substrate. A five to ten minute structured voice session, repeated periodically, captures the major signal across five of the six capacities.

Cost per person per year: a few pounds at current AI inference prices. Technically achievable today.

The methods exist. The deployment does not.

Schools

Explicit curriculum time for attention, regulation, learning and identity, from primary to sixth form, alongside the academic curriculum.

The workplace

Structured employer programmes that build capacity inside daily working life, not as a separate wellness activity.

Civic life

Rebuilding the civic institutions that historically carried meaning, community and practice.

The evidence base is not speculative: millennia of contemplative practice, fifty years of clinical CBT literature, thirty years of deliberate practice research. What is missing is integration, funding and the political coalition.

Measurement finds the gap. Training closes it.

From credentials to measured capacity

British institutions reward credentials: GCSEs, A levels, degrees, job titles.

Credentials are proxies for capacity, and they are calibrated against precisely the routine cognitive work that AI now substitutes.

The required shift is to recognise and price measured capacity directly. This is already starting at the leading edge of US technology hiring, where credentials have lost weight.

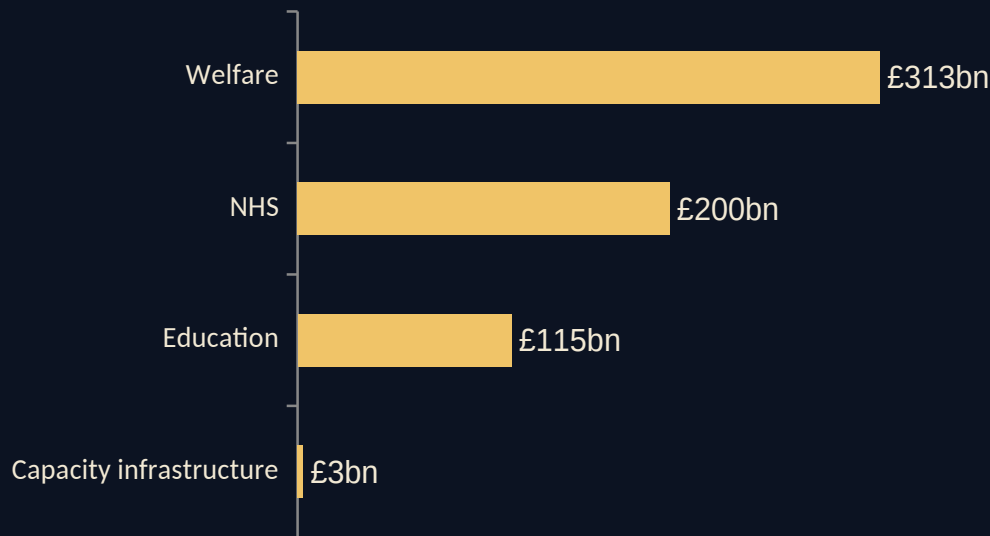
A hiring manager in 2030

Two candidates. One holds a first class degree. The other holds a recent capacity assessment showing high attention, regulation, learning velocity and decision quality.

The manager hires the second, because measured capacity is the better predictor of performance on the job.

Whoever builds the recognised measure sets the standard. Britain can set it.

A rounding error against the budgets it protects



£1bn to £3bn a year over a decade for the measurement and training infrastructure. Between 0.1% and 0.25% of total government spending.

The analogues are electrification, the road network and the NHS itself. Each was built in a generation, at meaningful but achievable cost, with returns compounding across every sector that depended on it.

The cost is not the constraint. The political will is.

The elite performance play, starting in football

TrueMind is a performance intelligence layer. Its job is to make conscious co-piloting visible, measurable and trainable in the populations where the stakes are highest.

Voice is the substrate. In the right population, with the right prompts, the voice carries rich signal on attention, regulation, learning velocity, decision quality and identity coherence, returned to the institution as decision grade insight.

Football academies are the wedge: a high stakes, measurement literate environment with a duty of care obligation and a clear performance return.

The pathway

Industry: leadership development, succession, team performance.

Defence: operator readiness in high stakes environments.

Education and the state workforce response after that.

The author is TrueMind's CEO. This slide is the declared interest, in operating detail.

The broad workforce play, backed by government

Mindora is building what its team calls a Performance Economy: an infrastructure layer in which personal performance data becomes a measurable, ownable asset that aligns the incentives of individuals and the organisations they work for.

Where TrueMind reads voice in elite environments, Mindora reads biometric and behavioural data across the broad workforce: sensors, sleep, mood and movement.

Backed by the UK Government's Global Entrepreneur Programme, the Department for Business and Trade's selective vehicle for ambitious founders.

Why it matters here

Two plays at the same measurement infrastructure, by the same founder lineage, with different starting populations.

This is what an emerging category looks like, and both early builders are British.

No country owns this category yet. The first credible builder sets the standard.

Treat this as a first order problem for the rest of the decade

1

Recognise the signal

Accept the leading indicators as a basis for planning, not a curiosity to revisit when the lagging data confirms them.

2

Commission the analysis

A cross departmental assessment of UK exposure to cognitive automation: labour market, welfare, education and tax base.

3

Pilot the response

A small measurement and training pilot in one public cohort, schools, retraining or the NHS workforce, with published results.

Every figure in this briefing is publicly checkable

- NFER / The HG Foundation, Destination Tech: UK tech job advert analysis, 2025. Programmer adverts down close to 70%, 2019/20 to 2024/25; 4:1 senior to junior ratio; first fall in working software developers since 2006.
- McKinsey UK, Not yet productive, already disruptive, 2025. Indeed job postings: high AI exposure occupations down 38%, low exposure down 21%, May 2022 to May 2025.
- NFER, The Skills Imperative 2035 (Nuffield Foundation), 2025. Up to 3 million UK jobs in declining occupations by 2035.
- ONS, economic inactivity series, 2024. 2.81 million inactive through long term sickness; 1.35 million reporting depression, anxiety or stress.
- NHS England, Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2023/24. 25.8% of 16 to 24 year olds with a common mental health condition, against 17.5% in 2007.
- ONS, young people not in education, employment or training, Q4 2025. 957,000 NEET, 12.8% of 16 to 24 year olds.
- OBR forecasts via Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2025. Working age health related benefits of £36bn in 2019-20 and £52bn in 2024-25, with £66bn forecast for the end of the decade.
- HMRC, income tax liabilities statistics, 2024-25. Top 10% of income taxpayers pay 60.2% of income tax; top 1% pay 28.2%.
- ONS, public sector finances, November 2025. Public sector net debt 95.6% of GDP.
- ONS, births in England and Wales, 2024. Total fertility rate 1.41, lowest on record for the third consecutive year.
- Ben Hawkes, The Cognitive Shock, 2026. Chapters 10 to 12: the six capacities, the three pillar infrastructure, the £1bn to £3bn cost estimate, and the worked examples. The author declares his interest as CEO of TrueMind.