GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURES OF TEACHER WELLBEING

A DEFI FORESIGHT STUDY

DIGITAL
EDUCATION
FUTURES
INITIATIVE
CAMBRIDGE

Contributors and Reviewers

Contributors:

Imogen Casebourne

Judith Hannam

Fawaz Abu Sitta

Reviewers:

Kevin Martin

Rupert Wegerif

ISBN Number: 978-1-7384336-3-6

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The aim of this research, looking forward to 2040, was not to predict what teachers' daily lives would be like, but to use Futures Thinking as an approach to anticipate possible future directions.

If we look back 15-20 years, the educational landscape was very different. The internet was beginning to be more common but mobile phones were not the pocket computers that they are now, social media was in its infancy and most schools had a computer room that they booked once a week for a lesson, if they were lucky. If we shift our perspective to more recent times, the Covid pandemic changed most schools' attitudes towards technology, and the more recent emergence of Generative AI has brought into question many of the assumptions that policy makers, assessment organisations and schools had about formative and summative assessment.

It is easy to feel concerned about these changes and the pace at which they appear to be happening, especially as past events and trends feel less useful at providing a reliable guide to the future. This uncertainty is particularly disconcerting when considering the future of teaching and the impact technology will have on teacher wellbeing. Futures Thinking provides a framework to explore these concerns in an inclusive and productive way.

Why focus on teacher wellbeing?

Around the world, teacher wellbeing has often been overshadowed by a justified concern for student wellbeing. Yet teachers' welfare is also significant: it influences classroom climate, student outcomes, and the sustainability of the teaching profession. At the time of this study, there is a global shortage of teachers – UNESCO estimates a deficit of 44 million of the teachers needed to achieve universal education by 2030 (UNESCO 2024[1]) and this shortfall is leading to overcrowded classrooms, overwork, and a greater likelihood of burnout and subsequently, teachers leaving the profession. The OECD Teaching Compass policy paper (May 2025[2]) describes the crucial role that teachers play in student wellbeing and learning: 'students will only flourish when their teachers are equally empowered in terms of their professional identity, agency, competencies and **well-being'** (our emphasis).

Participants in this foresight study noted that teacher wellbeing is an under-researched factor that could help address the twin challenges of teacher retention and recruitment. By imagining desirable futures where teaching is an attractive, healthy, and supported profession, we can begin to identify the steps needed today to move towards those futures.

The project brought together education students, teachers, researchers, EdTech companies and policy makers to imagine positive futures of teacher wellbeing and to conceptualise the steps that could be put in place to reach these preferred futures.

It builds on our previous futures thinking work with a variety of educational organisations where we have looked at the futures of assessment and the futures of schools and the suggestions we put forward are in harmony with the recently published UNESCO Teaching Compass policy paper (May 2025) which aims to 'empower teachers as co-designers of

learning, adaptive experts, and drivers of change' thereby offering 'a chance to elevate the status, purpose, and meaning of teaching itself'.

Summary of findings

- Teachers were most concerned with the immediate future as it contains so many challenges for them as teachers and as individuals.

- However, they were not afraid of the longer future, and imagined scenarios where teachers used technological advances, in particular Generative AI, wearable personalised devices and immersive technology to support them in providing a more inclusive and varied learning eco-system for students and a more fulfilling and less intensive work environment for themselves.

- Teachers saw their roles evolving to become facilitators or coaches of their students and in this self-selected group, the ideal class size to enable this was agreed to be around 15, or half the average current UK class size.

- An eco system of professional staff in addition to teachers were envisaged as co-workers in schools. They would offer high quality enrichment activities and support before, during and after the teaching day had finished so that teachers could focus on preparing stimulating lessons for their students and creating a supportive learning environment.

- The role of external evaluation was rarely mentioned as there was an assumption that formative, real time evaluation would replace summative assessments. This would leave more time for enrichment activities, inquiry and project-based learning.

- There was an emphasis on creativity, arts, sport and the need for a wider cultural and political understanding of the purpose of education as well as a closer connection with the natural world including the means of food production.

- To minimise the impact of different financial backgrounds and enable all students to access learning opportunities our participants planned that all students would receive nutritious meals at school.

- The judicious use of technology and other specialist support staff would enable teachers to enjoy work free evenings and time with their families whilst still delivering a high quality, stimulating and future focused education.

Recommendations and next steps

1. **Integrate Wellbeing into Educational Policy and Planning:** Just as student wellbeing has risen on the policy agenda in recent years, teacher wellbeing should be explicitly prioritised in education recovery and development plans.

2. **Invest in Wellbeing Infrastructure and Support Systems:** Tangible investment is needed to move from talk to reality.

3. **Use Technology to Reduce Workload, not increase it:** Technology, especially AI, is a double-edged sword which can automate drudgery or become a source of overload. We recommend a concerted effort to identify, develop, and deploy technologies that demonstrably save teacher time and stress, guided by teacher input at every stage.

4. **Promote Work–Life Balance through Flexibility and Autonomy:** Rigid schedules and one-size-fits-all roles contribute to teacher stress. Education leaders should experiment with and expand flexible work arrangements for teachers.

5. **Strengthen Community, Collaboration, and Teacher Voice:** A supportive professional community is a buffer against stress. Schools should actively facilitate collaborative teacher networks – both within the school and across schools.

6. **Cultivate Futures Literacy in Education Systems:** Finally, with the need for education system planning for resilience, we recommend that ministries of education, teacher training institutions, and school leadership programmes incorporate futures thinking as a core skill, both in educational management and within the school curricula.

In conclusion, a commitment to teacher wellbeing could form a key part of worldwide attempts to recruit and retain enough teachers with the resultant benefits for their students and the communities they live in. Signals of change that are already visible indicate that the next 15-20 years will bring new stresses but also new opportunities for tackling them. By planning ahead and involving teachers in the process, education systems could turn these uncertainties into opportunities.

Research approach

Methods

The project combined literature-based horizon scanning with collaborative scenario design in two phases.

Phase 1

In Phase 1 (2022), a small team of PhD students and DEFI researchers undertook a futures thinking process focused on teacher wellbeing. Over two months, they identified a range of signals of change (weak or emerging trends with potential future impact; see Table 1 and Table 2) and explored the forces shaping teachers' work lives. This served as a pilot to refine the process before engaging time-pressured practitioners. A key outcome of Phase 1 was the identification of an initial pool of 19 mostly technical signals with the potential to influence the future of teacher wellbeing.

Phase 2

In preparation for Phase 2 (late 2024), these signals were reviewed, especially in the light of the widespread adoption of generative AI and the advent of AI teacher assistants. At this point, the existing technological signals were supplemented with social signals, especially in relation to time use and time patterns. This resulted in 16 signals that were presented at an in-person foresight workshop event (see Appendix A for detailed set of signals from both project phases and tables 1 and 2 below for a list of signals) attended by 55 attendees – including practising teachers (20%), education academics (38%), EdTech industry professionals (16%), policy makers (10%) with participants from advocacy, publishing, the third sector and education consultancy services making up the balance. (16%)

Working in groups of 4–6, the participants were led through two structured futures workshop sessions: first evaluating and ranking the 16 signals and then co-imagining an ideal teacher's day in the year 2040 (the "Phase 2 scenarios"). Expert panel discussions were interwoven with the workshops to spark creative thinking. The outputs of both phases (the research team's analysis and the stakeholder workshop insights) informed this report.

Signals

In the context of this event, **signal** is the term given to a piece of evidence that points toward an emerging trend or potential shift in diverse fields such as technology, society, economy, environment or politics. These can be subtle observations, events, data points, or innovations that may seem insignificant in isolation (what we call weak signals) but which taken collectively suggest potential directions of future developments. By identifying and analysing signals, (together with emerging trends/drivers of change) it is possible to anticipate possible scenarios, allowing organisations and individuals to make informed decisions and proactively adapt and plan for upcoming changes.

Table 1 – Phase 1 Signals

Signals identified in Phase 1	
1. AI 2. Air quality 3. AI teaching assistants 4. AI & VR games 5. Bio hacking 6. Buddy school robot 7. Digital twins 8. Dynamic classrooms 9. Extended reality 10. Food & Mood	11. Generative AI 12. Gut bacteria 13. Meditation apps 14. Quantified teacher 15. Smart pills 16. Student mindfulness & wellness 17. Technostress 18. Telemedicine and self-care 19. Workplace wellness services

Table 2 – Phase 2 Signals

Signals identified in Phase 2	
1. Air quality 2. Bio hacking 3. Climate Change 4. Food & Mood 5. Generative AI developments 6. Life/Work Integration 7. Self-tracking 8. Slow Life Movement	9. Social media 10. Student Wellbeing Initiatives 11. Teacher shortage 12. Technostress 13. Technology pushback 14. Time shift (reimagining schedules) 15. Virtual Schools 16. Workplace Wellbeing Programmes

Phase 2 signals were shared with attendees before the workshop began so that they could familiarise themselves with them and they were asked to rank the signals before the event started.

Drivers of Change

Several consistent themes emerged by the end of the research process about the forces likely to shape teacher wellbeing in the coming decades. By synthesising the outputs from the Phase 2 pre-workshop signal ranking (see Figure 1), signal allocation on a 2x2 grid (see Table 3 & Appendix B) and group scenarios (see Table 4 and Appendix C) five key drivers of change emerged.

1.Time shift

In this context, time shift refers to the time intensive nature of the current demands on teachers and the indication from weak signals that in future these could become more manageable and flexible. In practice this could mean that if teachers were enabled to regularly work away from their classrooms for tasks that don't need to be done in school, they could better manage their home lives e.g. doctor appointments, their own children's milestones and school events. This is one of the reasons often mentioned by teachers as leading them to rethink their career choice or which causes tensions in their work-life balance. It might also extend to schools deciding which timetable or start time worked for their staff and students and rolling out new hours of participation – both for students and teachers. This was a key aspect of many of the workshop 2 scenarios, representing a desire for a greater sense of local agency and empowerment.

2. AI for teaching, learning & administration

Numerous weak signals were collected on the capacity of AI to relieve burdens on teachers from support planning curricula, producing resources, supporting parent-teacher relations, carrying out formative assessment, to alerting teachers to student learning issues before they became problems. These could, if used judiciously, contribute to the increased manageability of teaching as a role and free up teachers to concentrate on the aspects of teaching which have most value for students.

3. Social role of teachers

Teachers and schools in the UK are increasingly being told that they are responsible for many more aspects of their pupils' wellbeing than the sparking of curiosity and providing stimulating and memorable lessons: nutritional, mental and social wellbeing as well as radicalisation monitoring and enforcing attendance are taking planning and learning time away from teachers and are the aspects that in our workshop, teachers were most keen to outsource to other experts. There was a strong sense that teachers were no longer trusted to use their training, expertise and experience to decide what was best for their students and a hope that this might be reclaimed in the future.

4. Technologically enabled wellbeing tools

Many signals indicated that there was a potential health revolution in personalised wellbeing tools which could help teachers monitor their health and tackle emergent problems before they became critical and impeded them carrying out their roles.

5. Climate emergency

The awareness of a climate emergency and its impact on education was present throughout the process of this research project. Teachers are responsible for teaching about climate change and its implications for the world they are preparing their students for. Additionally, the nature of schooling will probably be radically changed by the impacts of climate change occurring already. The effect on: school buildings; resources needed for teaching; state funding; profile of the student body and their mental and physical health; as well as potential disruptions to learning and progression, were all raised by workshop participants.

Key findings

Key findings from the signals in Phase 2 of the research process

In the signal ranking exercise in Phase 2, participants highlighted teacher shortages and the influence of social media as the most urgent issues to address (these were ranked top by the greatest number of groups). Close behind were the rapid developments in AI – seen as both a potential support and a source of stress – and climate change, which poses systemic challenges to schooling and wellbeing. A cluster of other factors were also frequently noted, including initiatives around student wellbeing, the push for better work–life integration for teachers, and the challenge of technostress (the struggle to keep up with new technologies). More nascent or niche trends like "slow life" movements (advocating a slower pace of living), biohacking for health, and self-tracking garnered comparatively less attention from participants, though they present interesting possibilities. These signals – detailed in the Appendix A – paint a picture of the future context in which teachers could potentially operate and included demographic and environmental pressures as well as technological and cultural shifts.

As shown in Appendix A the inputs range from global macro-forces (e.g. climate change, teacher shortages) to technological innovations (AI, edtech, self-tracking & wearables) to cultural shifts in values (work-life balance, slow life movement). Not all are of equal certainty or importance; some may turn out to be minor, while others could dramatically reshape the profession. The purpose of identifying a range of signals and trends was not to definitively forecast what will happen, but to widen our peripheral vision and challenge assumptions. Even weak signals or seemingly irrelevant trends can spark creative thinking about how to improve teacher wellbeing. For instance, the "buddy robot" prototypes mentioned in our Phase 1 signals (an AI-powered classroom assistant robot) might seem far-fetched, but they prompt us to consider how automation and human support could blend in future schools. Likewise, the self-care and "quantified teacher/self tracking" trends raise questions about how much personal data teachers might share to get wellbeing support, and where boundaries should be set. By scanning across domains, we seek to avoid the trap of technological solutionism – assuming one silver-bullet innovation will fix everything – and instead see the bigger picture of interacting factors.

Many signals are interlinked. Improvements in student wellbeing (Phase 2 Signal 10) can reduce classroom stress for teachers, just as workplace wellness programmes (Phase 2 Signal 16) might address some causes of teacher burnout but won't succeed if overwork from staff shortages (Phase 2 Signal 11) isn't also addressed. Signals can also drive or counteract each other: for example, rapid adoption of generative AI in schools (Phase 2 Signal 5) might reduce time pressure, or conversely, increase technostress (Phase 2 Signal 12) unless balanced, perhaps by technology pushback measures (Phase 2 Signal 13) or better training. In short, increasing or even maintaining teacher wellbeing will require a systems approach that considers interconnected trends rather than tackling issues in isolation. The next section describes how study participants engaged with the signals and

trends as building blocks to imagine several different future scenarios – stories of how a day in the year 2040 might look for teachers under varying conditions.

Figure 1 – Pre-Phase 2 workshop ranking of Signals by individual attendees

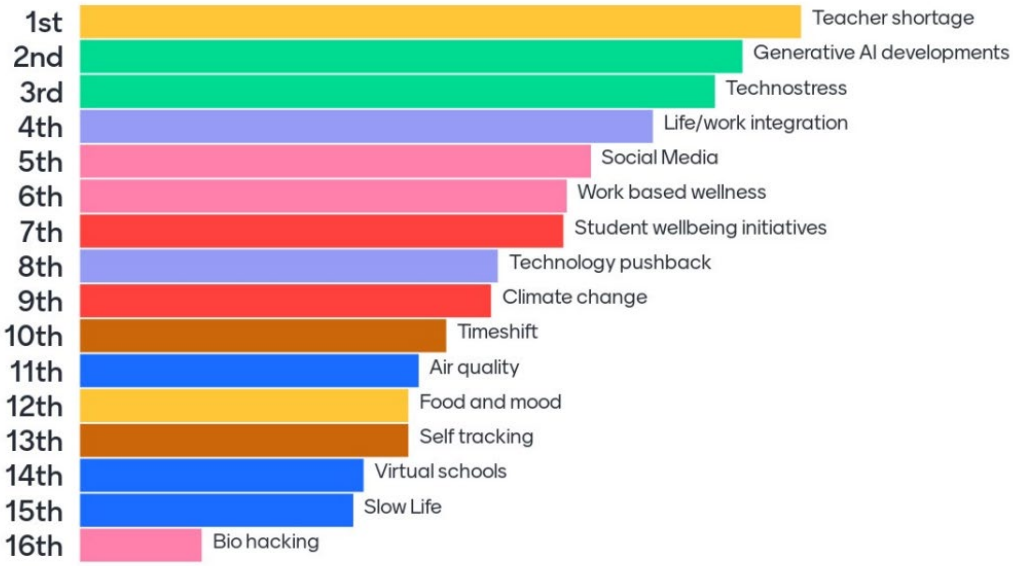


Table 3 – Group ranking of signals in Phase 2 workshop

Ranking – most important to consider	
7 groups	Teacher Shortages & Social Media
6 groups	Generative AI developments
5 groups	Climate change
4 groups	Student wellbeing initiatives
3 groups	Air quality, Food & Mood, Life/Work Integration, Technostress, Time shift, Virtual schools
2 groups	Workplace wellbeing
1 group	Bio hacking, Self tracking, Slow Life

Key findings from the scenarios in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the research process

With a shared understanding of some potential forces of change, the research group in Phase 1 and the workshop groups in Phase 2 engaged in scenario planning to explore how different combinations might play out by 2040. Scenario planning is a strategic foresight technique where participants create plausible stories about the future by varying key uncertainties.

Phase 1 scenarios

In the first phase of research, the smaller expert group (PhD students and researchers) created an initial set of divergent scenarios to frame the discussion. They used a method of defining axes of uncertainty to span a scenario space. In this case, two critical uncertainties chosen were: (1) the level of support for education from governments and society (ranging from high investment/support to neglect), and (2) the degree of technological advancement and adoption in education (ranging from high-tech to low-tech futures). By considering opposite extremes of these factors, the team outlined four archetypal scenarios for education in 2040, which they nicknamed:

- "**Smart Education**" – a future of high support and high technology. For example, strong government investment in education combines with advanced AI and digital tools in every classroom. This scenario envisioned abundant resources and innovation, potentially empowering teachers with AI assistants and data-driven personalisation. Teacher wellbeing could flourish here if the technology is harnessed to lighten workloads and if the high investment includes professional development and mental health support.

- **"Divided Education"** – a future of low support but high technology. In this world, cutting-edge edtech might be available, but public funding and policy support for education are weak and uneven. The name "Divided" reflects growing inequalities: well-resourced schools or private providers use AI and online platforms, while other schools are left behind. For teachers, this scenario could be a double-edged sword – some might benefit from innovative tools, but many might struggle in under-funded systems with only piecemeal tech support, leading to stress and frustration.

- **"Authentic Education"** – a future of high support but low technology. Here, society heavily values education and invests in it, but chooses to limit or carefully curate technology use. Schools might focus on "authentic" learning experiences, outdoor education, and human-to-human interaction, leveraging tech only sparingly. Small class sizes, ample prep time, and community support define this scenario. Teacher wellbeing could be high due to strong support and manageable expectations, though some administrative tasks might remain burdensome without tech assistance.

- **"Collapsed Education"** – a future of low support and low technology. This is a bleak scenario where both funding and innovation stagnate (or regress) due to political, financial or climate crises or policy failures. Teacher shortages might become more severe, infrastructure crumble under climate and economic strain, and morale could be low. Wellbeing in this scenario is predictably poor: teachers are overstretched, isolated, and

operating without new tools or support, essentially an exacerbation of the worst challenges today.

These scenarios provided a framework to provoke thinking. They are intentionally extreme to cover a wide spectrum of futures. The reality of 2040 will probably contain elements of several scenarios

Introduction to Phase 2 scenarios

Having outlined four extreme possible scenarios in Phase 1, in Phase 2, with teachers and other stakeholders present, scenario creation took a more concrete form. Based on the signals they had recently ranked together, groups were asked to "imagine what a teacher's ideal day in 2040 might look like" in a future where things had changed for the better. This prompt was intentionally optimistic and focused on desirable futures rather than dystopias, to energise participants and generate ideas for solutions. Each group sketched out elements of a narrative, often implicitly placing their story in a future scenario.

Table 4 - Summary of Phase 2 scenarios

Scenarios developed	Group 1 A day in the life of human-centred digital schooling on a healthy planet	Group 2 Time to work, time to live	Group 3 Flexible and relaxed	Group 4 A hive of busy, mindful, respectful and creative beings	Group 5 Teaching is one of the most desired professions	Group 6 15 years forward and 50 years back	Group 7 Sustainability, Equality of Opportunity, Joy
Morning	Teachers begin their day with a flexible and mindful routine, often supported by AI personal assistants, wellbeing practices, and a healthy breakfast—either at home or in school settings with a community atmosphere — before arriving at school refreshed and prepared through minimal admin, digital planning tools, and support systems.						
Lessons	Classroom time is student-centred, project-based, and enriched by technology, where teachers act as facilitators or co-learners alongside students, supported by AI, TAs, and co-teachers; learning is collaborative, immersive, flexible in timing, and often integrated with real-world contexts and outdoor environments.						
Lunch	Lunchtimes are protected, social, and nourishing, offering teachers and students healthy meals (often grown on-site), opportunities for community engagement or quiet retreat, and a clear break from supervision or administrative duties—fostering wellbeing and connection.						
After lunch	After lunch, the focus shifts away from academic lessons toward enrichment activities for students and planning or professional development for teachers, with flexibility to work from home or engage in passions; roles are distributed to reduce teacher workload, with specialists leading extracurricular activities and AI handling routine tasks.						
Evening	Evenings are dedicated to rest, social life, personal growth, or leisure—with no marking, no contact from school, and digital tools or assistants ensuring all planning and admin are complete during school hours, enabling genuine work-life balance.						

Phase 2 scenarios – emergent themes

These scenarios can be read in full in Appendix C.

Emergent themes

- **A renewed respect for teaching as a profession:** In the future visions, teaching was often described as more collaborative and respected. Teachers in these scenarios had stronger peer networks (some facilitated by tech, some by policy), and society recognised their role (e.g. better pay was implied in high-support scenarios, though not always explicitly stated). This ties back to tackling the teacher shortage: if the profession becomes more attractive and sustainable, more people will enter and stay, creating a virtuous cycle of reduced workload and improved wellbeing for all. Participants highlighted that teacher voice should be central in shaping these futures: a dialogic approach where teachers co-design reforms was itself seen as a way to improve morale and outcomes.

- **Trust in school leaders and their staff** that they can create a learning environment that supplies the needs of their particular pupils and setting – e.g. adjusting start times, time tabling, curriculum content beyond statutory elements, employing specialist staff to allow teachers to focus on what they are trained to do.

- **A curriculum that encompasses not just exam subjects** but life skills and understanding how to live sustainably and healthily – both mentally and physically. Teachers model this for their pupils and the school community is supportive and resilient because it takes the needs of all members into account – including pupils, teachers, parents and the local community. For assessment, there was a hope that AI could enable it to be formative and ongoing so that drilling for exams to the exclusion of other critical activities for young people is minimised.

- **A recognition that teachers can't provide the solution to every child's needs** (academic and pastoral) but that other specialist staff also have a place in every academic setting.

- **AI and digital opportunities are used judiciously as tools** to help a teacher decide how best to support their pupils' learning and their school environment. Every positive scenario featured AI taking over mundane tasks (planning, basic tutoring) so that teachers could focus on relational and creative aspects of teaching. This resonates with the signal that generative AI could significantly ease teacher workload if deployed thoughtfully. However, participants also voiced concerns that training and ethical guidelines would be needed to avoid pitfalls (such as AI bias or over-reliance).

- **Technostress relief and digital balance:** Whether through having an AI assistant or through policies like email curfews and phone bans during meetings, scenarios addressed today's overload of digital demands. There was a clear desire to avoid the 24/7 availability expectation that many teachers feel now. Some scenarios explicitly included technology-free periods (echoing the technology pushback signal), indicating a future where a healthy balance is struck between leveraging tech and preserving human downtime.

- **Work–life balance and flexible schedules:** Virtually all scenarios touched on improved scheduling – be it a four-day teaching week, later start times, or built-in collaboration periods – aligning with the time shift signal trends. Participants often mentioned that flexibility would allow teachers to better manage their personal lives, which is essential for wellbeing. Moreover, certain tasks currently done at home (like marking) were, in these futures, done with AI help or allocated time at work, so that evenings and weekends were freer.

- **Wellbeing culture and infrastructure:** Many ideas went beyond individual interventions and envisioned systemic supports: wellness budgets, on-site facilities, access to counselling or coaching, and a school culture that genuinely prioritises wellbeing (for instance, leaders modelling work-life balance and protecting teachers' preparation time). This echoes the rise of workplace wellness programmes but adapted to schools. The consensus was that piecemeal wellness efforts (like a meditation app) won't succeed unless the overall workload and pressure are addressed – hence the emphasis on policy and culture shifts.

It is important to note that these scenarios are not utopias. Participants balanced optimism with realism – for example, acknowledging constraints like budgets or the need for evidence to drive policy changes. However, by starting with "let's imagine things going *right*," the conversation shifted from mere problem gathering, to solution envisioning. This future-oriented mindset is a hallmark of anticipatory thinking: it helps stakeholders move beyond present frustrations and consider *actionable pathways* to improvement. In fact, after painting their ideal 2040 scenes, groups were asked, "What would need to happen between now and 2040 to get there?" This prompt generated many of the recommendations in the next section. It encouraged participants to think in terms of levers and strategies – for instance, if a scenario had full-time wellbeing coaches in schools, a pathway might be to pilot that programme in a small area now and gather data on its impact. If a scenario assumed widespread AI use, a pathway might involve setting up teacher-AI design committees to guide how such tools are developed and rolled out, to ensure they truly meet teachers' needs.

In summary, the scenario process confirmed that no single innovation will safeguard teacher wellbeing; instead, a *constellation* of technological, pedagogical, and policy innovations – guided by a vision of human-centric education – is needed. The future narratives crafted by this study's participants provide hopeful examples of what such a constellation might look like in practice. They illustrate that by proactively addressing current weak signals (from AI to climate adaptation to work culture), we can imagine futures where teachers might not only survive but *thrive*.

The following section includes participants' opinions of changes that they would like to take place in their institutions as a direct result of the workshops and distils the insights from discussions into a set of practical recommendations and considerations for education policymakers, school leaders, and other stakeholders who aim to improve teacher wellbeing at a systemic level. It concludes with a graphic of impossible things that attendees think would change teacher wellbeing for the better if they were only possible.

Attendees' views on future actions

Insights and potential actions as a result of the process

1. **Integrate Wellbeing into Educational Policy and Planning:** Just as student wellbeing has risen on the policy agenda in recent years, teacher wellbeing should be explicitly prioritised in education recovery and development plans.

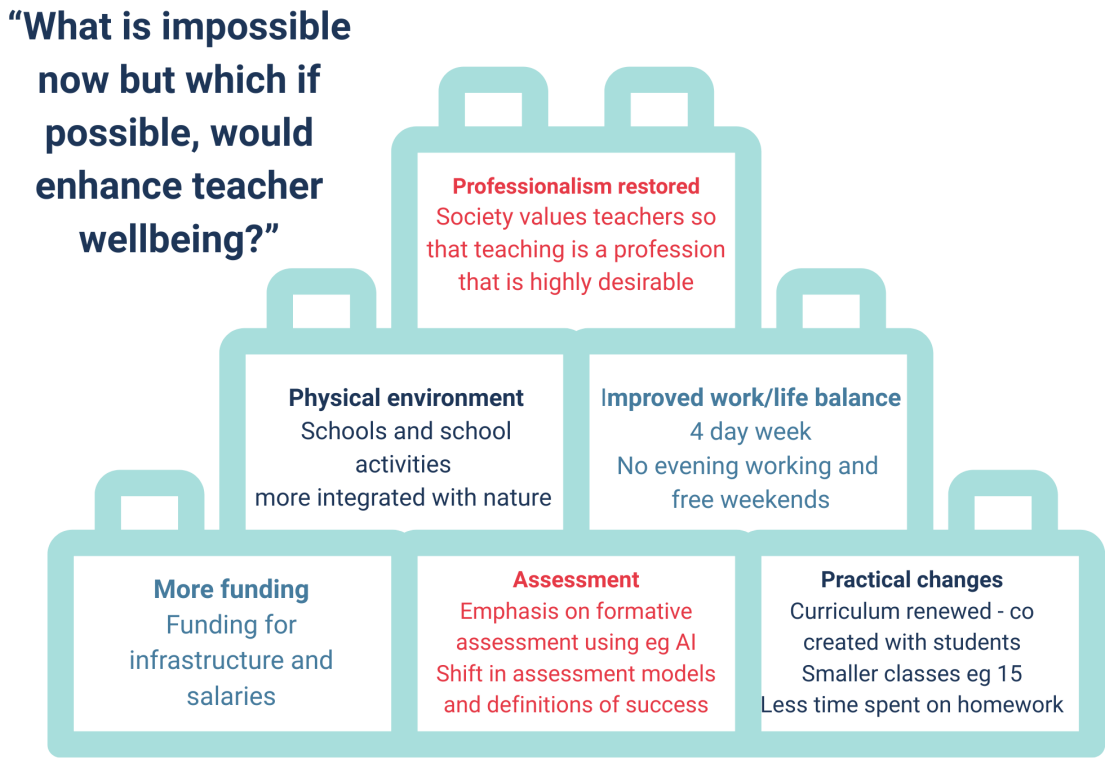
2. **Invest in Wellbeing Infrastructure and Support Systems:** Tangible investment is needed to move from talk to reality.

3. **Use Technology to Reduce Workload, not increase it:** Technology, especially AI, can automate drudgery or become a source of overload. We recommend a concerted effort to identify, develop, and deploy technologies that demonstrably save teachers' time and stress, guided by teacher input at every stage.

4. **Promote Work–Life Balance through Flexibility and Autonomy:** Rigid schedules and one-size-fits-all roles contribute to teacher stress. Education leaders should experiment with and expand flexible work arrangements for teachers.

5. **Strengthen Community, Collaboration, and Teacher Voice:** A supportive professional community is a buffer against stress. Schools should actively facilitate collaborative teacher networks – both within the school and across schools.

6. **Cultivate Futures Literacy in Education Systems:** Finally, we recommend that ministries of education, teacher training institutions, and school leadership programmes incorporate futures thinking as a core skill.



Appendices

Appendix A

Signals of Change: Trends Shaping Teacher Wellbeing

A signal is a piece of evidence that might form part of an emerging trend or individually point to a potential shift in the environment. DEFI's initial horizon scanning identified numerous signals across technology, society, economy, environment, and policy domains, which were refined to 16 key signals presented to participants in the workshop. Each signal represents an ongoing or nascent development that could significantly influence teacher wellbeing in the future.

Below please find a brief overview of these signals (in alphabetical order), along with their potential implications for teacher wellbeing.

Signal	Emerging Trend and Potential Impact on Teacher Wellbeing
1. Air quality	Recognition that cleaner air leads to better health and concentration in classrooms. Poor air quality in schools can contribute to fatigue and illness, so improving ventilation and air filtration may boost both teacher and student wellbeing.
2. Bio hacking	Experiments and DIY initiatives to enhance health or performance through biology, technology or nutrition. For teachers, biohacking trends (e.g. dietary supplements, wearable enhancements) could offer new ways to manage energy and stress, though efficacy and ethics remain uncertain.
3. Climate change	Climate change and related extreme events increasingly disrupt education infrastructure and resources. Schools may face heatwaves, floods, energy or water shortages, adding stress for teachers. Preparing climate-resilient schools and curricula will be crucial to protect teacher (and student) wellbeing amid environmental volatility.
4. Food and mood	Growing evidence links diet, gut health, and mood. This "food and mood" connection suggests that nutrition programmes (e.g. healthy school meals, staff dietary support) could improve mental health and emotional resilience for teachers. A focus on healthy eating is seen as an accessible wellbeing strategy.

Signal	Emerging Trend and Potential Impact on Teacher Wellbeing
5. Generative AI Developments	Rapid advancements in AI – such as AI teaching assistants, classroom chatbots or "digital twin" tutors – are poised to transform teachers' work. These tools can automate marking, planning, and other routine tasks, potentially reducing workload and freeing teachers for more meaningful interactions. However, if introduced without training or support, AI could also introduce technostress or job insecurity concerns. The net impact on wellbeing will depend on implementation.
6. Life/Work Integration	An emerging shift from "work–life balance" toward "life–work integration", where individuals prioritise free time and personal life alongside work ambitions. In teaching, this trend surfaces in calls for flexible schedules, job-sharing, sabbaticals, and policies that allow educators to manage workloads in ways that honour their life outside work. Embracing life-work integration could help mitigate burnout and improve overall satisfaction.
7. Self-Tracking	Proliferation of wearables and health-tracking apps enabling real-time monitoring of personal metrics (steps, sleep, stress levels, etc.). For teachers, self-tracking could provide insights into their wellbeing (e.g. alerting them when stress is high or sleep is low) and encourage healthy habits. However, it might also lead to feelings of surveillance or pressure if imposed by employers. Effective use of this trend would require a supportive, voluntary approach to avoid adding anxiety.
8. "Slow Life" Movement	A cultural movement advocating a slowdown of life's pace in favour of deeper contentment and well-being. It emphasises shorter work hours, reduced material consumption, and unplugging from technology regularly. If applied to education, a "slow teaching" ethos could mean more time for reflection, smaller class loads, or sabbatical periods – potentially reducing stress. This runs counter to the prevailing fast-paced, high-pressure school environment, but elements of slow life thinking are inspiring calls for more humane schedules and expectations in teaching.

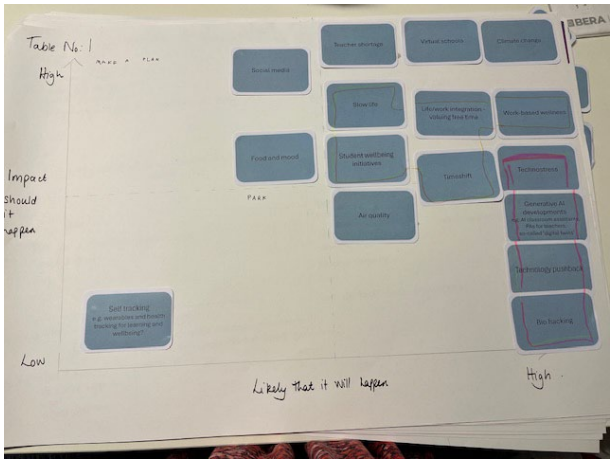
Signal	Emerging Trend and Potential Impact on Teacher Wellbeing
9. Social media	Ubiquitous social media use is linked to anxiety, distraction, and decreased wellbeing for young people, and by extension affects teachers' mental health in and out of the classroom. Cyberbullying, constant connectivity, and comparison culture can increase teacher stress. In response, some governments and schools have introduced smartphone bans or "digital detox" initiatives to improve focus and mental health. Reducing social media pressures – for students and teachers alike – is increasingly seen as necessary for wellbeing.
10. Student Wellbeing Initiatives	Heightened focus on students' mental and physical health, especially post-pandemic. Schools are introducing more play-based learning, mindfulness exercises, counselling support, and "whole child" approaches. These initiatives aim to reduce student stress and improve youth resilience – which in turn creates a healthier working environment for teachers. Improving student wellbeing is likely to positively impact teacher wellbeing as classroom dynamics and student behaviour improve. Teachers may also benefit directly from a school culture that normalises wellbeing practices (like breathing exercises or brain breaks) for everyone.
11. Teacher shortage	Many regions face a chronic shortfall of qualified teachers. UNESCO and the Teacher Task Force project a deficit of ~44 million teachers worldwide by 2030. This shortage means heavier workloads and larger classes for those who are teaching, contributing to stress, exhaustion, and attrition. Causes include high workload, low pay, limited support, and an aging workforce. Addressing this will likely require systemic changes – from better salaries and working conditions to automation of administrative tasks – to prevent remaining teachers from being overwhelmed.
12. Technostress	Technostress refers to the strain and anxiety caused by constantly evolving technology and the pressure to adopt new tools. The rapid shift to online learning during COVID-19 exemplified this challenge, as many teachers felt unprepared for new platforms. Without sufficient training and time to adapt, new edtech can lower teacher wellbeing. Mitigating technostress involves providing better support and professional development for teachers, as well as choosing technologies that truly simplify (rather than complicate) the job.

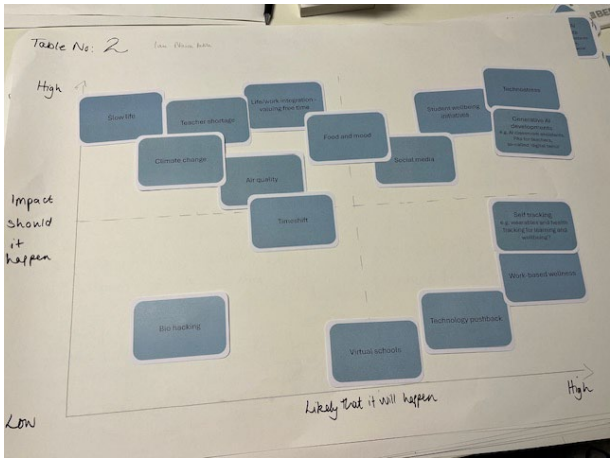
Signal	Emerging Trend and Potential Impact on Teacher Wellbeing
13. Technology pushback	A counter-trend to edtech growth: recently, some educators and policymakers have advocated for limits on technology in schools. Examples include banning mobile phones in class and re-emphasising handwriting or low-tech teaching methods. This "pushback" arises from concerns that constant tech use may hinder learning or wellbeing. If such movements grow, we may see "tech-free" periods or protected domains in education. For teacher wellbeing, a moderate stance could be beneficial (reducing digital overload), but an extreme pushback might also limit helpful tools. The challenge is finding a balance that maximises wellbeing.
14. Time shift (Reimagining Schedules)	Rethinking the timing and structure of the school day/year to alleviate stress. In the past two decades, research has explored later school start times to align with adolescent sleep cycles, year-round schooling to distribute breaks, and alternative work arrangements for teachers (like a four-day week or nine-day fortnight). Studies in the US and UK suggest later start times can improve student alertness (and possibly teacher mood), while spreading out school holidays might prevent burnout by providing more frequent breaks and shorter teaching stretches. However, these changes also have trade-offs (e.g. shorter summer breaks). Ongoing pilot programmes will inform how schedule redesigns could boost teacher work-life balance.
15. Virtual Schools	The expansion of fully online or hybrid "virtual schools" that deliver education digitally to students, sometimes across regions or countries. Virtual schools can help address teacher shortages and reach students who can't attend traditional schools, which may reduce strain on overloaded local teachers. At the same time, virtual teaching requires educators to master new platforms and pedagogies and can introduce feelings of isolation or new types of workload (e.g. being online at odd hours). The impact on wellbeing will depend on support systems for virtual teachers – such as training, tech support, reasonable scheduling, and strategies to build online teacher communities – to ensure they don't feel "always on" or disconnected.

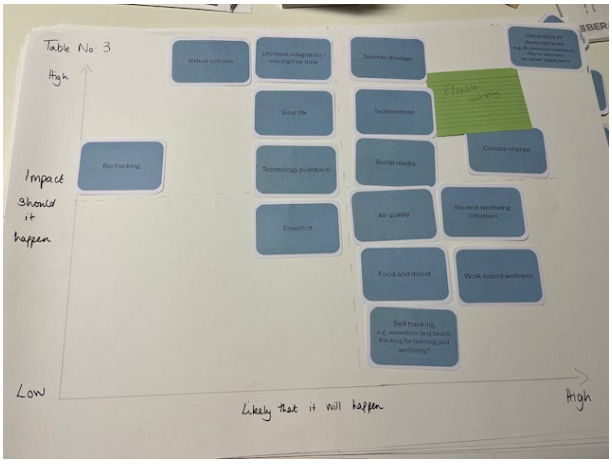
Signal	Emerging Trend and Potential Impact on Teacher Wellbeing
16. Workplace Wellbeing Programmes	Borrowing from corporate wellness trends, schools and education departments are increasingly considering staff wellbeing programmes ("work-based wellness"). These include initiatives like free or subsidised gym memberships, employee assistance counselling, yoga or fitness classes, healthy school lunches for staff, and wellness apps for tracking health goals. The global employee wellbeing market is booming, reflecting the belief that healthier staff are more productive and have fewer absences. In education, such programmes could help teachers combat stress and stay healthier – if teachers have the time and encouragement to actually use them. It's important that these efforts are accompanied by a supportive culture (so teachers don't feel guilty taking a wellbeing break) and respect privacy (since collecting personal health data raises ethical issues).

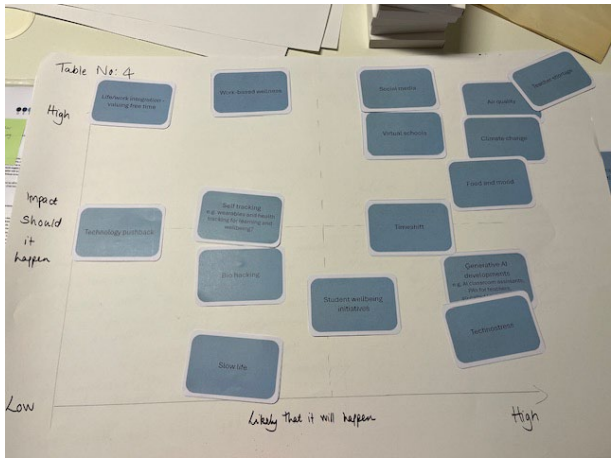
Appendix B:

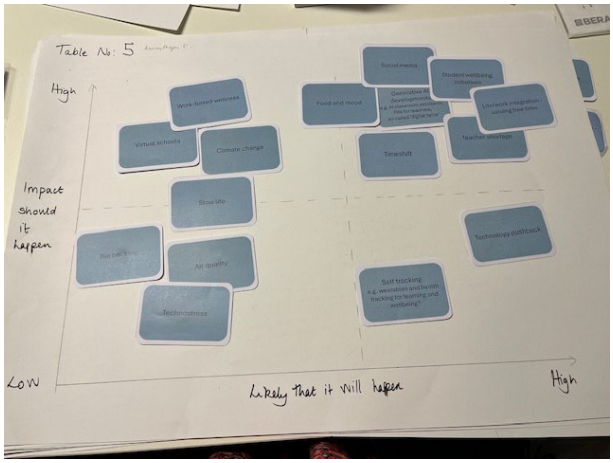
Workshop 1 posters – assessment of signals for likelihood and impact

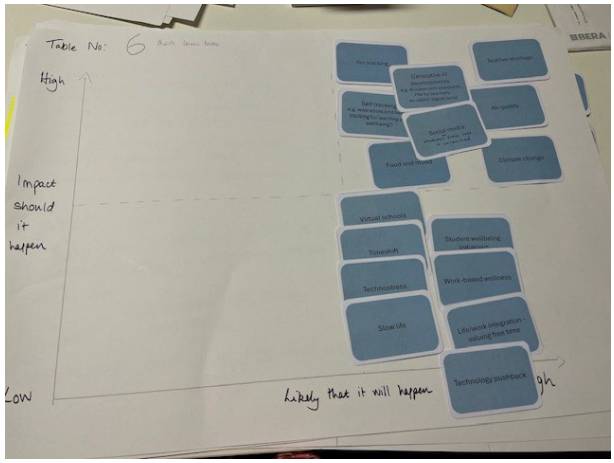


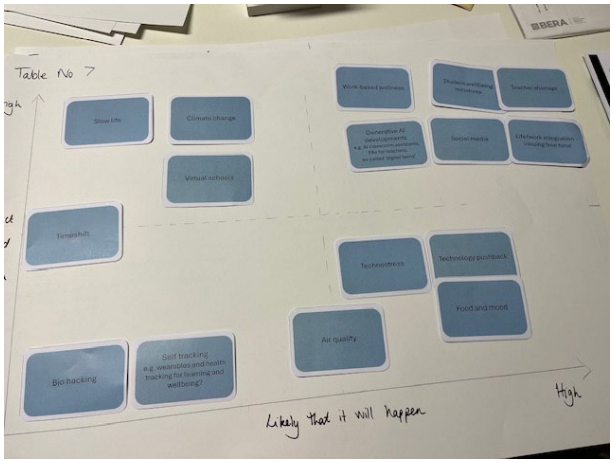


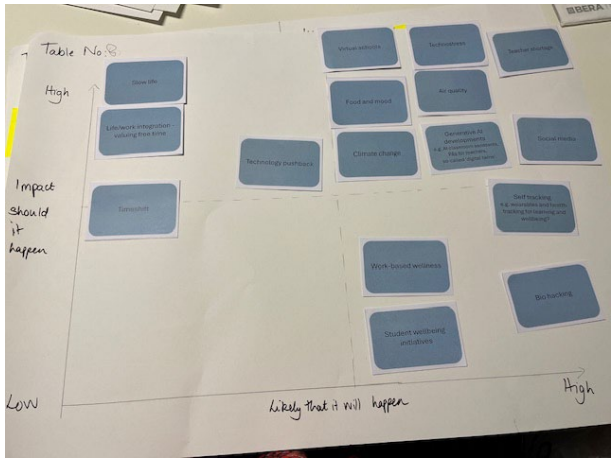




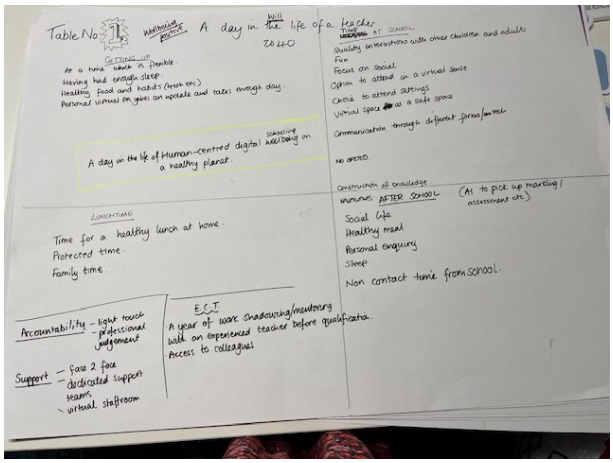


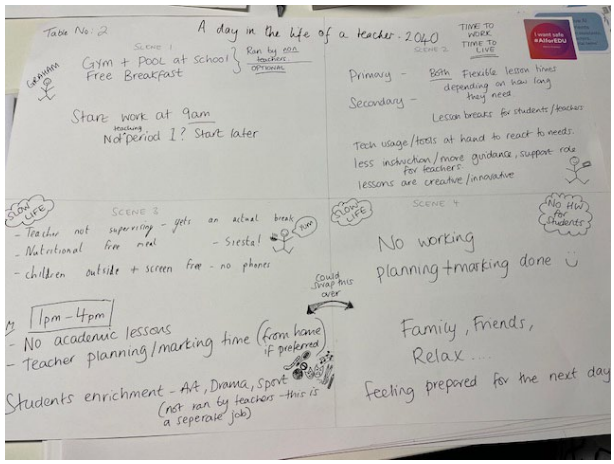


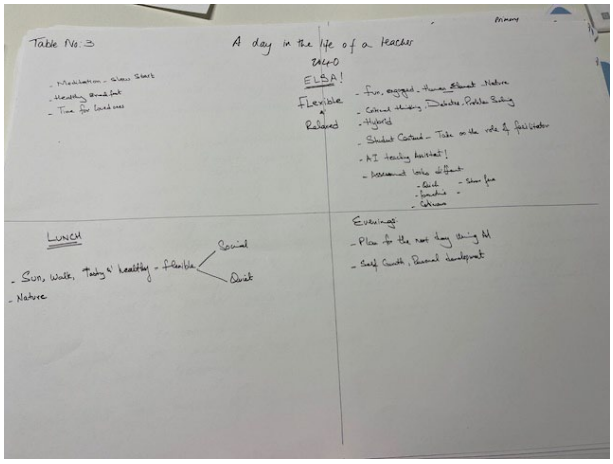


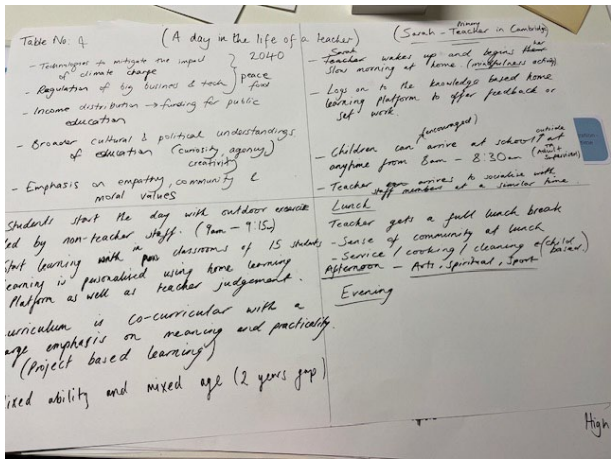


Workshop 2 posters – creating utopian scenarios









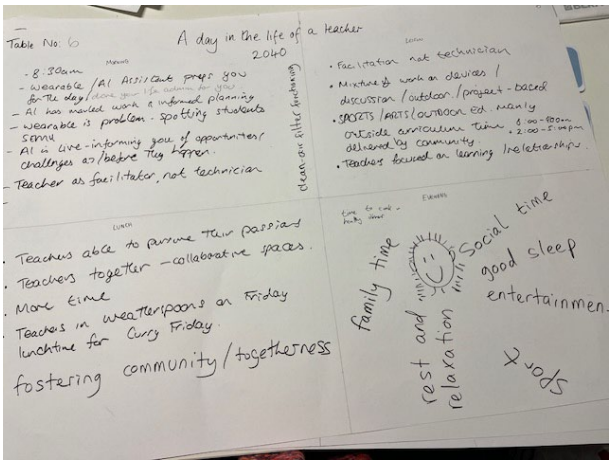


Table No: 6
A day in the life of a teacher
2040
Teacher as facilitator, not technician
Teachers able to pursue their passions
Teachers together - collaborative spaces
More time
Teachers in weatherspoons on Friday
lunchtime for Curry Friday
fostering community/togetherness
family time
social time
good sleep
entertainment
rest and relaxation
Evening

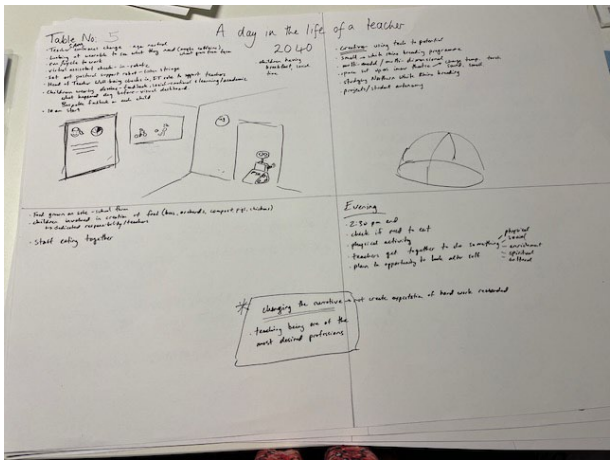


Table No: 5
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2040
Evening

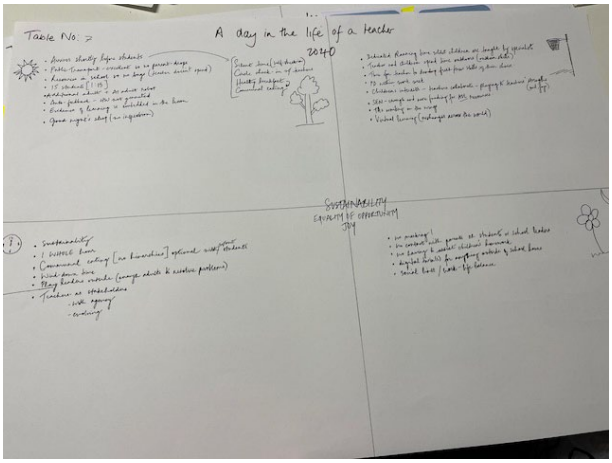
Table No: 7
A day in the life of a teacher
2040

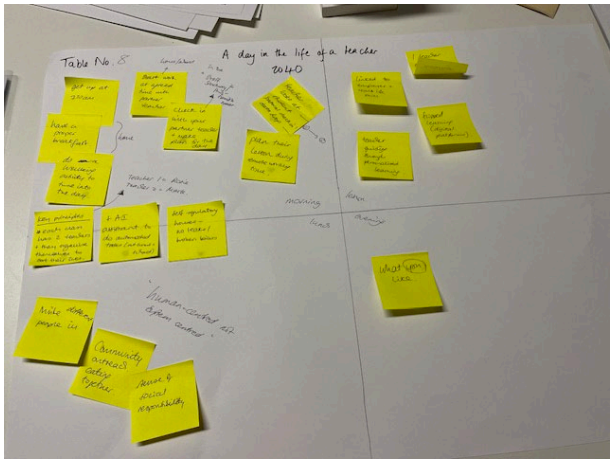
Table No: 8
A day in the life of a teacher
2040
Morning
Evening

Appendix C:

Scenarios developed in workshop 2

The titles of the posters from workshop 2 reveal the attitudes and ideal visions of teacher wellbeing in 2050.

Group Number	Scenario Title
Group 1	A day in the life of human-centred digital schooling on a healthy planet
Group 2	Time to work, time to live
Group 3	School is a hive of busy, mindful, respectful and creative beings
Group 4	Flexible and relaxed
Group 5	Teaching is one of the most desired professions
Group 6	15 years forward and 50 years back
Group 7	Sustainability, Equality of Opportunity, Joy

Group 1: 'A Day in the life of human-centred digital schooling on a healthy planet'

I woke naturally this morning, no alarm needed. My schedule is synced to my biological clock, so I wake up feeling rested and alert. After a refreshing shower and a breakfast of fresh, locally sourced food, my personal virtual assistant gently checks in. It gives me a quick overview of the day ahead—meetings, student projects, and a reminder that I've got a mentoring session with a new teacher this afternoon.

Before heading out, I spend a few minutes in quiet reflection—part of my daily wellbeing routine. I log into our virtual staffroom to catch up with my opposite number in the neighbouring town. We share ideas and laugh about yesterday's student-led science fair. It's a warm, supportive space—part of a wider network of educators who collaborate across schools and regions.

At school, the atmosphere is calm and energising. Students are already engaged in their inquiry-based projects, exploring everything from climate solutions to AI ethics. My role is more of a coach and mentor now, guiding their learning journeys rather than delivering content. AI systems handle the admin and provide real-time insights into student progress, freeing me to focus on meaningful interactions.

Today, I'm co-facilitating a cross-school project in our collaborative learning hub—a flexible space that blends physical and virtual environments. Some students are joining from home or other schools, and the tech makes it seamless. We laugh, debate, and build ideas together. There's a real sense of joy and curiosity in the room.

At lunchtime, I head home. It's protected time—no meetings, no emails. I sit down with my family for a healthy meal and a proper conversation. It's one of the best parts of my day.

In the afternoon, I meet with an early career teacher I'm mentoring. She's in her shadowing year, learning the ropes through observation and supported practice. We reflect on her week, and she shares how the support team helped her navigate a tricky classroom moment. It's a far cry from the sink-or-swim approach of the past.

After school, I have time for myself. I go for a walk, cook a nourishing dinner, and spend an hour on my own personal enquiry project—exploring how storytelling can enhance student empathy. There's no marking to do; the AI has already assessed today's work and flagged anything that needs a human touch.

As the evening winds down, I feel calm and fulfilled. I've had time to teach, to connect, to grow—and to rest. Teaching in 2040 isn't perfect, but it's human-centred, supported by technology, and grounded in wellbeing. And that makes all the difference.

Group 2: 'time to work, time to live'

I start my day with a swim in the school's pool—just one of the wellness facilities available to staff, run by dedicated professionals so teachers can focus on teaching. After a quick shower, I grab a free, nutritious breakfast in the staff café and chat with a few colleagues. There's no rush. My first class isn't until 10, and our flexible scheduling means I only need to be on-site when I'm teaching.

By 9 a.m., I'm in my classroom, prepping for the morning's sessions. Today, I'm facilitating a student-led design challenge. The lesson flows naturally—there's no rigid bell schedule, so we take the time we need. I move between groups, offering guidance, asking questions, and helping students reflect. The tech tools we use adapt to their needs in real time, freeing me to focus on creativity and connection.

We all take short breaks throughout the morning—students and teachers alike. It keeps the energy up and the stress down. The classroom feels more like a studio: flexible, collaborative, and full of ideas.

At lunchtime, I step outside into the garden courtyard. There's no supervision duty today—teachers actually get a break. I enjoy a screen-free moment with a healthy, free meal and even sneak in a short siesta in the staff wellbeing room. Meanwhile, the students are outside, playing, talking, and just being kids—no phones, no pressure.

After lunch, the school shifts gears. From 1 to 4 p.m., there are no academic lessons. I head home to plan and reflect, while students dive into enrichment activities—drama, robotics, nature walks—all led by specialist coaches. These sessions are purely for enjoyment, not assessment, and it shows in the students' enthusiasm.

If I wanted, I could swap my afternoon for an evening session, but today I'm done by 4. And because my planning and marking are already taken care of, my evening is truly mine. I cook dinner with my partner, catch up with friends, and unwind with a book. I feel rested, prepared, and—most importantly—present.

Teaching in 2040 is still a challenge, but it's no longer a sacrifice. It's a profession that respects time to work and time to live.

Group 3: ‘Flexible and relaxed’

A Day in the Life of a Teacher in 2040: Flexible and Relaxed

The day begins slowly, just the way I like it. I start with a short meditation, followed by a healthy breakfast and a quiet moment with my partner. Twice a week, I do the school run with my kids—those mornings are especially grounding. There’s no rush; the system is built around flexibility and trust.

By mid-morning, I’m in class. Today’s session is a hybrid one, with some students joining from home and others in the room. The atmosphere is light and fun—there’s laughter, curiosity, and a real sense of connection. We’re diving into a debate on ethical AI, and the students are fully engaged, challenging each other’s ideas and thinking critically.

My role is to guide, not instruct. I move between groups, asking questions, nudging thinking, and offering support. My AI teaching assistant handles the admin—attendance, resource sharing, even formative assessment—so I can focus on the human side of teaching. Assessment is continuous and stress-free, woven into the learning process rather than tacked on at the end.

At lunch, I step outside for a walk in the sun. The school grounds are designed with nature in mind—there are quiet corners for reflection and open spaces for socialising. I grab a delicious, healthy meal and sit with a few colleagues under the trees. Some days I eat alone, others I chat—it’s all about choice.

The afternoon is mine to shape. I use the time to plan tomorrow’s sessions, supported by AI tools that help me personalise learning paths and suggest creative approaches. Then I spend an hour on my own professional development—today I’m exploring a course on storytelling in education.

Evenings are sacred. There’s no marking, no late-night planning. I cook, read, and spend time with friends. I feel calm, fulfilled, and ready for tomorrow—not because I’ve done everything, but because the system is designed to support both my work and my life.

Group 4: The school is a hive of busy, mindful, respectful and creative beings

A Day in the Life of a Teacher in 2040: A Mindful, Creative Hive

My day begins slowly, with a few minutes of mindfulness and a warm cup of tea. The world outside is peaceful—cleaner, calmer, and more connected, thanks to technologies that help mitigate climate change and a global shift toward empathy and equity. Education is now seen as a public good, funded fairly and respected deeply.

Before I leave the house, I log into our knowledge-based home learning platform. It gives me a snapshot of how my students are doing—what they’ve been exploring, where they might need support. I leave a few notes and set up some prompts for the day ahead.

At school, the children begin arriving between 8 and 8:30. They head straight to the outdoor play area, where non-teaching staff supervise and support their morning routines. I arrive

around the same time and catch up with colleagues over coffee. There's a strong sense of community here —respectful, relaxed, and collaborative.

At 9 a.m., the students start their day with a short outdoor movement session. It's led by wellbeing staff and sets a positive tone. Then we head into our classroom—just 15 students, mixed ages, working together on meaningful, project-based learning. Today, we're exploring sustainable architecture, blending science, art, and ethics.

The curriculum is co-curricular and practical, designed to foster curiosity, agency, and creativity. I use insights from the home learning platform alongside my own judgment to personalise learning. My role is part guide, part co-learner. The classroom feels alive with ideas and mutual respect.

Lunch is a shared experience. I get a full break—no duties—and enjoy a healthy meal in the staff garden. Some teachers choose to join the children in cooking or tidying up, but it's optional. The children take pride in contributing to the community, and it shows.

In the afternoon, the students rotate through arts, sports, and spiritual learning sessions. These are led by specialists, giving me time to reflect, plan, or simply rest. The school hums with creativity and calm—a true hive of mindful, respectful beings.

Evenings are mine. I leave school behind and spend time with loved ones, knowing that I've contributed to something meaningful. Teaching in 2040 isn't just a job—it's part of a broader, more compassionate world.

Group 5: Changing the narrative so that teaching is one of the most desired professions (not creating an expectation of hard work rewarded)

A Day in the Life of a Teacher in 2040: Changing the Narrative

Sam arrives at school just before 10 a.m.—refreshed, unhurried, and ready for a day of meaningful work. Before heading to their learning space, they check their wearable device, which recommends a breakfast tailored to their nutritional needs. The school café, stocked with produce from the on-site farm, prepares it fresh. It's a small ritual that sets the tone for a balanced day.

Sam's teaching space isn't a traditional classroom. It's a multi-use, adaptive environment with movable walls and flexible furniture. Today, it's set up for immersive learning. Before students arrive, Sam sends out the pastoral support robot, which roams the halls, listening and checking in with students. It flags any concerns so teachers can respond proactively.

Sam checks in with the Head of Teacher Wellbeing, a regular part of the day, and then pulls up an interactive dashboard. It gives a holistic view of each student—how they're doing socially, emotionally, and academically. This insight helps Sam tailor the day's approach.

Meanwhile, students are finishing their breakfast, also made from food grown on-site. At 10:30, learning begins—not with textbooks, but with an IMAX-style immersive experience. Today's topic: the breeding programmes for the endangered northern white rhino. Students are virtually transported to central Kenya, where they can see, hear, and even smell the

environment. They touch textured replicas of rhino skin and speak with conservationists in real time.

Sam's role is to guide and inspire. The students lead their own projects, exploring the topic through science, ethics, and storytelling. The tools are powerful, but it's the autonomy and creativity that make the learning stick.

Lunch is a community affair. The children help grow, prepare, and serve the food. Teachers and students eat together, but only if they choose to—there's no obligation. The atmosphere is warm, respectful, and collaborative.

At 2:30, the school day ends for students. Sam and their colleagues stay on—not to mark or plan, but to reconnect and recharge. Some head to a yoga session, others to a book club or a walk in the school's orchard. It's a time for enrichment, reflection, and self-care.

Teaching in 2040 isn't about burnout or sacrifice. It's about purpose, creativity, and balance. And that's why it's one of the most desired professions in the world.

Group 6: 15 years forward and 50 years back

A Day in the Life of a Teacher in 2040: 15 Years Forward, 50 Years Back

I arrive at school at 8:30 a.m., just as the clean air filters hum to life and the morning sun lights up the outdoor learning spaces. The children have already been here since 8:00, starting their day with art and outdoor education. It's a gentle, creative beginning that supports families and sets a calm tone for the day.

As I walk in, my wearable assistant gives me a quiet update: my car's been booked in for a service, a reminder to call my sister is set, and my breakfast—tailored to my nutritional needs—is ready in the staff café. The AI has already marked yesterday's work and drafted a flexible plan for today, based on how my students are doing.

Throughout the day, my wearable keeps an eye on things—monitoring student wellbeing through blink rate, posture, and fidgeting. It flags those who might need a movement break or a quiet check-in. It's like having a second pair of eyes and ears, always tuned in. The AI feeds me live updates on opportunities and challenges—my own version of Jarvis—so I can stay ahead and stay present.

My morning class takes place in a flexible, open space. I'm not delivering content—I'm facilitating learning. We move between project-based work, outdoor exploration, and student-led discussions. The focus is on relationships, curiosity, and creativity. It's a rhythm that feels natural and energising.

From 8 to 9 and again from 2 to 5, the school opens up to the wider community. Artists, athletes, and outdoor educators lead sessions that enrich the curriculum and connect students to the world beyond the classroom. It's a beautiful blend of structure and spontaneity.

At lunchtime, I join my colleagues in a collaborative space. There's time to eat, chat, and even pursue personal passions—whether that's sketching, reading, or planning a weekend

hike. On Fridays, we head to Wetherspoons for “Curry Friday”—a tradition that keeps us grounded and connected.

The school day wraps up in time for me to live my life. I head home to cook a healthy dinner, spend time with my family, and unwind. There’s time for sport, entertainment, and rest. No marking. No late-night planning. Just a full, balanced life.

Teaching in 2040 blends the best of the past—community, creativity, care—with the tools of the future. It’s a profession I’m proud to be part of.

Group 7: Sustainability, Equality of Opportunity, Joy

A Day in the Life of a Teacher in 2040: Sustainability, Equality, Joy

I wake up feeling rested—really rested. There’s no anxiety about inspections or late-night emails from parents. I’ve had a full night’s sleep, and it shows. My commute is smooth and stress-free, thanks to excellent public transport. Parents use it too, dropping off their children who start the day with a communal, healthy breakfast.

I arrive at school just before the students head to class. That’s perfectly fine—everything’s already prepped. I’m not weighed down by bags or burdened by admin. The school is fully resourced, so I’m not spending my own money on stationery or scrambling to make things work.

My class is small—just 15 students—and I have support from another adult and an AI assistant. The AI helps track learning progress and wellbeing, and evidence of learning is built into the activities themselves. There’s no pressure to constantly give verbal feedback. We begin the day with a few minutes of silent reflection, followed by a circle check-in with my fellow teachers. It’s grounding and reminds me that I’m part of a thoughtful, supportive team.

While students take part in specialist-led extracurriculars, I have dedicated time to plan and reflect. I also get to explore new skills—this week I’m learning about regenerative design. Personal development is part of my work week, not something I have to squeeze in after hours.

Our learning spaces are flexible, and we spend a lot of time outdoors. The children follow their interests, and I collaborate with colleagues to support them in ways that align with my own strengths and passions. Teaching assistants are always nearby, ready to step in when needed. We even connect with classrooms around the world through virtual exchanges.

At lunchtime, we all share a meal together—students and staff alike. There’s no hierarchy, just community. I have a full hour to eat, relax, and recharge. Outside, play leaders help students resolve conflicts and enjoy their break. It’s calm, joyful, and sustainable.

After school, I don’t take work home. There’s no marking, no parent messages, no homework to oversee. My digital twin handles anything that comes up outside of school hours. I spend my evening cooking, catching up with friends, going for a walk, or just relaxing. I have time for sport, entertainment, and rest—and I sleep well, knowing I’ll wake up to another day of meaningful, supported teaching.

Group 8: A Day in the Life of a Teacher in 2040: Co-Teaching, Autonomy, and Balance

I wake up at 7:30 a.m. and ease into the day with a proper breakfast and a short wellbeing activity—sometimes it's stretching, sometimes journaling, sometimes just sitting quietly with a coffee. My AI assistant has already sorted the life admin: booked a dentist appointment, reordered groceries, and synced my calendar with my co-teacher's.

We've agreed to start work at 8:30, so I head to school and meet my teaching partner in the staff sanctuary—a flexible, calm space where we check in, talk through the day, and make any last-minute adjustments. We review the student pastoral check-in data, which gives us a sense of how everyone's doing emotionally and socially before the day begins.

Our classroom is a shared space, and we organise ourselves however works best. Sometimes one of us leads while the other supports; other times, we split the group or co-facilitate. Today, I'm guiding students through a project on sustainable design, while my partner is studying alongside the students, modelling curiosity and learning behaviours.

The content we teach is grounded in real-world skills and employer needs, but it's also deeply personal and flexible. Students have already done the knowledge-building at home through our digital platform, so class time is all about discussion, analysis, and creative application—flipped learning at its best.

There's no stress about broken boilers or missing resources. The school is well-maintained, and everything we need is at hand. We even have time during the day to plan lessons and reflect, rather than cramming it into evenings or weekends.

At lunch, the whole school community comes together. We eat communally—students, teachers, visitors—and there's a strong sense of social responsibility and inclusion. Sometimes we invite local artists, scientists, or elders to join us and share stories or ideas. It's human-centred, not system-centred.

After school, I do whatever I want. There's no marking, no parent emails, no homework to chase. My AI assistant handles anything that comes up outside of school hours. I might go for a run, meet friends, or just relax at home. The point is: I have the time and space to live my life.

Teaching in 2040 is collaborative, supported, and joyful. It's a profession where I feel trusted, empowered, and part of something meaningful.

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ISBN Number
978-1-7384336-3-6