

FUTURE THOUGHT LEADERS

*Report for
Stakeholders*



Peter Dennis PhD PGCE
Director

18 August 2026



FTL 2026

This year, we were delighted to welcome 28 exceptional young people drawn from a competitive pool of 97 applicants. Key changes from last year's programme were to (1) increase the length of the programme from three to five days, (2) further embrace delegate-led formats, and (3) support each delegate to focus on their own individual, real-world impact going forward.

Delegates had opportunities to show greater intellectual leadership through chairing expert panels, producing podcast-style interviews with experts on camera, and presenting their own original research. Delegates also worked in teams to respond to 12 challenges set by the invited experts over the five days, each of which was explicitly framed as a real-world contribution they could then take forward over the next 12 months.

The quality of the responses to the expert challenges showed that Future Thought Leaders has the potential to be more than just a five-day experience over the summer, developing as a year-round springboard to equip talented young changemakers with the peer and expert support they will need to make an impact over the first five years of their post-16 careers.

NEXT STEPS

In the coming year, we plan to (1) develop the FTL Alumni programme to support our delegates to continue their impact once the programme has ended, (2) launch an "FTL Circle" to engage parents and supporters, and (3) develop partnerships with key schools and funding organisations to enable deserving students of all backgrounds to attend.

These changes will help FTL become more self-sustaining, both in terms of student recruitment and in terms of the impact created by our young people.

OVERVIEW

Please use the page numbers below for more information about the following topics.

04**DELEGATE FEEDBACK**

Overall 4.7 star rating

05**ACADEMIC PROGRAMME**

Expert challenges focus delegates on real-world impact

06**LEARNING FORMATS**

Delegates present research, chair panels, and interview experts

07**AIMS AND BENEFITS**

Delegates develop futureproof skills and demonstrate impact

08**SCHOLARSHIPS**

£15,325 awarded in 2026 up from £3,649 last year

09**ESSAY COMPETITION**

419 competitive submissions up from 68 last year

10**WHERE NEXT?**

FTL Alumni supported to make long-term impact

11**HOW TO HELP?**

Offer an internship or join the FTL Circle!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the continued support of our Advisory Board and Patron, who have helped us develop a rigorous and relevant programme and communicate its aims to applicants and their parents.

Patron

Sir Anthony Seldon

Advisory Board

Alok Jha

Science & Technology Editor at the Economist

Pinar Ozcan

Professor of Entrepreneurship & Innovation at the University of Oxford

Jacob Turner

Author & Barrister at Fountain Court Chambers



DELEGATE FEEDBACK



"FTL showed me that I can do much more than I thought I could at my age"

--FTL26 Delegate

"I have never seen my daughter come back from a course this motivated and hungry to learn more."

--FTL26 Parent

"My son felt challenged, engaged, and very much at home among young people who were equally interested in asking difficult questions and thinking deeply about them."

--FTL26 Parent

"Overall, FTL has left me with a clear purpose of striving to achieve impact in the world."

--FTL26 Delegate

"I already had high expectations going into the program, but they were completely blown out of the water."

--FTL26 Delegate

"While I know this is only the beginning of the journeys and impact we will each go on to create, I wanted to thank you for being the catalyst that set so much of that in motion."

--FTL26 Delegate

We received a large number of unsolicited, positive messages from delegates and their parents following this year's event, some of which have been quoted above. On average, delegates gave the programme a 4.7 star rating and would overwhelmingly recommend the programme to a friend. Many listed a greater sense of agency and purpose, increased confidence, and increased understanding of complexity

as key takeaways. Suggested improvements included more time devoted to social activities and icebreakers, more time to work on expert challenges, and a broader range of topics given the number which inevitably touch on AI.

We plan extend the programme by one day next year in order to give each activity more breathing room.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMME

Each day brought together three experts whose workshops were connected via a philosophical theme: Trust, Justice, Power, and Planet. In parallel to this, each delegate selected one of these themes for their “deep dive” day. Instead of attending the expert workshops on that day, they spent 90 minutes with each expert as part of a small group. During this time, they received coaching on a chosen “expert challenge” and produced a podcast-style, on-camera interview.

Day 1: Trust

- Health Data (Dr Cosima Gretton, Our Future Health)
- Cybersecurity (Jaya Baloo, co-founder of AISLE)
- Misinformation (Prof. Quassim Cassam, Warwick)

Day 2: Justice

- AI in the Justice System (Dr Miri Zilka, Cambridge)
- Space Law (Dr P.J. Blount, Durham)
- Future of Work (Dr John Danaher, Galway)

Day 3: Power

- Global Fragmentation (Dr Inderjeet Parmar, City St George's)
- Digital Sovereignty (Anniki Mikelsaar, Oxford)
- Blockchain and Decentralisation (Lavinia D Osbourne)

Day 4: Planet

- Climate Change (Dr Laurie Parsons, RHUL)
- Pandemic Preparedness (Dr Tess Johnson, Cambridge)
- Global Migration (Dr Ben Brindle, Migration Observatory)

Day 5: Challenge Groups & Pitches



Daily Structure

7:30am	8am	9am	10am	10:30am	11am	12:30pm	1:30pm	3pm	3:30pm	5pm	6pm	6:45pm	7pm	8pm	10pm	11:30pm
Morning Run	Breakfast	Delegate Panels	FTL Academy	Break	Workshop	Lunch	Workshop	Break	Workshop	Social Time	Expert Panel	Challenge groups	Supper	Activities	Games Room	Lights out

LEARNING FORMATS

A defining feature of FTL is that the agenda for discussion is set by the young people themselves, offering them the chance to show genuine intellectual leadership. Building on last year's event, we honed this principle into a number of distinctive learning formats which are likely to define FTL programmes in the years to come.

Expert Interviews

Delegates devised their own questions to pose to invited experts on camera and chaired a podcast-style discussion. These will be made available online for students and schools.

Delegate Panels

Delegates presented research papers to the rest of the cohort, and were gently interrogated by two other delegates making up the panel. Q&A followed from the audience and invited experts.

Expert Challenges

Delegates devised real-world projects to address 12 challenges set by invited experts in small groups over the five days. Examples included an AI factchecker plug-in for social media and teaching resources on political awareness for schools. Support to develop these projects will be provided through the developing FTL alumni programme.



Expert-led workshops

Delegates took part in twelve 90-minute simulations of a real-world task or challenge. For example, they vibecoded apps using blockchain technology to promote the UN sustainability goals, and took part in a pandemic simulation.

Expert Panels

Delegates chaired live panel discussions involving three invited experts at the end of each day.

Plenary Panel

Parents were invited to watch a panel of delegates reflecting on the themes of the programme. This year's panel focused on the implications of reducing the voting age and social media restrictions for under 16s.

AIMS AND BENEFITS

Our second year running this programme has allowed us to hone our thinking around what the young people really gain from it, developing our educational philosophy of independence, moral agency, intellectual autonomy, and practical impact. We believe that every young person who attends FTL should leave with five tangible benefits.

I

AWARENESS

Delegates gain an awareness of the major global challenges that leaders across all sectors will need to confront over the next fifty years. They gain a state-of-the-art understanding of these issues by conversing with today's experts at the top of their fields in a way that simply is not possible at school.

II

CHARACTER

Through focusing on the social and ethical implications of future challenges, delegates develop a 'thought leader mindset', defined as *problems oriented, interdisciplinary, pragmatic, empirical, holistic, and values-led*. This allows them to see, and see past, the technical detail, developing an ethical vision.

III

IMPACT

The expert challenges require delegates to think seriously about a concrete, real-world impact that they themselves can make now. The alumni programme will encourage them to think about how they might develop this over a longer period, creating accountability and connecting enthusiasm with expertise.

IV

SKILLS

Delegates develop futureproof skills such as critical thinking and the ability to defend their ideas to experts and peers without arrogance or deference. Practical tasks require them to vibe-code apps, learn entrepreneurship, and communicate effectively online with the support of our Media Fellow.

V

NETWORK

Something special happens when our delegates find themselves in a room of peers who are as committed to changing society as they are. By definition, being exceptional can be a lonely business, and this intensive residential programme is a crucible for meaningful, productive, and lasting friendships.

SCHOLARSHIPS & BURSARIES

**TOTAL AMOUNT AWARDED
IN 2026**

£15,325

**DELEGATES RECEIVING A
SCHOLARSHIP OR BURSARY**

11

**DELEGATES RECEIVING
BURSARIES OF 75% OR
ABOVE**

3

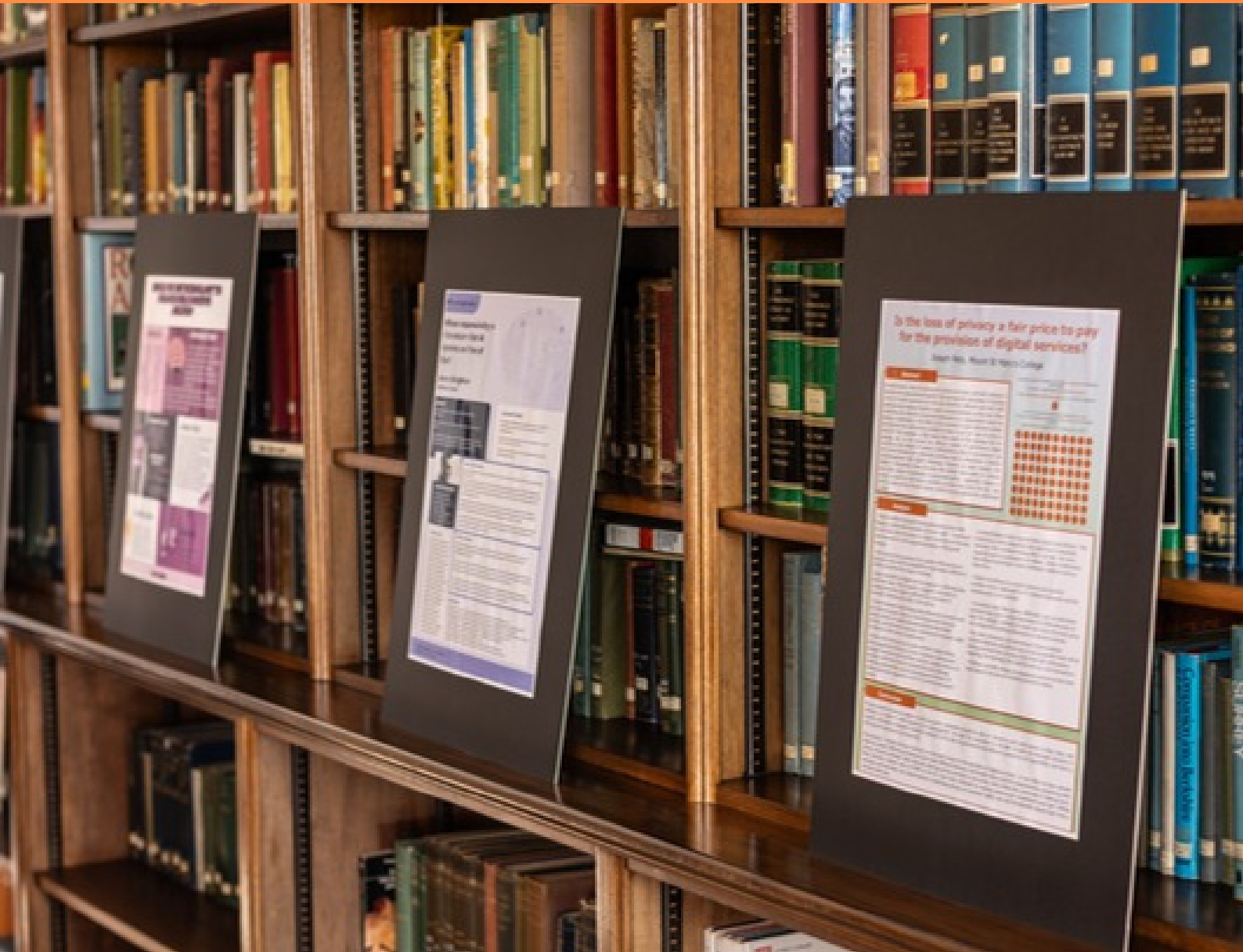
Like last year, a number of merit-based scholarships were awarded through our annual essay competition. Bursaries were offered to applicants on a combined basis of academic merit and financial need.

Significantly, we received £1,000 from a top London independent day school to joint-fund a place for one of their own bursary students. This endorsement will make it easier to propose similar arrangements to other leading independent schools, and in turn to ask businesses and private donors to fund deserving young people in the state sector.

By securing further external funding for bursaries, we can secure the sustainability of the programme at the same time as allowing us to recruit from the widest possible pool of talented young people.



ESSAY COMPETITION



We received 419 submissions to our free essay competition in March, up from 68 last year. Questions focused on the impact of emerging technologies on society, the economy, and humanity. Entries were of an extremely high standard, showing both original argument and extensive research. First prize was a £1,000 scholarship to attend FTL26 and £100 in cash.

The integration of the essay competition into the residential programme has become a unique feature of FTL. Like last year, delegates who had entered the competition were invited to present their work to their peers and invited experts. Those who hadn't entered were also given the opportunity to present a short abstract or "argument brief".

WHERE NEXT?



*"If you founded a school, my daughter
would be the first to sign up"*

FTL Parent

While we have no plans (yet!) to found a school, the delegates' responses to the expert challenges showed beyond doubt that, given the right conditions, young people are capable of creating serious real-world impact. At the end of the five days, most had viable projects which just needed more time and support to bring to fruition.

We feel a sense of responsibility to support these talented young people to complete their projects by developing a more structured alumni programme. We also feel this is an exciting opportunity to help

build this generation's response to the big global challenges they have inherited. As a start, we plan to organise termly meet-ups, safely connect the young people with relevant experts, and, where possible, give them access to a nominated mentor at their school.

As well as being the right thing to do, successful alumni will in turn attract more talent to the programme, and we look forward to welcoming our delegates back as invited experts in the years to come.

HOW TO HELP?

Our goal is to empower young people to lead society's response to the most pressing global challenges of the next fifty years. In so doing, we hope to produce a generation of leaders that is kinder, wiser, and more foresighted than those of the past. If you share this goal, here are a few ways you can help.

JOIN THE FTL CIRCLE

We are creating a network of parents, experts, and supporters who would like to share ideas, receive updates, and join an annual dinner. To sign up, email director@futurethoughtleaders.co.uk.

OFFER AN INTERNSHIP

Our talented alumni are actively seeking work experience across all sectors. We can help you handpick the right person for your context, and can also recommend young people from under-represented backgrounds.



SPONSOR A DELEGATE

We have met so many talented and deserving young people who would love to attend our transformative programme. If you would like to be the reason they do, please get in touch!

SHARE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Please use the links below to follow, repost, and recommend to your network

