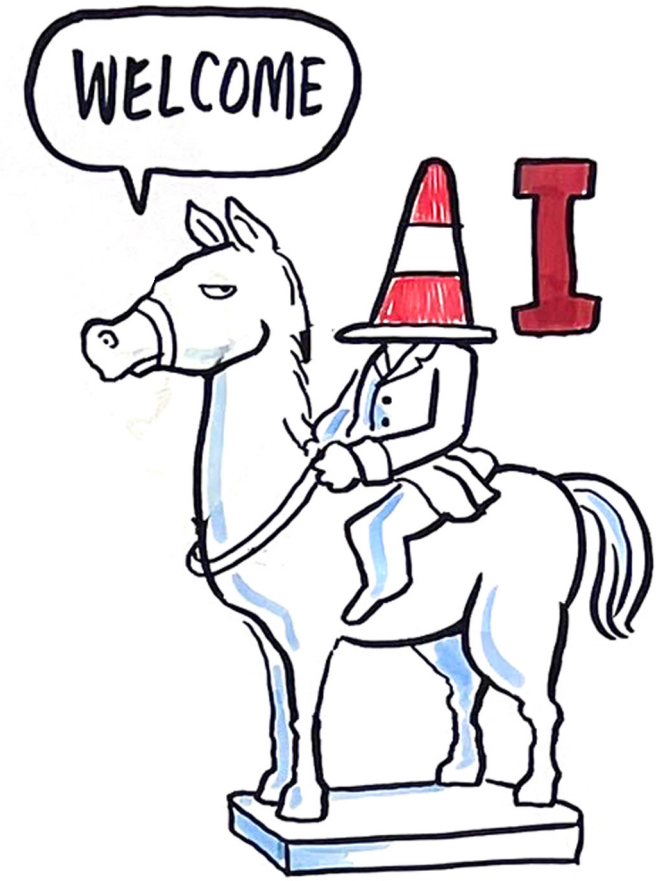
Peoples AI Stewardship Summit

Glasgow, October 9th, 2024



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Royal Academy of Engineering

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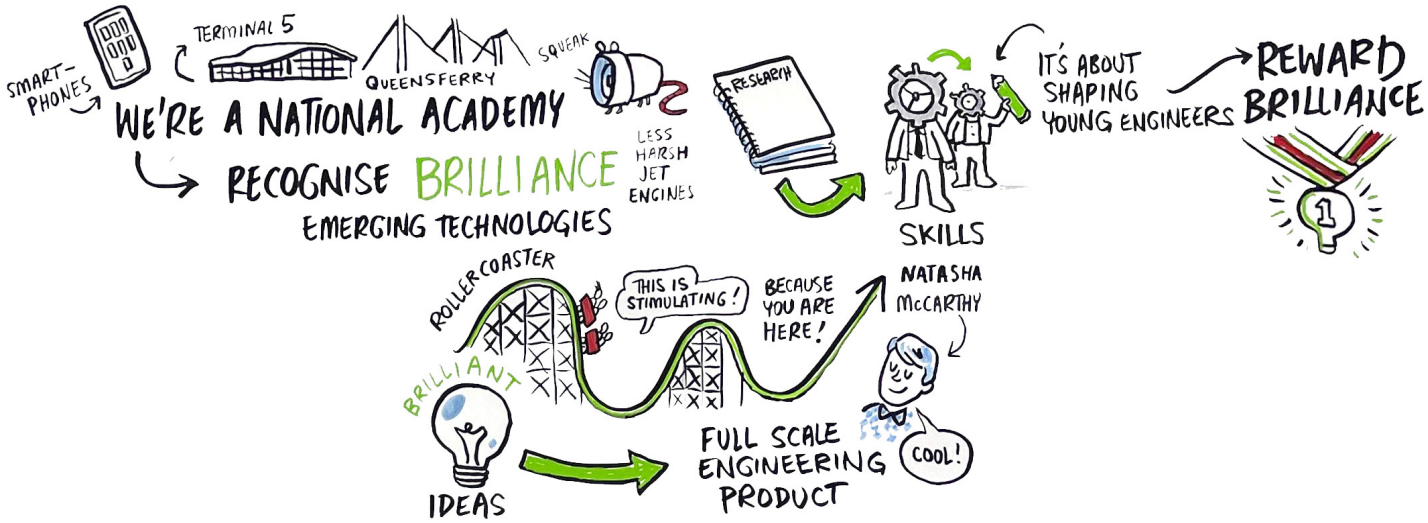
The second People's AI Stewardship Summit took place in the heart of Glasgow, bringing together diverse members of the public, policymakers, innovators and entrepreneurs, researchers and academics—united by a shared interest in the future of AI in Scotland.

Welcome from the Academy

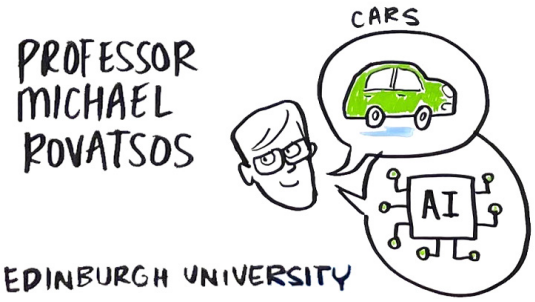


Dr Natasha McCarthy, Associate Director of Policy at the Royal Academy of Engineering (or 'the Academy'), welcomed the participants with an introduction to their work. She highlighted the contributions of the Academy's brilliant engineering fellows, whose innovations underpin everyday life—from those who helped design the chips in smartphones to those who assisted in constructing the Queensferry Crossing.

Natasha outlined the Academy's mission to build a sustainable society and inclusive economy, emphasising that engineers must actively listen to society's concerns. The conversations raised during this summit will be heard by the Academy and the local organisations represented to help shape a more inclusive future.

AI vs Cars: Professor Michael Rovatsos

Professor Rovatsos set the scene by drawing a parallel between the well-established stewardship of cars and the relatively nascent challenges of managing AI. Society understands cars—there are institutions, regulations, and social norms around their use.

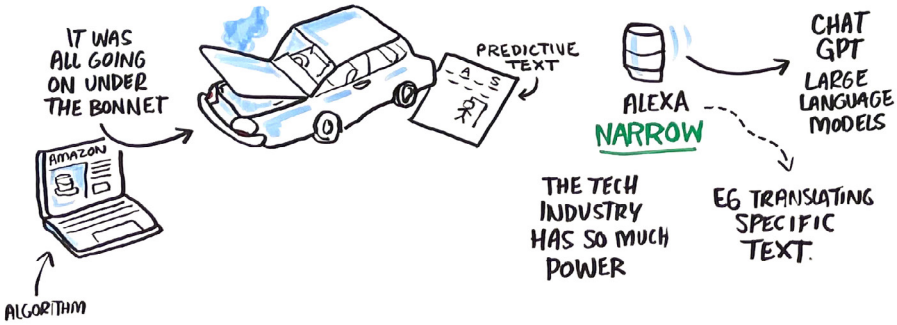


"Society never, in any final way, decides whether technology is good or bad. We decide whether to have it or not."

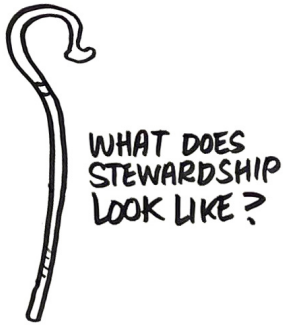
In contrast, AI presents a more complex picture. Although it has been developing for many years in narrow areas like predictive text and recommendation algorithms, it often operates "under the bonnet", out of sight. More recently, AI has shifted from performing specific tasks to generating content autonomously, raising new questions.

Does AI serve society, or do its developers primarily reap the benefits?

Concerns about misinformation, bias, and the unpredictable nature of AI are mounting. Unlike cars, algorithms may yield different outcomes based on user characteristics. Furthermore, AI is outpacing regulators and lawmakers.



"Developers sometimes throw technology over the fence before society knows how we're going to manage it properly."

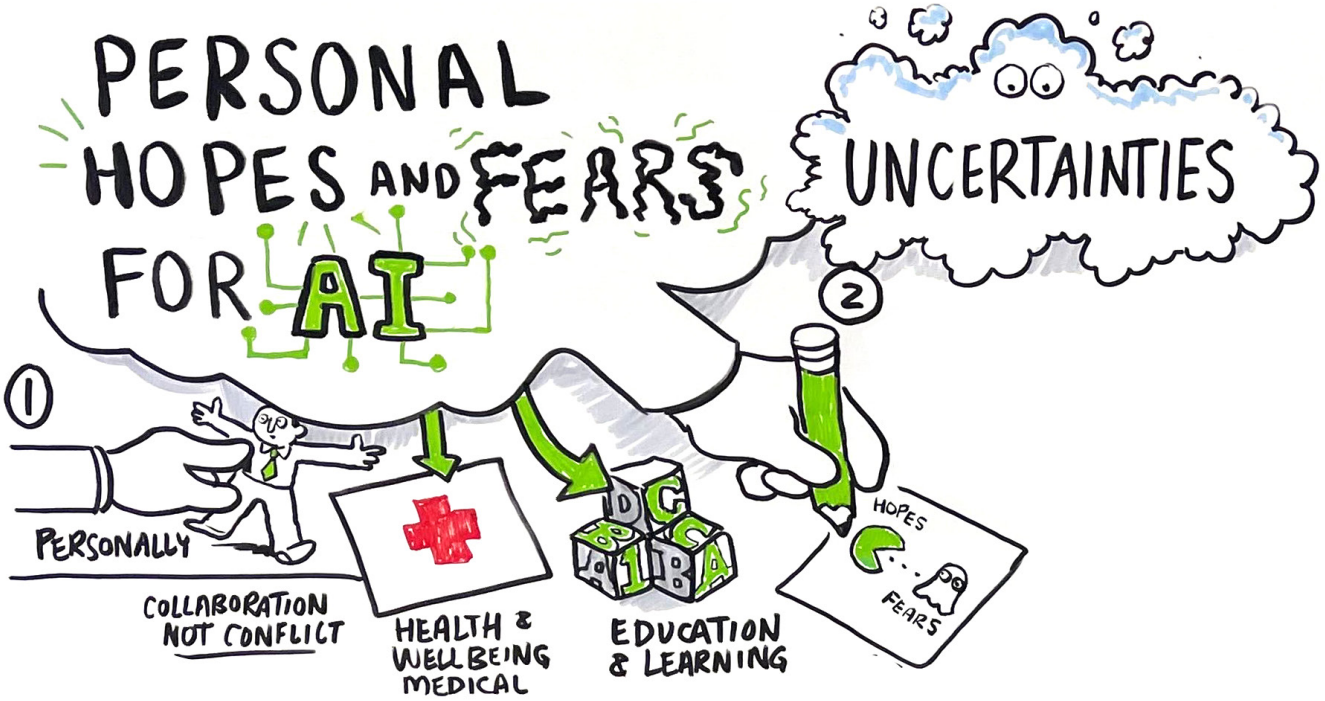


So, Michael's key question was: "What does effective AI stewardship look like?"

In response to Michael's talk, participants reflected on what distinguishes AI from traditional technologies like cars, emphasising that AI's inherent scalability presents challenges due to its potential to affect increasing numbers of people at an unprecedented pace.

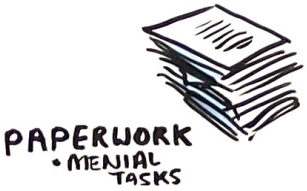
Concerns were raised regarding AI's role in exacerbating mental health issues, political radicalisation, and the spread of disinformation. Participants questioned the unprecedented power held by the technology industry and the ongoing lack of accountability from social media companies, ultimately calling for greater responsibility, comparable to the stringent regulations governing advertising.

Exploring Hopes, Fears, and Uncertainties Surrounding AI



Initial Perspectives on AI

Hopes: Many expressed great optimism about AI's innovative potential, envisioning applications ranging from handy tools for improved job searching to enhanced disaster mitigation. Increased efficiency in delivering services and completing specific tasks was a recurring theme, with participants excited about AI freeing resources and time for people to explore creative pursuits (***"less admin, more creativity"***).



Participants hope for more transparency, perhaps in the form of direct labelling and watermarking of AI-generated content: ***"I hope systems are upfront about the fact they use AI".***

Participants acknowledged the current dominance of certain cultures and entities in the field and emphasised the need for equitable benefits for all: ***"I hope bottom line doesn't trump value".***

Fears: While a couple of participants mentioned extreme, dystopian scenarios, most anxieties were grounded in more immediate, everyday issues. Many expressed worries about data security, along with a broader concern about losing touch with reality in an increasingly AI-driven world—a fear magnified by celebrity deepfakes online.

The potential for AI to negatively change our habits came up, too—making people less sociable, more individualistic, or overly reliant on technology.

Sector-specific Discussions

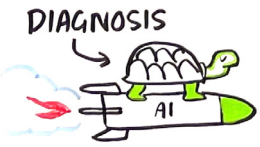
AI in Education

Hopes: Participants believe AI could lead to improved learning outcomes and greater educational equity, particularly for those who may otherwise feel failed by the education system. One person wrote, ***"Talent is everywhere, opportunity is not."*** They envisaged personalised learning experiences enabled by AI assistants and more fun teaching methods. AI could let children experience "new worlds".

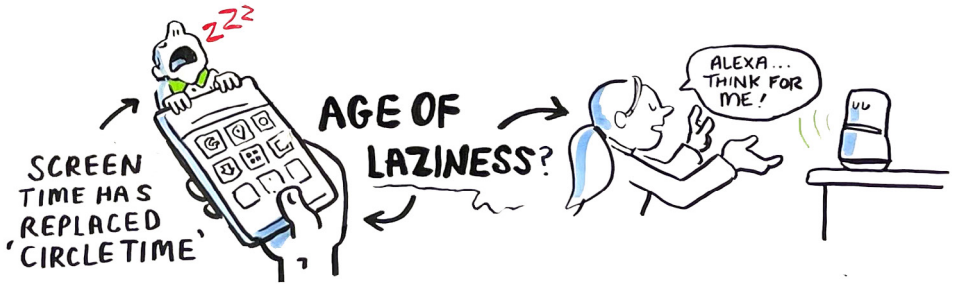
Fears: However, concerns were raised about AI replacing teachers, diminishing human interaction, limiting creativity and critical thinking skills, and failing to address the diverse needs of individual learners. One teacher quoted their pupil: ***"Teachers understand our feelings."***

AI in Healthcare

Hopes: Participants hope AI will accelerate research on under resourced diseases like Parkinson's, enable more proactive monitoring, and provide readily available advice. They also saw AI's potential to help address systemic challenges, optimising resource allocation and planning for net-zero emissions.



Fears: Echoing the earlier discussion about teachers, concerns were raised about the decreasing personal interaction with healthcare professionals. There are worries about a narrowing focus due to data bias and model limitations—will only known conditions be addressed? Additionally, participants shared fears that AI will negatively impact young minds on social media, trigger anxiety through constant health monitoring, and encourage sedentary lifestyles.



Expectations

Participants shared ways that government, industry, academia, and civil society could support their hopes and address their fears.

They expressed desire for responsive government policies, robust industry safeguards, anti-monopoly measures, strong ethical standards for developers, and increased transparency—especially concerning health data. Open communication and proactive efforts to address public concerns were underscored, particularly around job displacement and the need for greater public understanding.

Poster Presentations: Positive AI Visions

Participants crafted collages together showing positive visions for AI's future. As eight groups presented their posters, the importance of choice came up several times. Participants underscored the necessity of offering both digital and non-digital solutions. They thought AI should complement human interaction rather than replace it—particularly in healthcare, where agility and responsiveness are crucial. AI can offer a helpful level of anonymity, making it easier for patients to share sensitive or embarrassing concerns. But presenters stressed that vulnerable groups, particularly the elderly and those in rural areas, should not be left behind.

Collaboration was a strong theme, with calls for AI to work alongside existing professionals to foster partnerships rather than conflict.

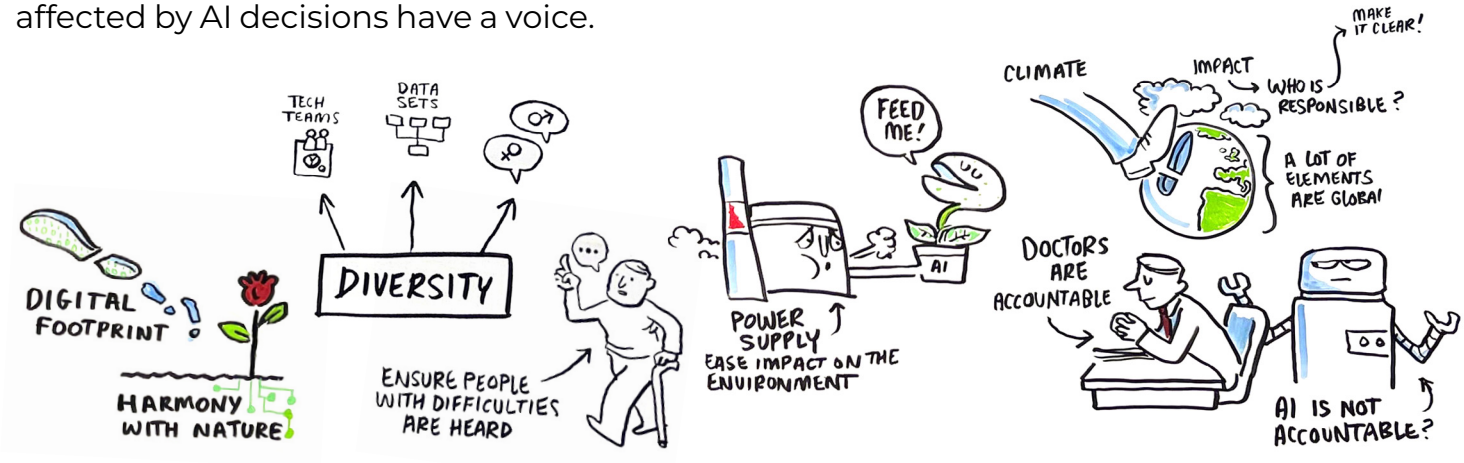
Diverse voices should be represented, too, with one group emphasising,

> *"We want diversity of tech teams in design and development, diversity in data sets, diversity of voice, and diversity of solutions."*

AI's environmental footprint was a major concern, with participants advocating for a harmonious relationship between technology and nature.

Discussions on the education sector revealed nuanced opinions. While some were enthused about AI's ability to enhance learning and make assessment fairer, others cautioned against an over-reliance and "forgetting how to think".

The issue of accountability came up in several groups. There was a clear demand for clearer guidelines and regulations to delineate responsibilities, ensuring that those affected by AI decisions have a voice.

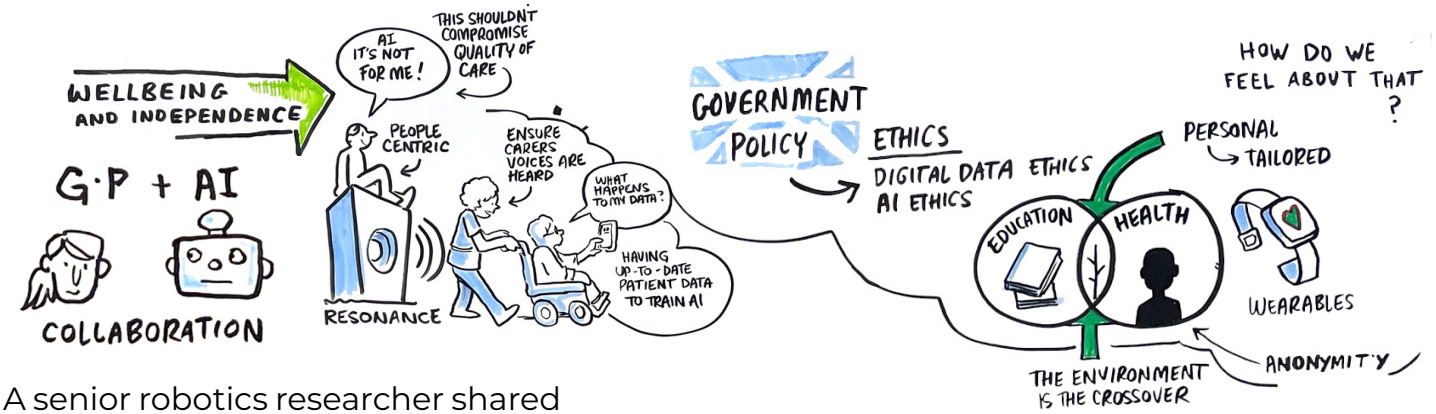


Open Discussion

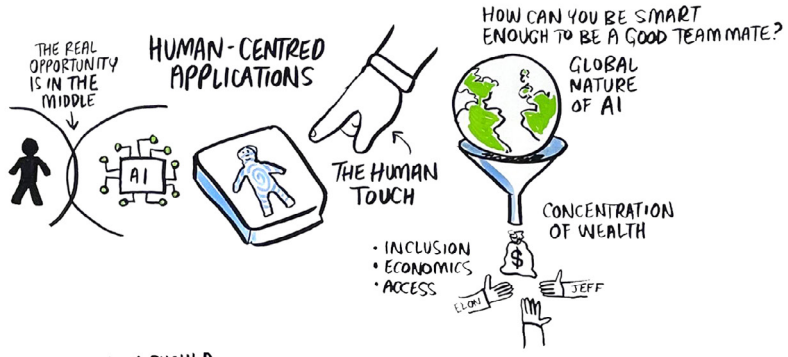
As participants were invited to share their reflections, many drew from personal experience.

A participant, working in the health and social care sector, stressed the need for accurate and up-to-date health information in Scotland. They advocated for digital human rights to guarantee that care quality remains uncompromised, regardless of technological preferences.

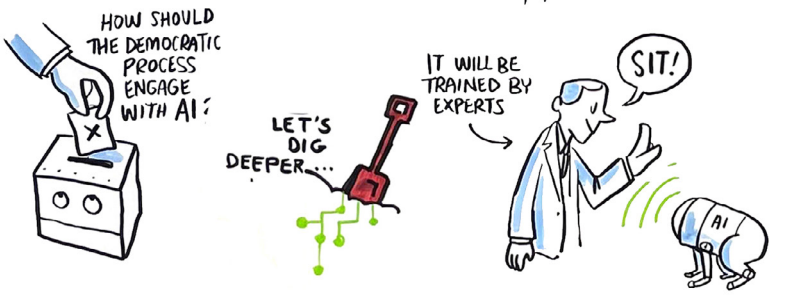
Another individual working in policy questioned whether society is comfortable replacing personal health management with AI solutions (like wearable trackers), and expressed concern that AI might stifle creativity by generating overly similar responses.

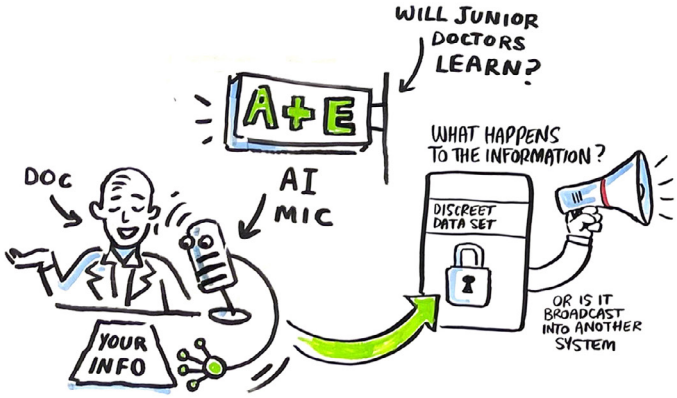


A senior robotics researcher shared the view that AI should function as a "smart teammate". They urged for robust democratic engagement, pointing to the global implications of AI, where a small group of developers can create technologies that impact healthcare delivery in diverse regions. Robust democratic engagement was urged, but the question remains how this might be achieved?



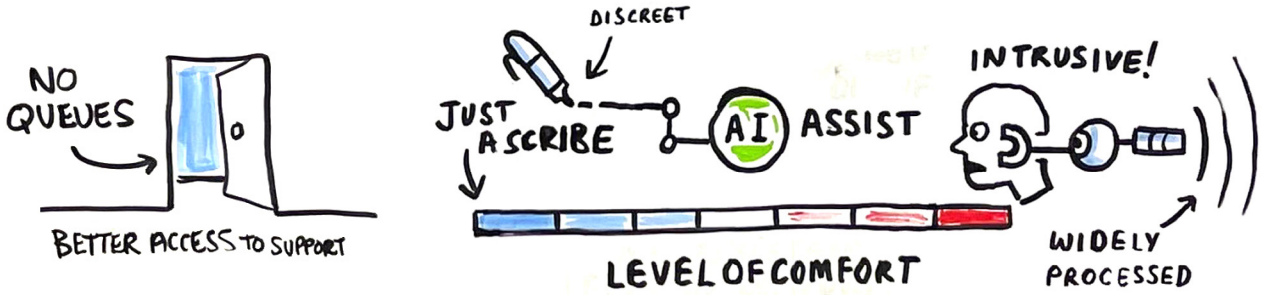
An AI entrepreneur from the Academy's Enterprise Hub took a more probing approach, challenging the room to consider the real implications. Would you feel comfortable if AI systems were to listen in on your medical appointments, make suggestions, or advise junior doctors?





"As an individual in A&E, would you care about AI taking away a learning experience from a junior doctor? Or would you just want the best possible care?"

These questions sparked a spontaneous group activity. Participants positioned themselves across the room based on how collaborative they want AI to be in healthcare (assuming data is handled securely).

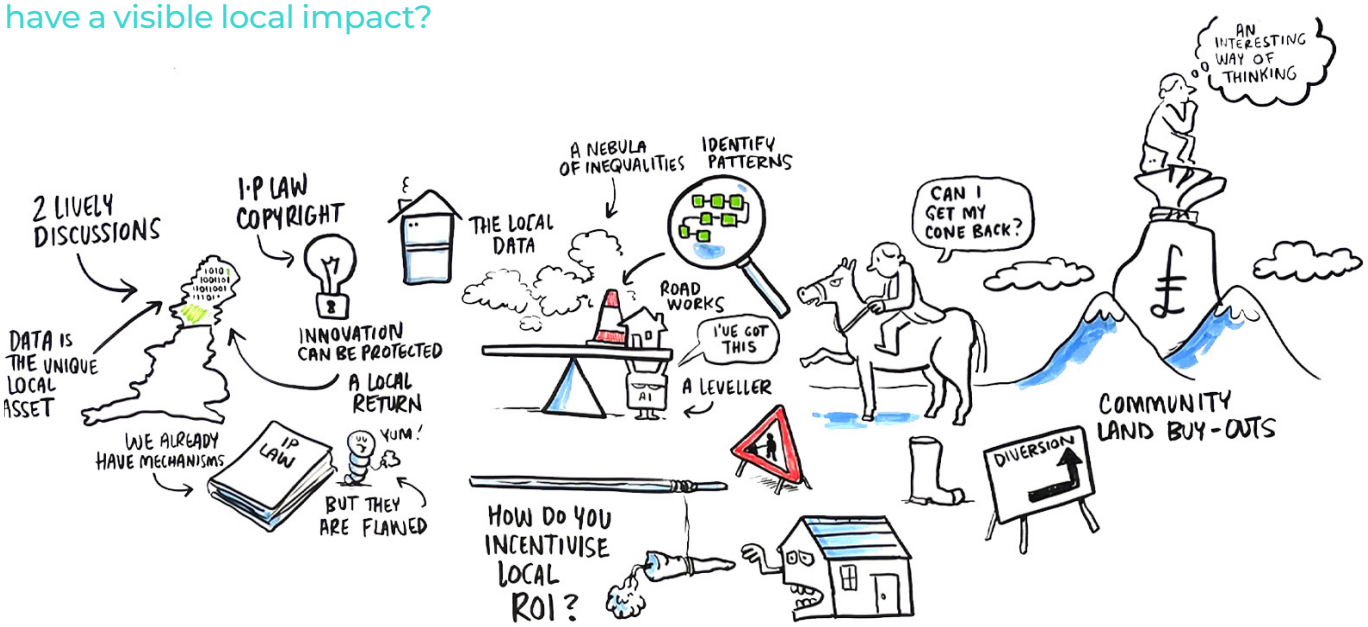


Most leaned toward embracing AI in this context, while a few remained hesitant. Some advocated for swift AI adoption in healthcare—"the sooner, the better"—given that experts train the models. Many nodded as it was remarked that having access to an AI doctor can be better than having no doctor when waiting times are long. Others expressed more scepticism: AI may fail to consider holistic outcomes, like quality-of-life post-treatment, or overlook subtle patient cues that seasoned practitioners intuitively recognise.

Three Final Questions

For the final discussion, participants mingled and formed new groups to discuss the following themes:

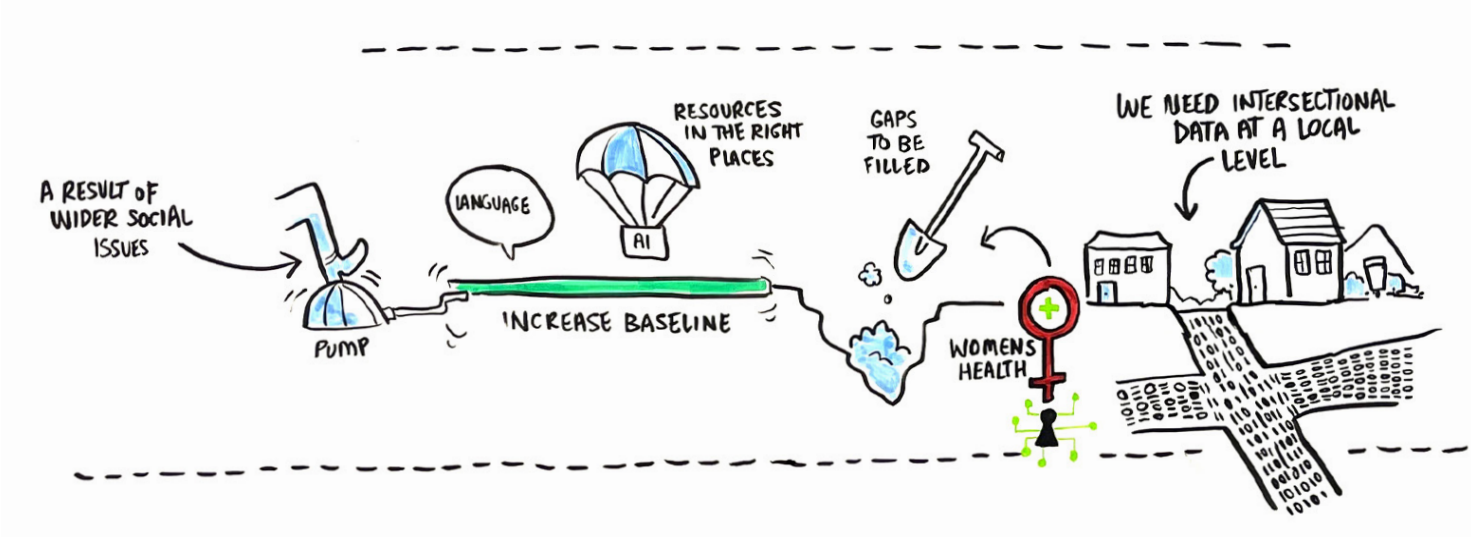
AI and Local Benefit: How can we ensure that the benefits from AI developed in Scotland have a visible local impact?



Participants felt existing systems like intellectual property laws aren't enough to ensure local communities benefit from AI. They highlighted that data—the key local asset—is poorly protected once shared.

To secure a return on investment for communities, they suggested new approaches, perhaps borrowing ideas from community land buyouts, which have successfully empowered locals to take control of resources. This model could give communities a say in how AI is developed and used, ensuring it delivers tangible benefits. For example, AI could improve roadwork planning, reducing disruptions.

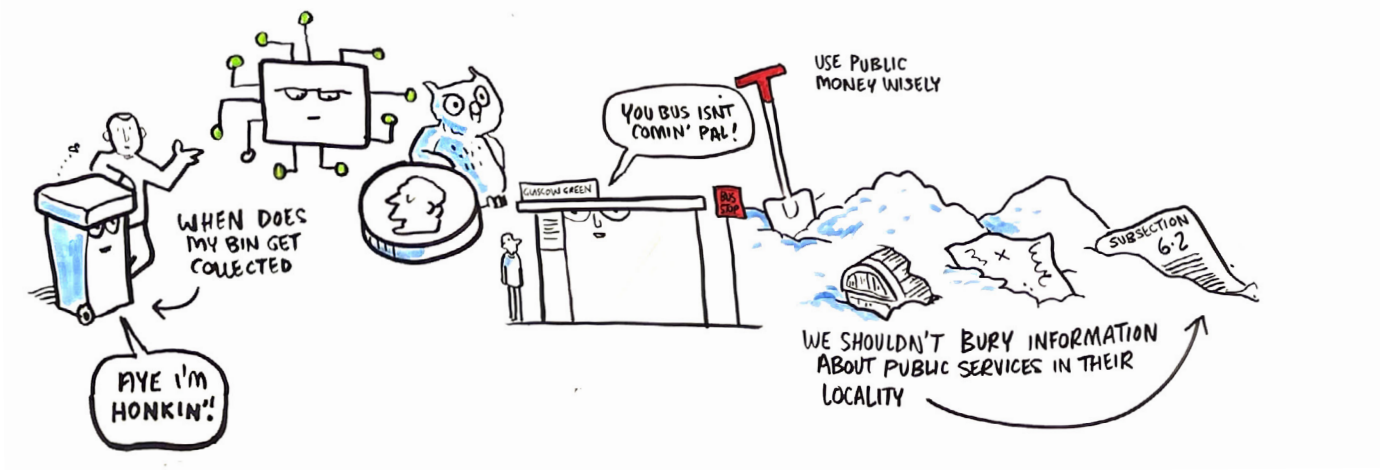
AI and Health Inequality: How could or should we use AI to address and mitigate health inequalities?



This conversation revealed a consensus that health inequalities are often rooted in broader social disparities. The group emphasised that AI must be part of a larger redesign of healthcare systems rather than a quick-fix addition to existing structures.

One practical suggestion was to make health information available in people's first languages by default, ensuring accessibility. Another point was the importance of intersectional data collected at the community level, ensuring that resources are allocated where they are most needed. In particular, it was highlighted that women's health has significant data gaps, and AI could help identify these gaps, driving research and improvements in this area.

AI and Public Services: How could or should we use AI to improve access to and delivery of public services such as education and skills training?



AI has the potential to make public services more accessible and user-friendly. People sometimes struggle to navigate outdated websites or find accurate details about local services. AI could change this by presenting information in everyday language and intuitive formats.

For example, AI could connect individuals to community groups, mental health resources, or local initiatives they might not be aware of. It could also act as a career advisor, asking simple but meaningful questions—like what hobbies they enjoy—and helping them explore career paths they might not have considered.

Closing Remarks

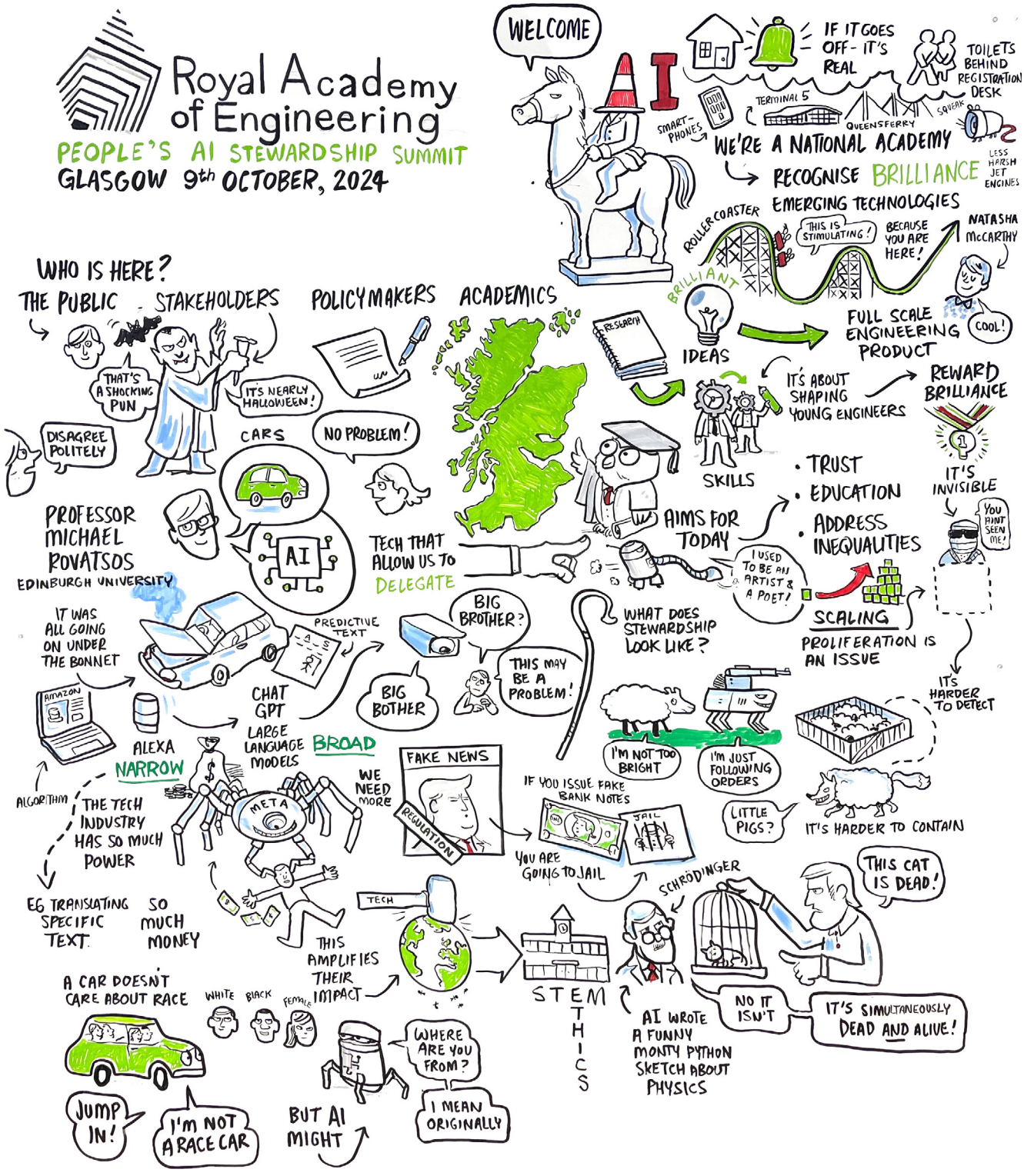
As the summit drew to a close, Natasha reminded us that “engineering can be seen as a social science”—its impacts are as much about people as they are about technology.

Emma Loedel, Senior Enterprise Manager at the Academy’s Enterprise Hub in Glasgow, then underlined the Academy’s commitment to a place-based approach that prioritises community engagement and reassured participants that their voices would resonate beyond this event—”we are listening.”

Thank you to everyone who brought their insights and energy to this event. Your contributions will help ensure the future of AI truly serves the people of Scotland.

“Engineering can be seen as a social science.”

The Big Picture



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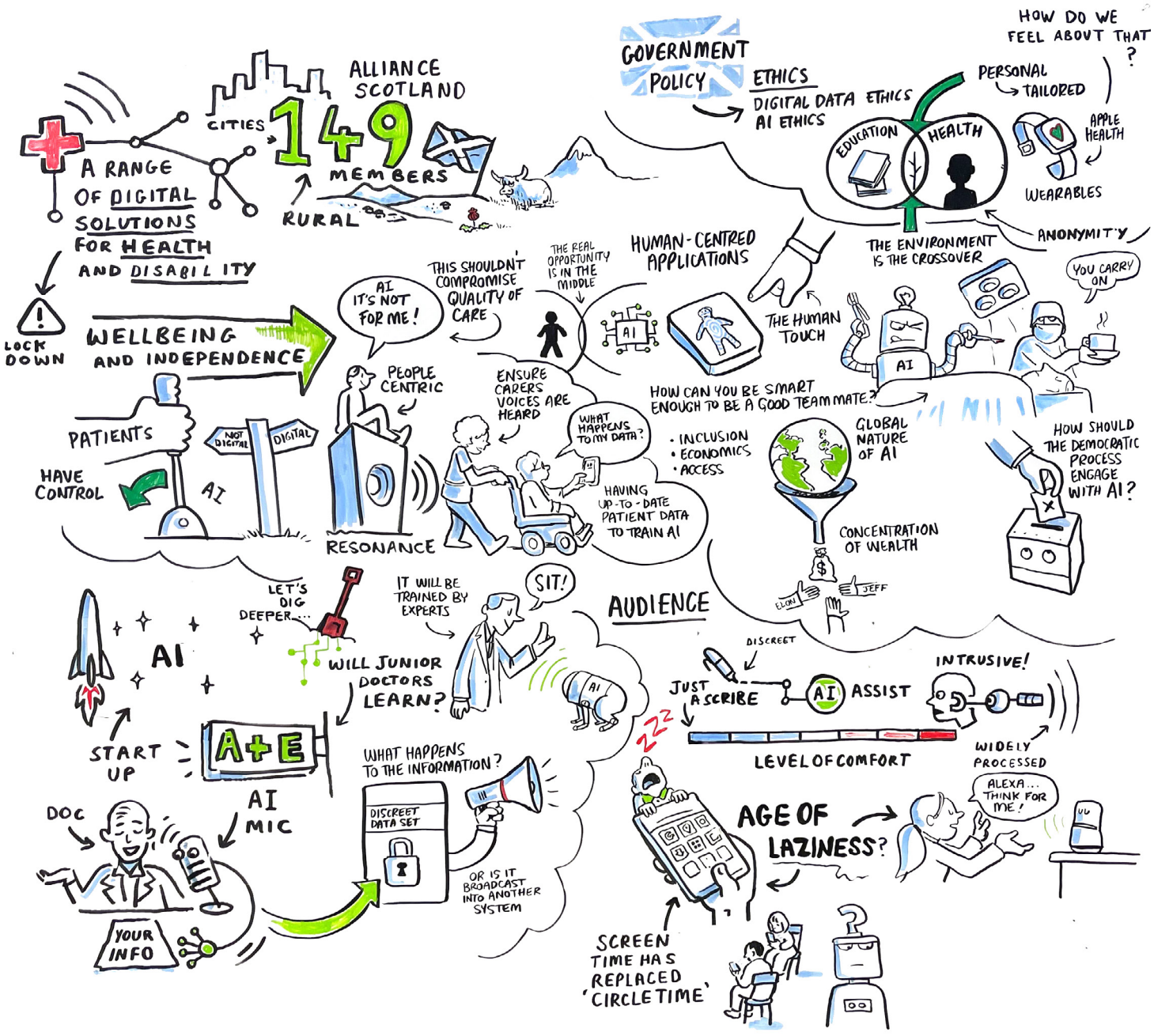

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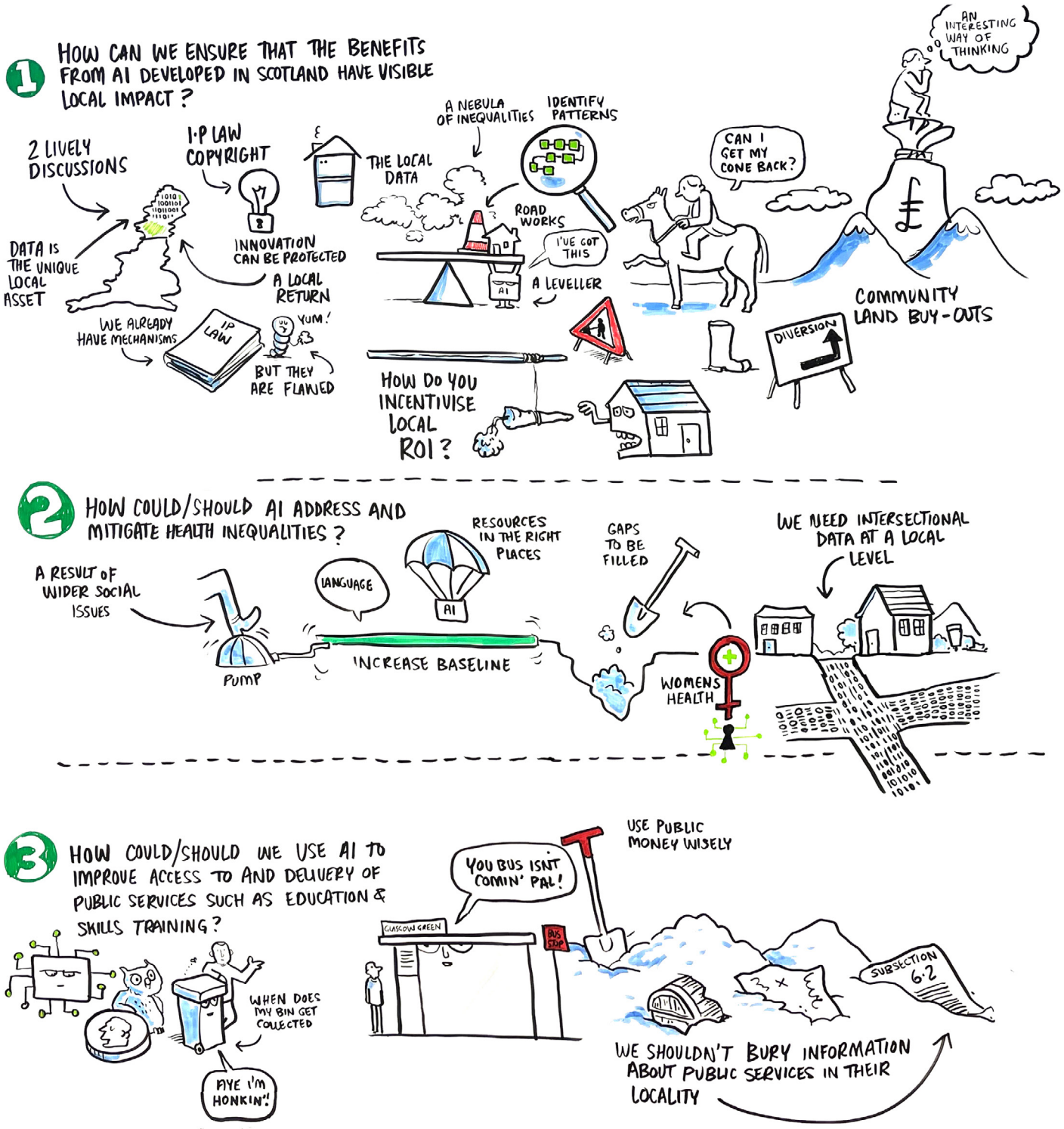

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