

Northern Gas Networks

Young Innovators Council



SESSION 5: RESPONSIBLE AI

October 2025

Facilitated and written by Solutions for the Planet

Contents:

1. Executive Summary
2. Overview of the session
3. Attendees
4. Key discussion points
5. Key reflections for Northern Gas Networks
6. Conclusion
7. Appendices

1. Executive Summary

Northern Gas Networks' (NGN) Young Innovators Council (YIC) met online on Wednesday 8th October for the fifth session of 2025. The YIC were joined by members NGN's Head of Digitalisation, Tom Pollock, who is developing a sustainable and responsible AI strategy for the business.

In advance of the session, the YIC were invited to watch a series of videos offering an introduction to AI, and more specifically around AI in business. They were asked to think about the broader impacts of AI by reading articles about the equity and inclusion questions with this technology, as well as the ethical considerations surrounding it. The YIC then researched examples of businesses using AI in an ethical way, and reflected on the risks and benefits of AI for a business like NGN.

The session began with an exercise to gauge the YIC's perception of AI using a Trust Barometer. With the YIC averages showing that they sit consistently near the middle of the scale between worried and excited, it is clear that this group of young people are still unconvinced one way or the other about the role of AI across their lives.

Tom Pollock provided an overview of NGN's AI strategy, explaining the organisation's planned uses of AI, the anticipated benefits, the risks being considered, and the role of the AI Impact Assessment (AIIA) in guiding responsible implementation. After hearing from Tom's presentation, the YIC were given the chance to ask any immediate questions and then shared their initial reflections on NGN's approach to AI on a shared whiteboard. Overall, it would appear that where the YIC are open to AI's innovation, they want it implemented ethically and inclusively.

The young people then joined breakout rooms to dive deeper into themed discussions around NGN's AI strategy; evaluating NGN's AIIA, NGN's responsibility for monitoring their use of AI, the social, economic and environmental impacts of this use, and what the YIC feel might be missing in this approach. There was also some reflection on the wider use of AI across the energy network in general. There is a strong preference for any AI use as a supportive tool, rather than a substitute for human roles. The YIC certainly recognise AI's potential to improve safety, efficiency, and reduce workload; but echoed throughout the discussion were the shortfalls of AI and a preference for human oversight.

2. Overview of session

Background to the Young Innovators Council

2025 marks the fifth consecutive year of Northern Gas Networks' Young Innovators Council (YIC). The YIC continues to be the voice of young people at Northern Gas Networks, and the business ensures that these young people's thoughts and opinions are put at the heart of decision making.

At the end of 2024, Northern Gas Networks published its 5-year business plan for 2026-2031. It is clear from this plan that the business has taken the YIC's contributions into consideration, with multiple references to the importance of their unique youth perspective.

14 members of this year's YIC were also part of the programme last year, with one member entering her fifth year on the YIC. This demonstrates the value that young people are also finding from their experience.

Background to the Session

NGN is developing a sustainable and responsible AI strategy. This includes an AI impact assessment form, a governance and assurance programme, and a focus on building customer and public trust. They are taking a slow and considered approach to this strategy, and consulting with stakeholders is a key factor in this.

YIC Session 5 of 2025 was a chance to gather youth insights to inform the ethical, sustainable, and responsible adoption of AI at NGN. The aim was to have an open conversation with the young people around AI's role both at NGN and in the wider energy sector, to help inform how the business develops the wider AI adoption both sustainably and responsibly. The session was designed to gauge how the YIC feel about the topic; what their sentiments are towards AI and how they think the business should be using it.

Tom Pollock acted as the expert witness for this session, as NGN's Head of Digitalisation. He shared with the young people a draft of NGN's Artificial Intelligence Impact Assessment Form. Along with his witness presentation, this helped provide context to NGN's intentions for AI. This was to ask the YIC what they would need to see to be assured that NGN are using AI in the right way, what concerned and/or excited them about the uses of AI, and what about it might affect working in the business.

YIC 2025 Session 5: Responsible AI

Total length: 1 hour 45 minutes

People involved: 3 S4TP facilitators, 5 NGN facilitators, 1 NGN witnesses, 1 NGN observer, 1 ISG observer

Date and time: Wednesday 8th October, 5:15 - 7:00pm

Panel attendance: 19

Apologies: 7

Objectives:

- To explore young people's perceptions of AI (trust, risks, opportunities)
- To build an understanding of NGN's current AI strategy
- To identify potential benefits, challenges, and risk areas for AI use at NGN and gain insight into young people's perspectives on NGN's plan to adopt AI
- To gather youth views to help shape the governance and assurance around NGN's use of AI, particularly the AI impact assessment form
- To consider the ethical and sustainable impacts of AI and help NGN assess the customer impact and benefits of its adoption of AI framework

Prior to the session the YIC were asked to read and complete the following tasks:

1. Watch videos:

- a. "An Introduction to AI" [What is AI? - AI Basics](#)
- b. ["Ethics in AI Applications"](#)

2. Read [5 Ethical Considerations of AI in Business](#)

3. Research task: Find an example of a business using AI in an ethical way.

4. Reflection: Note down what you see as risks and benefits of AI for a business like NGN.

Agenda

Time	Activity
5:15	Welcome, 'You said... So we have...', and work experience feedback
5:30	Pework sharing: examples of ethical AI use in businesses
5:35	Trust barometer (Menti)
5:43	Expert witness: Tom Pollock, Head of Digitalisation NGN
5:53	Group activity: initial thoughts about NGN's AI Strategy
6:03	Breakout activity: deep dive questions
6.23	Feedback and Plenary
6.43	Wrap up and Close

3. Attendees

Young Innovators Council

Akorede
Amiee
Ben
Daniel
Danielle
Divya
Ellie
Ethan
Florence
Hassan

Joe
Maryam
Mubashir
Nora
Orla
Ralph
Ronan
Sophie
Zinedine

Solutions for the Planet

Claire Fitton
Lauren Gupta

Fran Isherwood

Youth Insights Programme Manager
Youth Insights Programme Coordinator /
Interim Comms Lead
Youth Insights Programme Coordinator (Maternity)

Northern Gas Networks

Emma Holman
Alex Lawson
Tom Pollock
Jenny Wilkinson
Hollie Scott
Kati Sexton
Rebecca Croft

Sustainability Reporting Lead
Energy Futures and Net Zero Educator
Head of Digitalisation
Stakeholder Engagement Lead
Stakeholder Engagement Coordinator
Customer Care Officer
Net Zero Educator

Observers

Alan Lowdon

NGN's Independent Stakeholder Group member

4. Key Discussion Points

You said... So we have...

The panel heard from Emma Holman, Sustainability Reporting Lead at NGN, who shared feedback from the previous session about interim Planet commitment targets for NGN's People and Planet Strategy.

Target dates



You said...

It makes sense to have targets at regular intervals. You suggested 2035, 2040 and 2045.

So we have ...

Begun to integrate this into our Planet strategy. We'll be redrafting the short, medium and long term targets taking this in to account. Our 2025 Annual Sustainability Report will publish any changes publicly.



Specific commitment feedback



You said...

Ensure that emissions are offset if they are over target

So we have ...

Ofgem has refreshed its guidance on offsetting, that we must follow - applying the principle that offsetting will be a last resort, and not relied upon. However, we recognise the importance of presenting a clear and transparent picture and committed that if we are over the total Scope 1 and 2 target we will seek to purchase offsets if they are available at a suitable price



Specific commitment feedback



You said...

Ensuring financial feasibility of any biodiversity projects is key

So we have ...

..taken this on board, and will continue to prioritise initiatives that deliver environmental impact without unnecessary cost, such as NO MOW MAY. Moving forwards we'll continue to focus on those that strike the right balance between environmental benefit and financial sustainability, especially where we have community involvement.



Jenny Wilkinson also presented an update that related to YIC Session 3 in April 2025 about NGN's work placement offer.

Inclusive work placements



It was clear from the feedback from Session 3 that there is significant diversity of thought that exists across the Council when it comes to work experience at NGN. Whilst there were some consistencies, such as group work and practical activities to gain a realistic experience, one size does not fit all when it comes to an ideal work experience programme. The recommendation was that flexibility and variety is essential for positive engagement and outcomes. As such, Jenny explained that NGN has developed two different work experience structures to offer different opportunities depending on students preferred learning styles.

Work experience feedback from the YIC

Ronan, online work experience

- Q&A panel made up of leaders from different departments, who talked about what it's like leading a group, and answered questions about how to develop leadership skills.
- Group project about supplying energy to an island harnessing different types of renewable energy.
- Positives:
 - The project worked really well online.
 - It's nice to hear from and learn about lesser known parts of the company.
- Improvements:
 - There could be a larger project that covered more factors.
 - More panels from niche areas in the company.

Ethan, in-person work experience

- Thoroughly enjoyed it, incredibly detailed.
- Introduction and Q&A with key staff members, connecting with work experience colleagues, team building exercises.
- Visited control room to see how some of the gas pressure is actually augmented.
- Group tasks, understanding the entire process from when a problem is reported, to how the dispatch works and how the in-person team actually deals with the issue.

Pework sharing

As part of their prework, the YIC were asked to research examples of AI use in business, focusing particularly on any ethical examples of this. Key themes emerged both from those young people who shared in the call and those who sent research via the Zoom chat or ahead of the session.

Ethical use of AI in business

- Whilst the YIC found plenty of examples of businesses use of AI - specially large ones like Google and Microsoft - a number of them highlighted that it wasn't easy to discover how they were doing it in an ethical way.
- There was a perception that companies aren't openly sharing how they use AI ethically because it's harder to do so due to scale or profit.
- One Council member suggested that "maybe it's because you can't really be a big business like that and use it in an ethical manner... if it was ethical or they were implementing things in an ethical way, they'd obviously be bragging about it".
- The absence of public information about ethical AI was seen as a red flag to the YIC.

Accountability

- Ethical partnership: DeepMind's collaboration with the NHS publicly shares algorithm details, research methods, and results.
- Data privacy safeguards: patient data is anonymised and governed by strict ethical review boards.
- Human oversight: AI supports but does not replace doctors - final decisions remain with humans.
- AI systems should only use data that the business is already in possession of for existing legitimate use, as it terminates bias and respects human rights, e.g., Europcar harnessing information from their website to provide answers quickly and easily for employers.
- The YIC expressed a need to have information about AI readily available to better understand the social and environmental effects.

Human vs machine roles

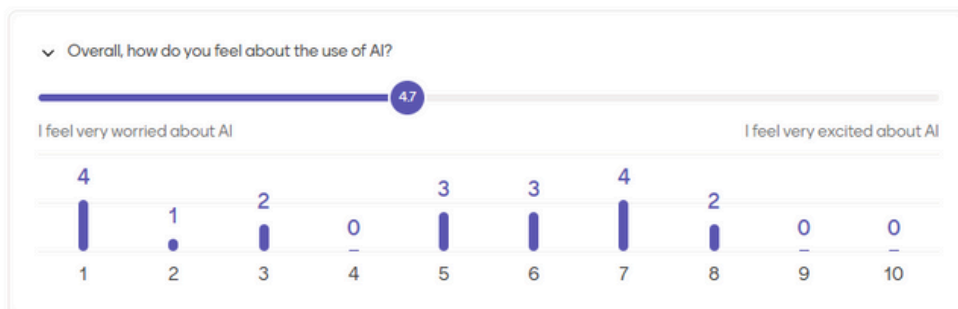
- AI as a support tool: Patagonia uses AI to improve supply chain transparency and sustainability.
- The company employs AI systems to analyse data from suppliers, production sites, and transport routes to reduce environmental impact and ensure ethical labour practices.
- Salesforce is developing an AI system which provides governance controls which allows responsible deployment.
- Partnering with universities and colleges to help with diverse data collection and to reduce bias.
- Ethical AI use is one that empowers professionals rather than automating away their roles.

Trust barometer

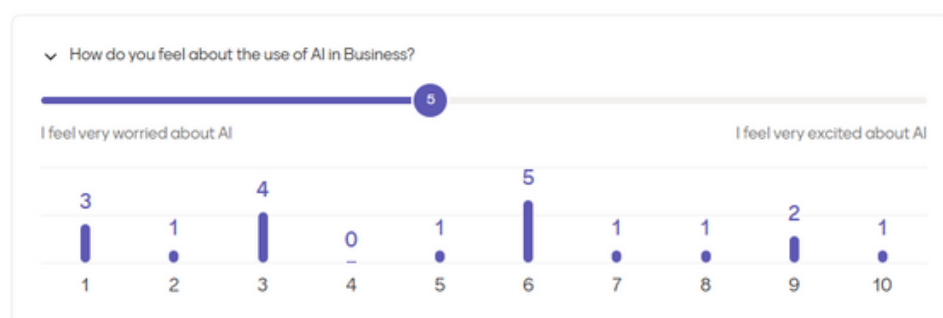
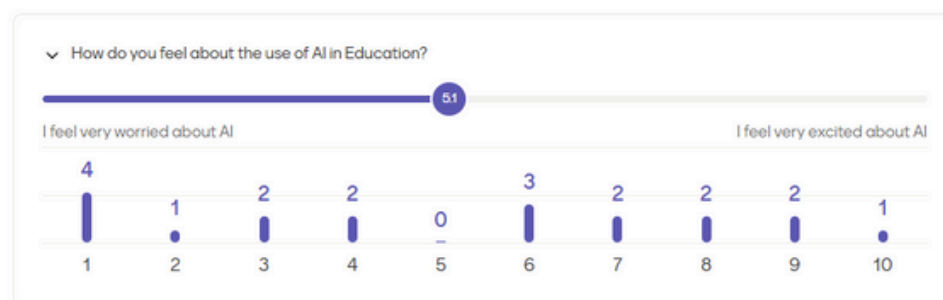
In order to capture the general mood of the YIC towards the use of AI, they were asked to rank their sentiments about it personally and in general, in relation to education, in relation to business, and in relation to every day life.

On a scale where 1 was 'I feel very worried about AI' and 10 was 'I feel very excited about AI'. the YIC consistently fell in the middle of the trust scale, with only 1 or 2 Council members ever voting at the very excited end of the scale.

Thinking ahead, do you feel more excited or more worried about the use of AI. For this question, think GENERALLY in your life.



Thinking ahead, do you feel more excited or more worried about the use of AI in these specific contexts...



Expert witness

The YIC heard from Tom Pollock about NGN's current approach to AI, which he explained was in the early stages of its journey.

- AI use will be responsible and sustainable.
- NGN aims to build its own AI capabilities internally rather than outsourcing.
- A major focus is on improving data quality, consistency, and completeness.
- NGN is highly conscious of AI's environmental impact, so has developed a bespoke "sustainability metric" to assess whether an AI solution saves more carbon than it consumes.
- All AI solutions at NGN must pass an internal AI Impact Assessment (AIIA).

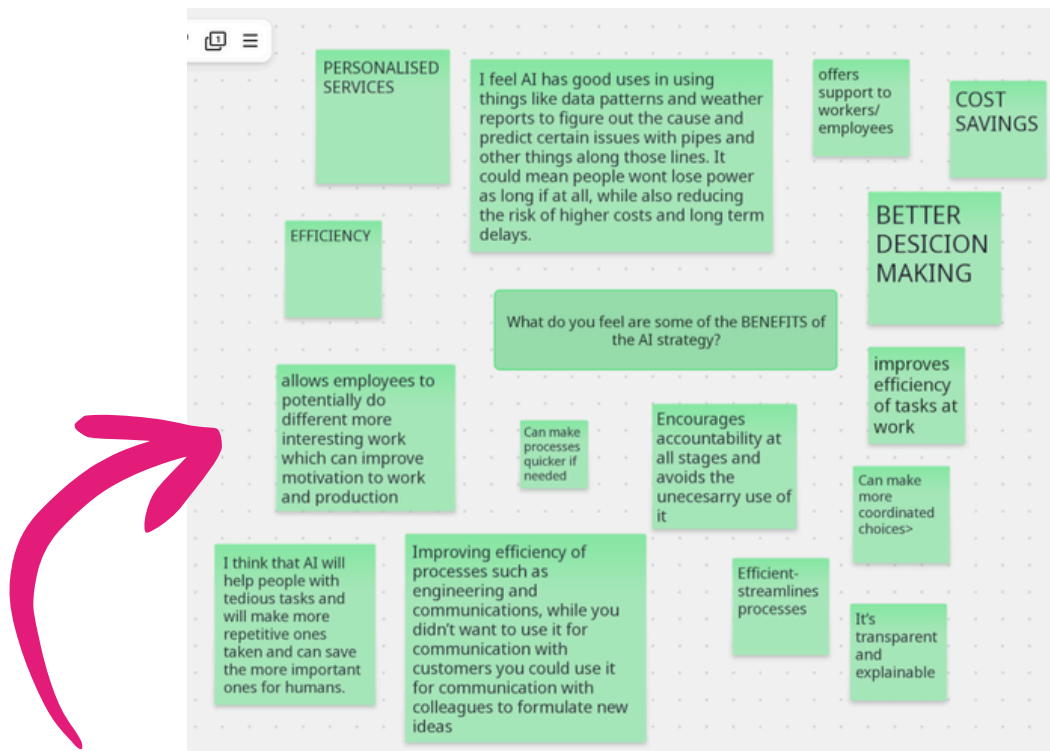
Group activity: initial thoughts about NGN's AI Strategy

The YIC were then given the opportunity to reflect immediately on Tom's witness presentation about NGN's use of AI, using a shared whiteboard to capture key words, sentiments and beginnings of thoughts or questions that they could go on to explore in the breakout room discussions.



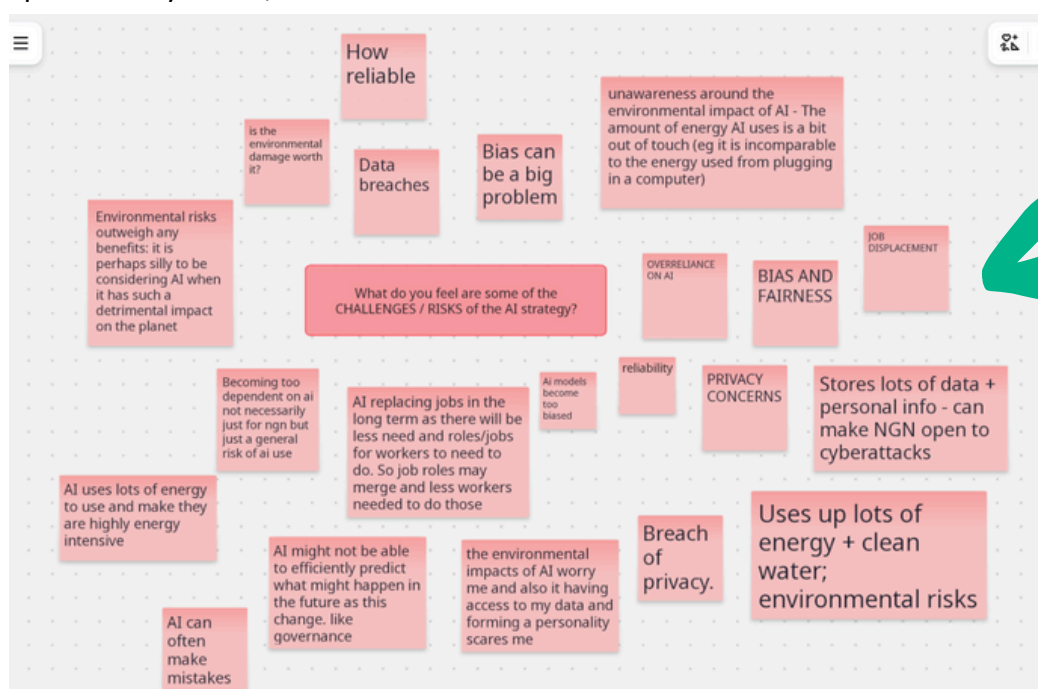
The YIC's initial thoughts and reflections about NGN's proposed AI strategy suggest that they support AI integration as long as it is human-centred. They want any AI use to complement people, not replace them - and they admire NGN showing an awareness of this need. They echo the areas that NGN highlights as AI's operational value: making networks safer and more efficient.

Optimism is balanced with caution, as they recognise the risks of AI and question whether it's worth it.



The YIC see AI as a tool for speed and productivity at NGN, which could help to streamline process by reducing repetition and improving data communication. They see this benefiting the business by enabling employees to do more interesting and motivating tasks. One YIC member notes that AI could do exciting things such as using data and weather patterns to predict and prevent issues like floods or power floods, which directly impact NGN's work. They think that AI could have a positive impact on the workforce if accountability and transparency are combined with effective explanations and training.

Having said that, the YIC are also very forthcoming about the challenges and risks of NGN's AI strategy. Several of the YIC highlight fears around data breaches and cyber attacks, AI storing personal information, and the consequent privacy risks for both employees and customers. Governance and future-proofing are called for, with one YIC member highlighting that this is not something that AI could or should be capable of. The YIC flag the energy and water consumption of any AI use, and don't want the environmental risks to be overlooked.



Breakout activity: deep dive questions

Group 1: Does NGN's AI Impact Assessment form reassure you enough for you to feel that customer impact and benefits are at the heart of the approach?	
Reassurance and transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is valuable to customers and potential workforce to know that AI is being interrogated thoroughly before it is actually used. • AI should go through a number of people for accuracy and ethics. • Giving the customer all the information allows them to make an informed decision about whether AI use is reliable or not. • Make the information pertinent and engaging to the various different stakeholder audiences. • Younger and working-age adults are more likely to engage with AI.
Education and futureproofing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGN already demonstrates its role in educating customers and the wider public about the future of energy, AI could be educated about as well. • This helps demonstrate accountability on the part of NGN. • NGN needs to be prepared to future-proof for AI use, because it is going to change and evolve rapidly. • Is there a backup plan that involves not integrating AI? • Ensure you can respond appropriately and effectively to concerns and responses that are against AI.
Group 2: How would you want to see NGN monitoring the impact of their AI use? How often should it be reviewed and by who?	
Monitoring and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything should be reviewed by a lead on data protection. • Every so often NGN should use a third party organisation to like verify it. Reviews should happen every quarter by independent auditors. • Use dashboards that track real-time AI performance and flag anomalies or potential biases. • Report on how the AI is performing and share that openly so people know that NGN is being honest and responsible. • Monitoring board could include young people and customers.
Data privacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absolutely definitive what information is being used by AI and what is off limits, and do not drift on this. Customer safety is important. • Used within the company, not to interact with customers or using their personal data. • Keep data sets separate if AI can use them to deduce personal information or identity.

Group 3: What is missing from NGN's current approach, e.g., social, economic or environmental elements? What worries or excites you the most about AI in energy networks?	
Social impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's a risk of job displacement and de-skilling. • If some jobs are more at risk than other, NGN should fund reskilling programmes. • "AI is good for things that have happened... but it's not very good at creating things."
Economic impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can NGN predict how much AI integration is going to cost? And where that's going to come from? • Concerns that this financial burden will grow as global knowledge and use of AI grows.
Environmental impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AI has a huge environmental impact, especially water and energy usage. • The information is not thorough or clear enough about how NGN will counteract or offset the environmental impacts of AI.
Group 4: How might AI impact jobs, training and skills at NGN? Think positive and negative impacts.	
Training and upskilling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "AI is very good for giving feedback for individual circumstances... can also help out employees during training." • "You can use it to simulate different situations... an engineer could simulate a situation where they'd have to fix pipes." • Training the whole workforce in the specificities of AI for their role and department feels like a huge undertaking. • Training should have the scope to be personal and adaptable, something hard to imagine AI being able to deliver. • Some employees could lack the digital and technical skills to keep up with AI. • "You don't want to only have a select group of people getting really skilled... leaving others behind."
Jobs and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It allows people to be more adaptable. • It could create more diverse high quality jobs. • "It's only as good as the information that is provided... needs constant updating... diverse and inclusive. • "You might not feel as responsible [with excessive AI use] ... as a business you don't want to be too far removed." • "I wouldn't want to be forced in the job... ethically, you wouldn't be able to do it with a clear conscience." • Any potential faulty or bias information could result in algorithmic error.

Plenary

AI can only really apply data added to an existing model, **it can't create new ideas** for innovating towards net zero.

AI can't mitigate for **future changes**, such as political upheaval changing AI rules and legislation.

- AI doesn't necessarily need to be one of the main focuses of NGN as of now.
- Focusing more on being sustainable and net zero targets will be a lot more efficient for NGN.
- Aim to explore AI as a more long-term milestone, exploring it as a concept and bringing new ideas of how it can benefit the company in the future is important.

"I think being a company that's known for using AI ethically would definitely get more people talking about NGN, because it's really alarmingly hard to find companies that use AI ethically. So by being one of the few companies that do, that makes NGN stand out a lot more. And while that might not necessarily make people more likely to work for the business, at the very least, it'll get more people talking about it."

"I do agree that it will get people to talk more about the company, but I don't know if that would be in a good way. There's a big negative opinion on AI and the use of AI. If someone would tell me that my doctor or a teacher was using AI to do all these things, I wouldn't like it particularly. You don't know how it's being used, if it's being applied in a correct way or if it's being used to breach crime, say. You don't know."

- With new inventions and new technologies, there's always going to be quite a bit of opposition.
- But then eventually, it becomes clear that it often does have quite big benefits.
- Throughout history, we've seen that when companies jump on new technology and new things it does often benefit the consumer, as well as things like profit and how efficiently the company runs.

5. Key Reflections for Northern Gas Networks

Key reflections on the **social impacts** of NGN's AI use:

1. Customers need to know how AI is used and validated.
2. Transparency on this matter will build trust and improve understanding, so make all the information publicly available.
3. Different age groups have varying levels of concern and interaction with AI, so make sure the information is provided appropriately for all.
 - a. E.g., use engaging formats like social media to explain AI, keeping it simple and captivating.
4. If it is integrated across the business, NGN should educate customers about their use of AI, even if it's not their core business. Education helps build credibility.
5. NGN should put mechanisms in place to address public concerns and anti-AI sentiment, which is evident just from the YIC's discussions.

Key reflections on the **environmental impacts** of NGN's AI use:

1. AI's environmental footprint needs to be acknowledged and addressed.
2. Customers expect action, not just words.
3. AI's energy consumption seems to be at odds with NGN's net zero goals. No AI solutions should undermine NGN's sustainability goals (both for people and planet).

Key reflections on the **economic impacts** of NGN's AI use:

1. AI will evolve very quickly beyond current uses and even intended uses, so any business needs to have a plan for this and be adaptable, which requires financial input.
2. This should not be taken from any budget earmarked for more important things, like achieving net zero.
3. Some members of the YIC questioned whether NGN's in-house AI development model is financially sustainable, as it will cost a lot of time and money to develop, and will need unending input financial and expert input.

Key reflections on **AI use in the energy sector**:

1. Some members of the YIC questioned AI's necessity in the energy sector, suggesting that innovation and sustainability may be better served through human-led strategies.

Key reflections on **effective monitoring** of NGN's AI use:

1. Regular and independent oversight of any AI systems is imperative.
2. All customer data should be well protected, and NGN should limit AI's access to sensitive information.
3. Diverse representation in AI monitoring will ensure integrity, including young people and all customers.
4. NGN need to know what they'll use AI for before building it into any operations. It must only be used where it adds value.

Key reflections on the impact on jobs, training and skills at NGN:

1. AI could be use to enhance training, but not NGN should not lose human-centred learning and critical thinking.
2. Workplace culture may not be enhanced by the use of AI, so NGN should always prioritise job satisfaction, accountability and the human experience at work.
3. NGN must be aware and vocal about the varying degrees of influence will have on office-based roles, where it may revolutionise systems, compared with field operations, where it may play a more supporting role.
4. Ensure all training, including AI training, remains inclusive so as not to lose expertise or disenfranchise any of the workforce.
5. Becoming dependent on AI will not be good for business, so assess and continuously monitor where it might be overused or inappropriate.
6. NGN should know which jobs are most at risk and fund reskilling programmes accordingly.
7. AI is only as good as the information it is provided with, so continued and sustained investment in the human workforce is vital.

6. Conclusion

This final session of the YIC 2025 explored the multifaceted and sometimes contentious topic of AI, and the young people once again demonstrated their enthusiasm for entering into these conversations with NGN. Through listening to complex digitalisation strategy plans from an expert witness, reacting and reflecting on what they'd researched and heard, and discussing in more detail the wider repercussions of AI at NGN, they highlighted that AI needs handling with great care and responsibility in this business and wider sector.

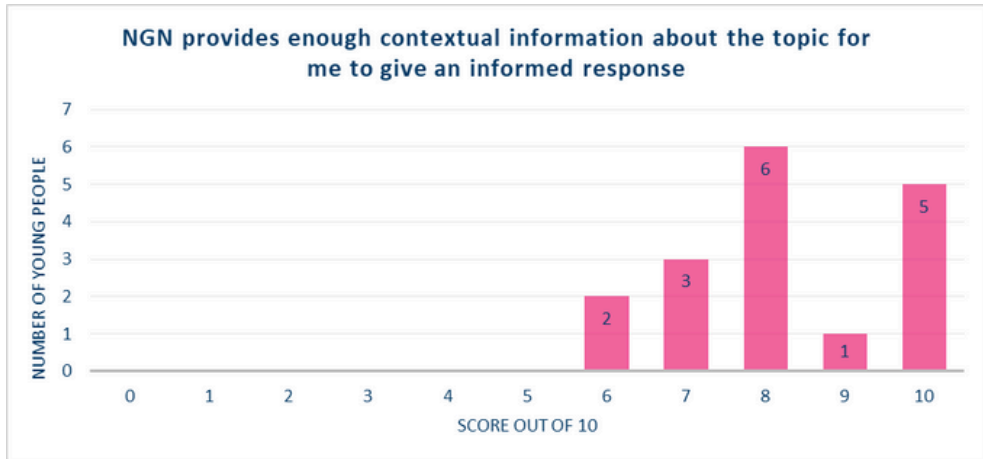
They acknowledged the benefits of streamlining workflows and therefore hopefully making space for diversifying job roles and enhancing training and delivery; they were simultaneously adamant that no integration of AI should be to the detriment of human experience or workforce at NGN.

The YIC emphasised that any AI development must reinforce — not redirect — the company's journey to net zero. For them, sustainability is the foundation of responsible innovation: progress should strengthen NGN's environmental and social commitments, not compete with them.

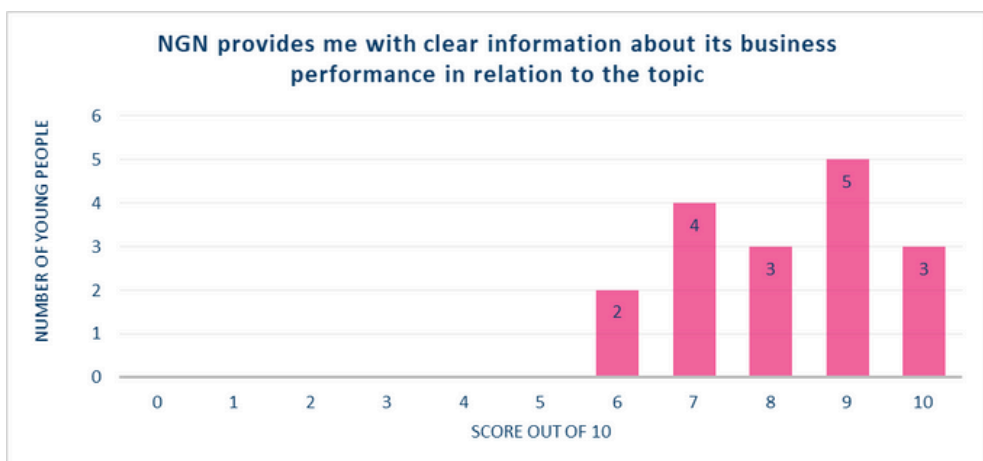
Appendices

Appendix 1: Post Session Feedback Survey on NGN Engagement. As of 22/10/2025 17 of the 19 who attend have completed the survey.

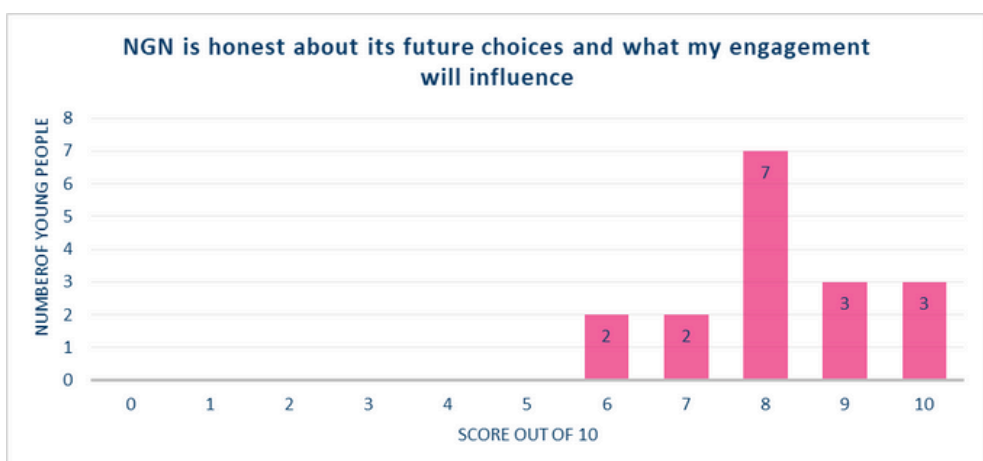
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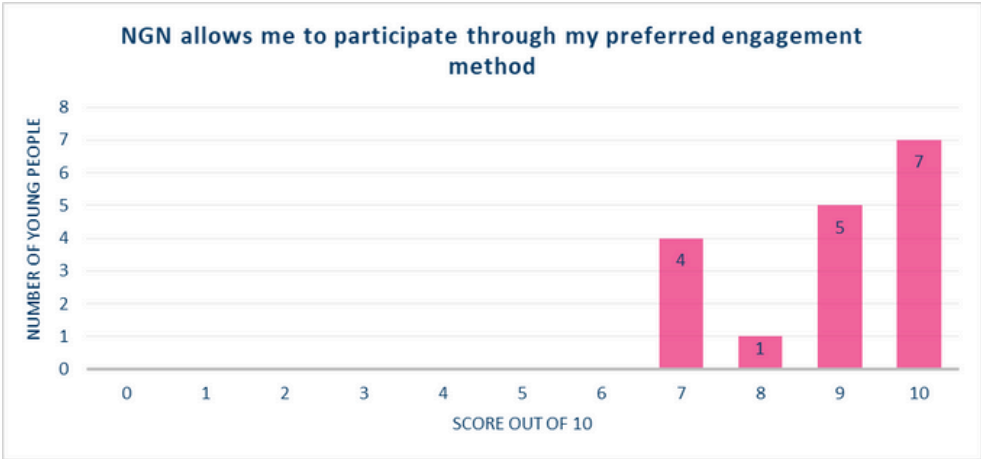
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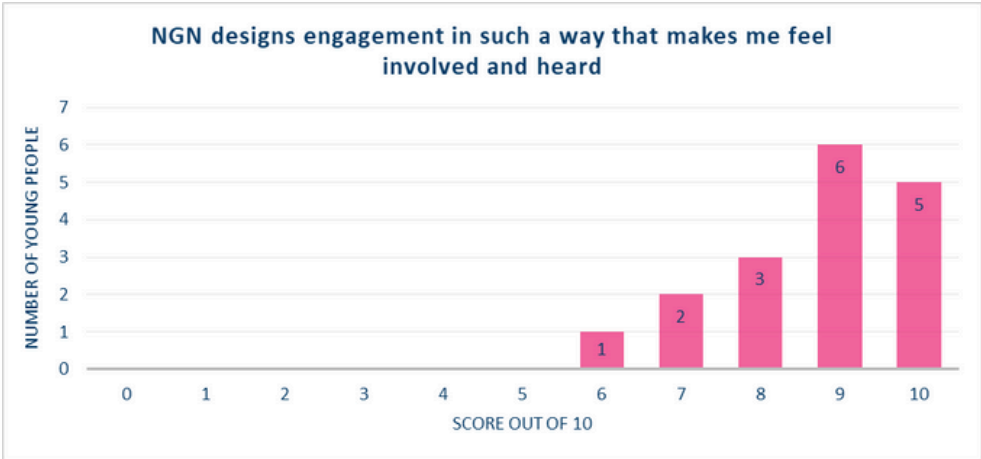
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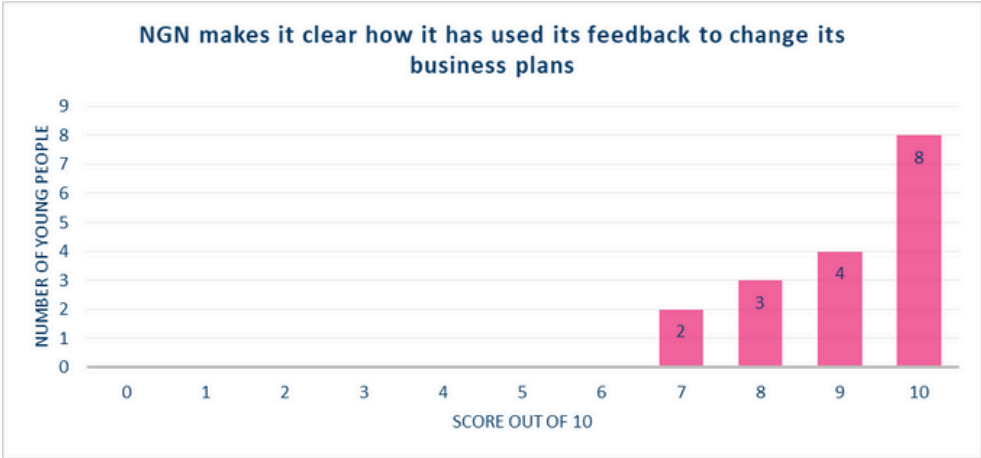
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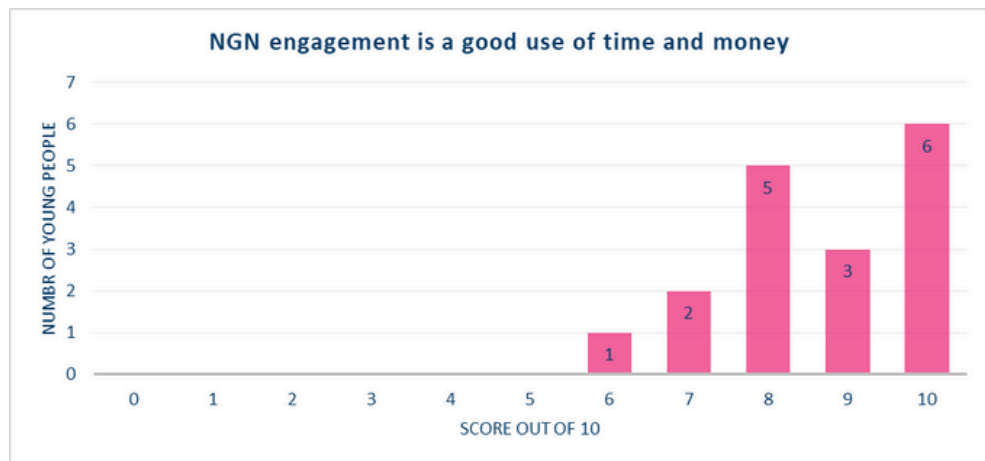
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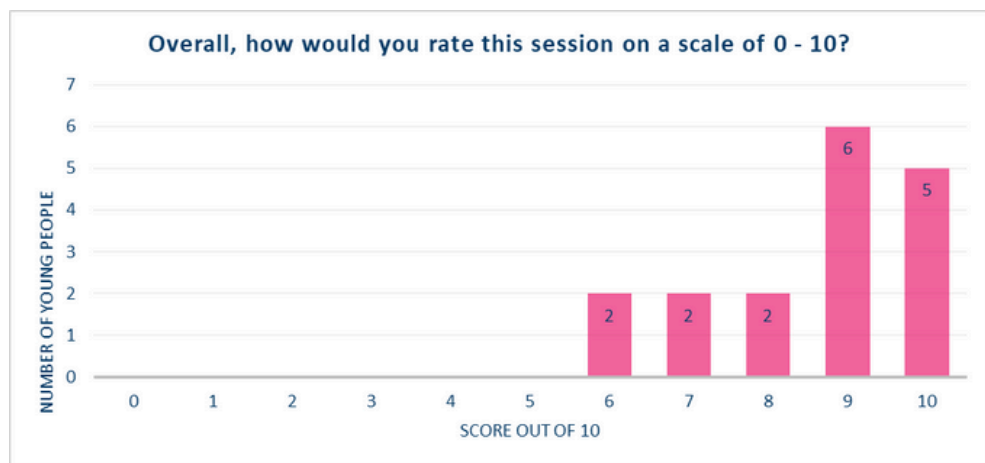
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Appendix 2: Additional comments from the YIC, either added on the feedback survey or sent by absent members.

- “I think the premise of using AI is a bit corrupt. There is no excuse for using AI, and it is having hugely negative impacts on the planet. The state of our planet is more important than profits, and will be frustrating if NGN don’t realise this (in incorporating AI).”
- “I think that we need to be using AI correctly, and not be using it inefficiently. By this, I mean we should inform people about the use of AI and have people know about what we are planning to do with it.”
- “While I think AI has its uses for NGN, I personally feel the initial implementation and subsequent development needs to be done very carefully, especially in the way of either data or safety critical roles. I think the role of AI as webpage navigation for consumers is a great one, and could be very useful, given the number of large documents that a company such as naturally NGN has, but I feel a bit more conservative when it comes to AI being used as a tool for operatives as an example, and think that it should be trialled in parallel initially.”