

THE AI INSTITUTE / OPERATING INTELLIGENCE

LEADERSHIP BRIEF · 18 SEP / 2026



# Make Your AI Training Partner Bring Real Work

A university–industry partnership in Mauritius points to a better buying question: what will people be able to deliver when the course ends?

Boards, C-suite and senior management

Research period: September 2026 – September 2026

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PUBLICATION RECORD

# An Institute thesis and decision framework

Buy an AI learning partnership around a pipeline of real work: problems supplied by employers, supervised practice, local judgement and a route for successful participants to keep using what they learn.



WHAT LEADERS SHOULD TAKE FROM THIS PAPER

- |    |                                                                                        |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | <b>Start with a useful job, not a course catalogue.</b>                                |
| 02 | <b>Budget for supervision and safe practice alongside tool access.</b>                 |
| 03 | <b>Give local employers, learners and affected workers a say in project selection.</b> |
| 04 | <b>Renew the partnership on demonstrated capability, not attendance alone.</b>         |

## Research method

Institute analysis of official university announcements, current institutional programmes and two new arXiv reports. The proposed purchasing framework is our synthesis, not an evaluated intervention. No private conversations are reproduced.

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How to use this brief

Start with the decision and use the framework to challenge the current plan. Figures retain their original populations and definitions. Institute analysis is labelled, and limitations are recorded before the references.

# Ask what happens after the course

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Before signing the next AI education partnership, ask the provider to bring something besides a curriculum: work that matters, people who can supervise it and a route for learners to use their new skills afterwards. A course can introduce a tool. A partnership should help an organisation build a capability it can keep.

On 17 September, UCL announced a three-year agreement with the University of Mauritius covering student projects and teaching pathways. Plans include a local industry network and an AI engineering lab. Its inaugural meeting was on 4 August: the announcement is new, but the collaboration did not begin yesterday. These are programme commitments, not demonstrated employment or productivity outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

The useful feature is the connection between education and locally supplied problems. It offers leaders a practical alternative to buying training first and searching for a use for it later. The Institute's recommendation is to make that connection a condition of the next skills investment.

# Start with three jobs worth learning

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Choose a small set of tasks that a business or public-service team wants to improve. Each needs an accountable manager, accessible material and a finish line a learner can understand. Preparing a reviewable service guide or testing a document-search process may be a better starting point than a vague invitation to transform the organisation.

The work should be useful without becoming a cheap substitute for an employee. Participants need time to learn, permission to make bounded mistakes and a supervisor who can explain why an apparently impressive result is unsuitable. A production deadline that leaves no room for learning belongs in a delivery contract, not an educational partnership.

Make the first agreement specific: who provides the problems, who supports the learners, who can approve use of the output and what happens to unfinished projects? The employer brings operating context; the education partner brings teaching and supervision. Neither contribution can be replaced by access to a model.

# Local judgement is becoming more valuable

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This week's research gives a reason to take local expertise seriously. A new SEA-LION technical report describes adapting models for Southeast Asian languages, with reported improvements on a regional benchmark. That is an early research result, not proof that every local organisation should build its own model. It does suggest that language and context deserve a place in the skills plan. <sup>2</sup>

Another new preprint studies differences in people's preferences using automotive-design judgements. Its narrow setting cannot tell an employer how to train staff. It does challenge a convenient assumption: disagreement among users is not necessarily an error to be averaged away. Learning to ask whose needs a system serves may be as important as learning to operate it. <sup>3</sup>

For leaders, the opportunity is a workforce that can adapt tools to real customers, explain trade-offs and recognise when a result needs help. Test that ability on familiar work before expanding the partnership. Do not turn preliminary research into promises of immediate commercial advantage.

# Include the people who will receive the work

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The partnership needs more than senior sponsors. Put an operating manager, a teaching lead, a learner representative and someone affected by the proposed work into project selection. Invite a smaller employer or public-service organisation where appropriate, so the programme does not simply reproduce the priorities of its largest funder.

This week's LSE forum programme placed employment, job quality, trade unions, government capacity and human rights alongside AI adoption. An agenda is not a set of findings, but it makes the missing conversations visible. Employers deciding what people should learn also need to decide how work, progression and influence will change.<sup>4</sup>

A good partner should be willing to discuss the awkward cases: a promising participant who lacks reliable access, a project that conflicts with workers' interests, or a sponsor who wants a favourable demonstration. Agree how those cases will be handled before the first cohort starts.

# Copy the partnership logic, not the programme

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Mauritius is one national setting, not a proxy for Africa or every emerging economy. The transferable idea is to join learning to locally owned work. Korea and African partners have also placed skills alongside digital infrastructure in their latest cooperation plan; that is an investment agenda, not evidence that capacity has already arrived. <sup>5</sup>

In North America and Europe, a partnership may have to work through established hiring, professional and worker-representation arrangements. In Southeast Asia, language coverage can change project selection. Across African, Middle Eastern and Latin American markets, leaders should test the actual availability of supervisors, connectivity and suitable employers rather than assume either abundance or shortage.

Everywhere, check local privacy, employment, accessibility and intellectual-property requirements before sharing material. The regional question is practical: which part of the learning-to-work pathway is missing here, and can this partnership provide it?

# Renew on capability, not attendance

Ask the proposed partners for a first-cohort plan with three suitable projects, named supervisors, protected learning time and a clear route for accepted work to continue. Include the cost of supervision and access, not just course fees. Make responsibility for the resulting service explicit; students should not inherit an unsupported production system.

At the end, review what participants can do independently, where they still need assistance and whether an operating team will use the result. Keep completion, capability and business benefit separate. A successful course may not yet produce an operational improvement, and a useful prototype may still depend heavily on its supervisor.

Then decide whether to renew, redesign or stop. The strongest AI education partner is not necessarily the one with the largest platform deal. It is the one that can help your people move from understanding a tool to doing useful work with it.

EXHIBIT / THREE STAGES TO PUT IN THE AGREEMENT

| SELECT                                                                                  | PRACTISE                                                                                       | CONTINUE                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Useful work</b><br>An employer supplies a suitable problem and an accountable owner. | <b>Supported learning</b><br>A supervisor provides feedback and a safe place to make mistakes. | <b>Independent capability</b><br>An operating team decides what learners and outputs can do next. |
| Institute proposal                                                                      | Institute proposal                                                                             | Institute proposal                                                                                |

## RESEARCH RECORD

# Method and limitations

## Method

Institute analysis of official university announcements, current institutional programmes and two new arXiv reports. The proposed purchasing framework is our synthesis, not an evaluated intervention. No private conversations are reproduced.

## Limitations

The Mauritius programme has no verified outcome evaluation in this record. UCL's indexed official announcement was accessible, but direct page retrieval was challenged. Research results are bounded and no peer-review claim is made for the two preprints. Regional implementation questions are due-diligence prompts, not measured comparisons.



## Sources and limitations

Source facts link to the original publication. Institute analysis reconciles definitions and turns the material into a management proposition. Frameworks are decision aids, not claims of universal causality. Read every important statistic with its population, date, definition and caveat.

Research cutoff: 18 September 2026. Review cycle: six months, or earlier after a material change in the underlying facts, standards or policy.

REFERENCES

# Evidence behind the thesis

|                                                                                                                         |                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 01                                                                                                                      | <b>UCL: University of Mauritius education partnership</b>                 |
| 17 September 2026 announcement; inaugural meeting 4 August. Plans rather than outcomes; official indexed text reviewed. |                                                                           |
| 02                                                                                                                      | <b>Dabeer et al.: SEA-LION-v4.8</b>                                       |
| New submission 16 September 2026; technical report and regional benchmark, not enterprise outcomes.                     |                                                                           |
| 03                                                                                                                      | <b>Mohan et al.: Learning Heterogeneous Preferences</b>                   |
| New submission 15 September 2026; automotive aesthetic preferences; not a workforce study.                              |                                                                           |
| 04                                                                                                                      | <b>LSE Global AI Forum: programme</b>                                     |
| 16–17 September 2026 event agenda; no claim of agreed conclusions.                                                      |                                                                           |
| 05                                                                                                                      | <b>African Development Bank: Korea–Africa digital cooperation roadmap</b> |
| Published 16 September; declaration adopted 9 September; 2027–2028 plan, not realised investment returns.               |                                                                           |
| 06                                                                                                                      | <b>Cornell: AI and the Future of Work Summit</b>                          |
| 17 September 2026 event listing; employer and university discussion, not findings.                                      |                                                                           |
| 07                                                                                                                      | <b>UNESCO: Global Forum on the Ethics of AI</b>                           |
| 14–17 September 2026 programme; institutional capacity and education agenda, no claimed agreement.                      |                                                                           |

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