

NORTHERN POWERGRID

Focus for Future Panel 2025-2026

Session 1

Exploring Digital Futures

November 2025

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1. Executive Summary

Following the success of Northern Powergrid's first Youth Insights Panel, now known as the Focus for Future Panel, this was the first session of a new year for the panel. This second cohort of 23 panellists is made up of 7 continuing panellists from Focus for Future 2024-2025, with an additional 16 young people who were offered places after applying and interviewing this year.

The topics that the panellists will continue to discuss cover a range of social and environmental issues impacting and influencing the business, from digitalisation and the role of artificial intelligence to growing and diversifying the workforce. Climate change and the role of renewable energy is a thread throughout Focus for Future panel discussions, as are the cost and equity of access to energy as we move towards net zero.

The Focus for Future Panel is a way to gain enduring and sustainable input from young people, and the membership will be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that it remains efficient, inclusive, and representative.

The panellists made meaningful suggestions and requests for the way of working together over the coming year, prioritising respect, inclusivity and professionalism. They fed back openly about their electricity usage pre-work, which helped to set the scene for the session as a whole. They were detailed and thought-provoking in their discussions about digitalisation, and the caution and transparency with which any business, but particularly an energy business, should approach artificial intelligence.

2. Overview of the session

Session 1 of Northern Powergrid's Focus for Future Panel 2025-2026 explored data, digitalisation, and innovation at Northern Powergrid. NPg wanted to discuss with the Focus for Future panellists, amidst similar discussions with their wider stakeholder base, how they feel about the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a business tool. In this session, the panellists explored NPg's approach to this, what level of innovation the FfF Panel expect from NPg, and if there are any ethical concerns the young people might have. NPg also wanted to test what level of digital sophistication and innovation people expect from them as a business, so this session worked to lay out some of the context for this so that we could ask it as a concise quantifiable question in the session feedback survey.

Objectives of the Session

- That the Focus for Future (FfF) panellists feel welcomed, connected, and confident contributing online.
- That the panellists understand Northern Powergrid's role, Ofgem's influence, and how the FfF Panel shapes decisions.
- Explore the panellists' reactions and reflections around data, AI, and digitalisation at NPg.

Agenda

Time	Activity
5:30	Welcome and introductions
5:40	Introduction to NPg
5.47	Group reflection: your electricity diaries
5:52	Witness presentation: digitalisation, AI & data privacy at NPg Q&A
6:05	Group reflection: your digital world
6:10	Breakout rooms: data dilemmas
6.35	Plenary feedback and discussion
6.45	NPg business planning
6.55	Wrap-up, next steps and finish

Session information

Total length: 90 minutes

People involved: 2 x Solutions for the Planet, 2 x Northern Powergrid, 1 x Independent Stakeholder Group (ISG), 21 x Panellists

Date and time: Thursday 20th November 2025, 5.30-7.00pm

Panel attendance: 21 of 23

Panel apologies: 2

3. Attendees

Focus for Future Panel

Alfie

Anahita

Aysha

Brodie

Devon

Emily C

Emily O

Eva

Francesca (Kicca)

Harvey

James H

Jamie

Kate

Millie

Navjot

Noura

Oliver

Pater

Sebastian

Tafadzwa (Taffy)

Venya

Solutions for the Planet

Claire Fitton

Fran Isherwood

Youth Insights Programme Manager

Youth Insights Programme Coordinator (Maternity)

Northern Powergrid

Rachael Durrett

Edd Anderson

Stakeholder Engagement Manager

Digitalisation Transformation Lead

Observers

Mike Kay

NPg's Independent Stakeholder Group

4. Key discussion points

Getting To Know You

The beginning of Session 1 was an opportunity to introduce all of the stakeholders. The first two session objectives were to bring together existing and newly recruited panellists in a welcoming and open way, as well introducing Northern Powergrid. The panellists were invited to approach the time with an open mind, listening and contributing actively, and thinking about how they would like their Focus for Future Panel to feel and deliver.

They were asked to bear this in mind and think about it in relation to:

- what they expect of other panellists
- what they expect of themselves as individuals
- what they expect of the businesses they're working with, both Solutions for the Planet and Northern Powergrid.

As an icebreaker in the breakout rooms, the panellists were invited to share their initial thoughts on this in one or two words, with some of their thoughts captured here:



The Focus for Future Panel were subsequently asked for their suggestions for a Group Agreement for this panel year in the feedback survey for this session [Appendix 1].

The introductions continued with a presentation from Rachael Durrett, Stakeholder Engagement Manager at Northern Powergrid, about the work NPg is responsible for, their role in the wider energy system, and why a Youth Insights Panel is vital to their delivery. This is vital context for the young people, in addition to the materials they were sent ahead of the session:

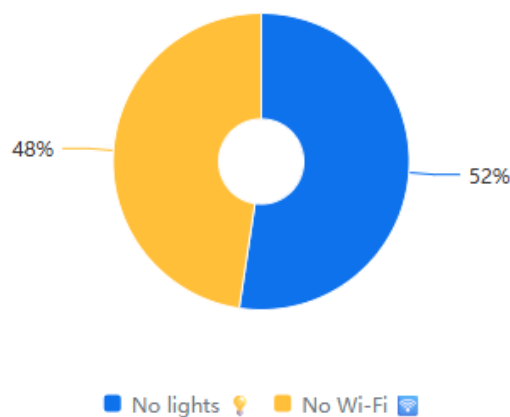
- **Watch:** [Northern Powergrid – About us](#)
- **Read:** [Northern Powergrid’s Focus for Future Panel end of year report 2024-2025](#)

Pre-work: electricity diary

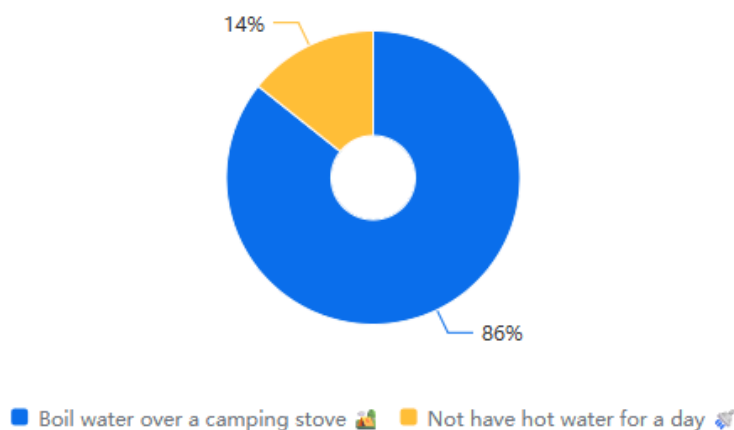
As well as getting some context for Northern Powergrid, ahead of the session the Focus for Future panellists were also invited to complete an electricity diary for one day, logging how many activities used electricity and how long for [Appendix 2.]

This helped to highlight quite how often we use electricity in our daily lives, and served to set the scene for the following icebreaker “would you rather...?” poll:

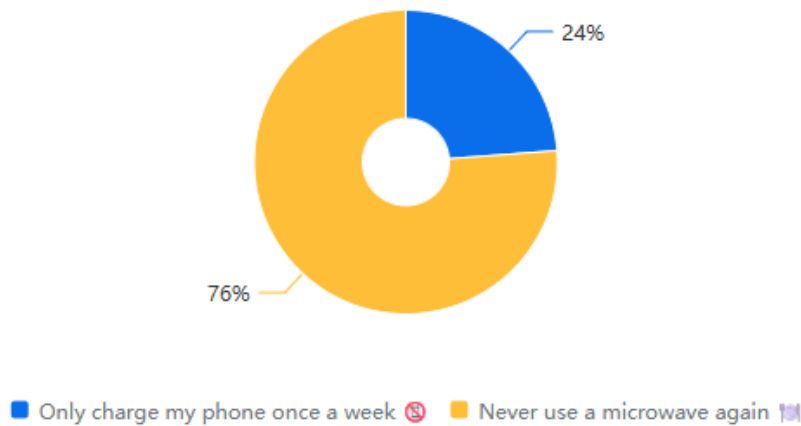
1. Would you rather have no lights for a day or no Wi-Fi for a day?



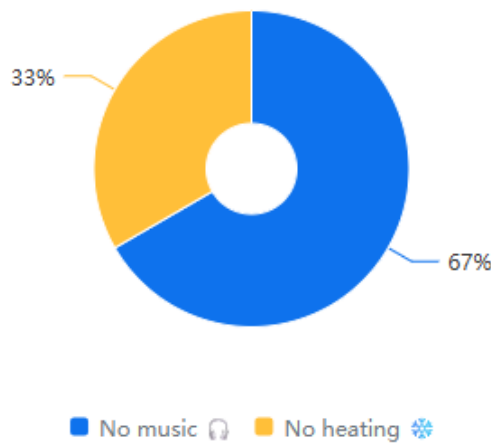
2. Would you rather have to boil water on a camping stove or not have hot water for a whole day?



3. Would you rather only be able to charge your phone once a week or never use a microwave again?



4. Would you rather go a whole day without music or whole day without heating?



The young people were split almost down the middle when it came to choosing lights or Wi-Fi for a day if they had do, and it was $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ preference for heating over music; but they largely voted to boil water over a camping stove every day time they had to use it, and go without a microwave rather than their mobile phones.

When asked if they found anything surprising, some FfF panellists commented:



- How much I use my laptop all day. On the day I did it, I used my laptop for 12 hours continuously.
- Pretty much all day, something was on somewhere... just quite how much it all adds up.
- How much I charge my phone... often I just put it on charge and leave it there. And that actually topped up to be my highest usage.

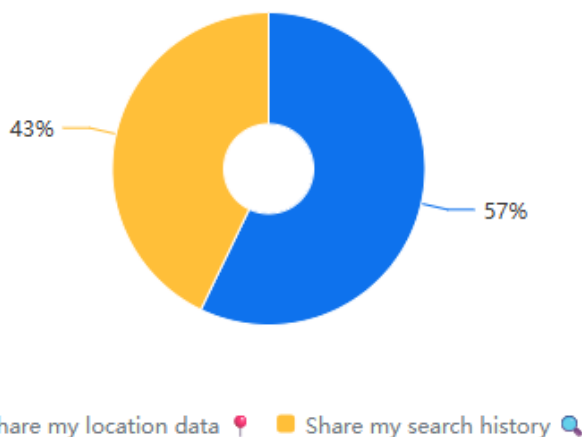


Witness presentation: Edd Anderson, Digitalisation Transformation Lead at NPg

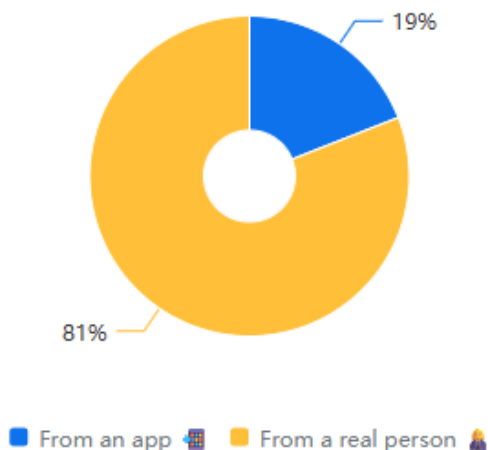
Initially the Focus for Future Panel heard from an expert on this topic from within the business. Edd Anderson explained that there continues to be extra and growing demand on the system, given the increasing numbers of electric cars, smart meters and renewable energy sources. This requires higher technological capabilities and capacity. The panellists were given some examples of where this innovation is needed, and also how artificial intelligence might be built into some of these processes, e.g., in NPg’s Smart Grid initiative and predicting maintenance needs. Edd also highlighted some of the challenges that NPg associate with this increase use of digital tools.

The panellist had the opportunity to ask Edd questions about what they had heard and any thoughts it sparked [Appendix 3]. The presentation was also context for their breakout room discussions. In order to capture some immediate reflections before that deeper thinking, they completed a second “would you rather...?” poll:

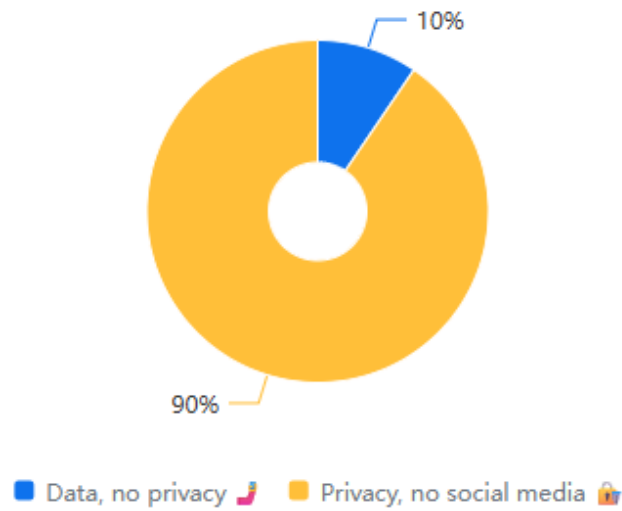
1. Would you rather share your location data or your search history with a business?



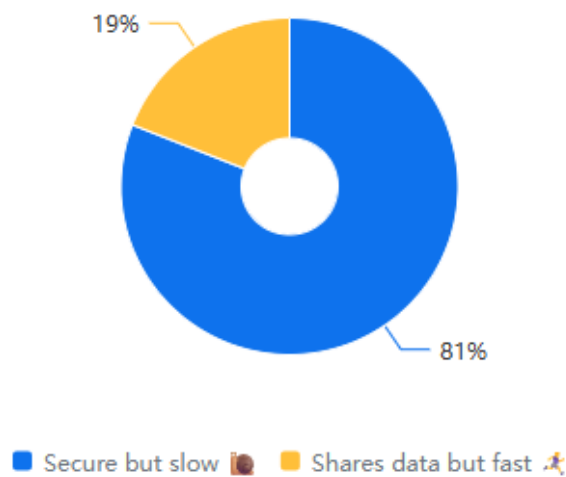
2. Would you rather get energy usage tips from an app or from a real person?



3. Would you rather have unlimited data but no privacy or total privacy but no social media?



4. Would you rather use a super secure app that's slow and awkward, or a fast, fun app that collects lots of your data?



This poll was a quick way to test some assumptions about young people and digitalisation. We can clearly see a preference for data privacy, with 90% choosing total privacy if it was a choice between that and social media access. This follows that 81% also chose digital security over speed, and 81% of the panellists wanting access to a real person instead of an app when it comes to information about energy usage.

Breakout rooms:

NPg wanted to understand from the Focus for Future panellists how they feel about companies using data. They were asked to discuss three aspects of this topic in their breakout rooms:

1. Comfort zone: How comfortable are you with private businesses using your data to offer personalised services or recommendations? When does it feel useful? When is it invasive? What makes the difference?
2. Red flags: What concerns do you have about data privacy or digital security? What makes you feel exposed or unsafe online? Who should be responsible for keeping data safe?
3. Trust builders: What makes you trust a company with your data?

COMFORT ZONE

- A business should have a good public reputations.
- Businesses should only collect personal data when it's needed: if they're not offering personalised services, they shouldn't collect personalised data.
- Keep us informed about what the data is being used for.
- Delete data after the relevant use for a certain period of time.
- Provide clear explanations of what they're using the data for.
- Options for me to control my data: to opt in and opt out.
- Data such as search history is one thing. When it's things like location, phone number, age - that's when it starts getting a bit more invasive.
- Good websites define clearly when the data is essential and only ask for that.
- Understanding why an organisation values its customers and the data that is relevant to their purposes, and makes their services excellent.

RED FLAGS

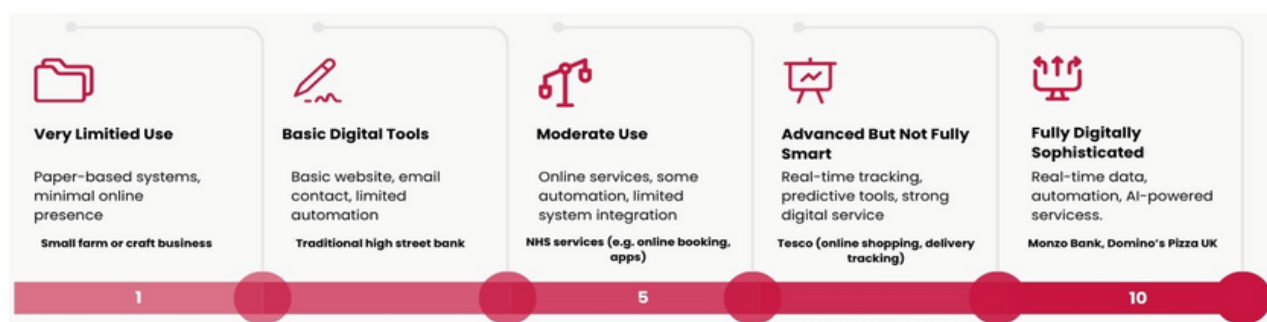
- When businesses ask for unessential cookies or data it makes me uneasy.
- Making data usage or digitalisation really complicated, to disguise what you're actually signing up for.
- Sharing information with third parties, but not mentioning who these other businesses are.
- When it feels like there's nothing we can do about spam messages.
- For vulnerable groups, it could be even more difficult for them to understand why data is being collected or what is being done with it.
- When it isn't possible to 'reject all'.
- Being asked for location or scanning the metadata it's really "creepy".
- Overly personalised data; how do they know everything about you?
- Feeling manipulated or spied on.
- If the product is free, then the customer becomes the product.
- AI uses a lot of energy.
- The risk of laying off human staff who also need to make a living.
- Lithium ion and other materials are mined and that comes with it a risk of child labour.

TRUST BUILDERS

- It's more trustworthy if a business explains their data requests and usage in straightforward language that everyone understands.
- Having clear and defined options when it comes to cookies.
- Replace 'do you accept these cooking' with 'reject all' or the option to go through and select the specifics.
- When a business is really transparent about what they use the data for.
- Instead of having long pages, businesses should just list in bullet points what exactly the data is for and how long they're going to keep it.
- Fewer fields should be asterisked on data collecting forms. Why do I need to provide this in order to proceed?
- Having an article clearly visible on the same page we are using, explaining why they need your data.
- If a business open sourced some of the code or the data, that would feel a lot more safe.
- Knowing that data fed into any AI programme is proper, secure, and actually relevant.
- A lot more security against data breaches.

Northern Powergrid's Data Maturity Scale

In the feedback survey the panellists were also asked what level of digital sophistication and innovation they expect for NPg [Appendix 5]. This was asked in the context of what they learned from the session about NPG's digitalisation, working with AI, and the feedback they heard from their fellow panellists. On this scale, score of '0' equals the lowest level of digital maturity with very limited use of digitalisation, and a score of '10' equals the highest level of digital maturity with full use of digitalisation.



The young people returned an average of 7.5, indicating that they believe Northern Powergrid should sit somewhere within the remit of 'advanced but not fully smart'. This reflects their recommendations that NPg should provide strong digital services and utilise digitalisation to improve the customer experience, but that there should still be room for human-led services.

5. Key reflections for Northern Powergrid



WE ARE COMFORTABLE WHEN

- Northern Powergrid customers have access to a source that's easy to read and explains how data is used, with correct permissions.
- We know what data NPg is using and why.
- NPg specifies what type of AI is being used and how they're implementing it.
- AI is used for clever ways to analyse existing data.
- Reputation and transparency are valued.



WE ARE CONCERNED WHEN

- We feel AI is checking our every movement.
- Businesses appear to boost their advertisements at the expense of our privacy and security, it is invasive.
- Long data agreement lists appear, because we can't trust there aren't loopholes to allow businesses to use your data for something unclear.
- Northern Powergrid's vulnerable or less technology-literate customers might be at higher risk of unwittingly sharing their data for purposes they can't control.



WE TRUST MORE WHEN

- Northern Powergrid doesn't rely too heavily on AI, but invest and concentrate on more reliable resources.
- As Northern Powergrid is a regulated business, be transparent about the code they're using, and if it's outsourced or developed in-house.
- AI and the tools it interacts with are understood by the public and its users, rather than just the engineers who design and embed it.

6. Conclusions

The session was the first time bringing together both continuing and newly recruited young people. It needed to cover both an introduction to Northern Powergrid and a background to the FfF panel, as well as tackling the complex topic of digitalisation within a big business. The panellists worked well together, demonstrated excellent listening and collaboration skills in the breakout rooms, and were critical and inquisitive of the strategies that NPg brought to the conversation.

The panellists expressed that they're comfortable sharing data when a business has a good reputation and is transparent about why, where and for how long data is collected and stored. They want data collection to be clearly limited to only what is necessary for the service, and corresponding explanations. The young people used adjectives like 'invasive', 'creepy' and 'spying' to express their feelings towards unnecessary or unconsented data collection.

A number of the panellists explained personal experiences of having been scammed online in the past, leading to financial loss and distrust of online services. They expressed deep concern for vulnerable groups being at higher risk of these things, and the responsibility every business has to prevent and even eradicate this.

When it comes to trust, the Focus for Future panel doubled down on the need for transparency. They value information in clear, simple, accessible terms. They value customer control: easy options for rejecting cookies and managing data. They value privacy and security, with the assurance that data won't be misused, and the AI will not be too highly trusted or left unchecked.



7. Appendix


Appendix 1: Northern Powergrid's Focus for Future 2025-2026 Group Agreement

<p>What do I expect of other panel members?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect and listening - treat each other with respect and understanding, listen actively, and ensure everyone feels heard and valued. • Equal participation - give all members an opportunity to speak, share opinions, and contribute to discussions. • Professionalism and preparedness - be committed, well-prepared, and constructive in approach. • Open and friendly atmosphere - be kind, maintain a friendly, approachable, and relatively informal tone to encourage comfortable and open-minded discussions. • Honesty and confidence - speak openly and honestly, while being considerate and supportive of others. • Collaboration and contribution - share ideas, help one another, and work toward productive, engaging conversations.
<p>What do I expect of myself?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution and engagement - be willing to share ideas, participate fully, and connect with the team in meaningful ways. • Listening and respect - listen carefully to others, respect different viewpoints, and give space for everyone to contribute. • Learning and growth - seek to learn about future opportunities and industry developments, and approach discussions with curiosity. • Confidence and openness - be brave in expressing opinions, think creatively, and understand that personal perspectives are valid. • Professionalism and preparedness - arrive prepared, punctual, and dedicated; conduct research where needed and maintain a constructive attitude. • Collaboration and kindness - be friendly, helpful, and considerate, fostering an inclusive and supportive environment. • Unique perspectives - explore issues from different angles and bring fresh ideas to the group.
<p>What do I expect of S4TP and Northern Powergrid?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and inspiration - provide insights into the energy sector, educate the next generation, and inspire future career opportunities. • Support and guidance - offer help with further education, career pathways, and advice on apprenticeships or training routes. • Respect for ideas - take youth perspectives seriously, consider suggestions, and adapt ideas where possible. • Transparency and communication - maintain clear, honest, and open communication, including sharing relevant data and logistics. • Professionalism and organisation - continue delivering well-structured, productive sessions with clear pre-session materials and good timing. • Inclusivity and engagement - create a safe, friendly environment for discussion, ensuring authenticity and openness. • Ethical standards - act in a way that is morally and ethically correct, prioritising the best interests of both consumers and the business.

ELECTRICITY DIARY

Activity <small>(add to these with your own)</small>	How long did you use it for?	How many times today? Did you use this every day?
Charging your phone	Overnight (6-8 hours)	Once, yes
Using a computer	2 hours	Once, No
Boiling a kettle	I didnt useit	Once, no
Watching TV	2 hours	Once, no
Streaming videos on a device	2 hours	Multiple times, yes
Turning lights on	1-2 hours	A couple times, yes
Using a microwave or oven	1 hour	Twice , yes
Playing games on a console	1 hour	Once, no
Having the heating on	All day	Once, no
Using an alarm clock	Wake me up in the morning, goes off for ablut 1 minute	Once, yes
Showering	20 minutes	Twice, yes



Appendix 3: Panellists' questions for Edd Anderson, Digitalisation Transformation Lead at NPg

ANSWERED

Q: How does NPg test the accuracy of the AI models before allowing them to influence real- world decisions?

A: Test and learn. We bring it into a really safe environment, what we call a sandbox. And we'll monitor that for a very long time before we're comfortable that it's feeding us the right information. In addition, it's about the information that we're feeding AI on top of that to make sure that's clear and accurate and it meets our brand and it meets our ambition. We've got to be really careful with AI because AI can literally create a mind of its own. So it's about the accuracy of the information that we feed that artificial intelligence and very much a test and learn environment. So before that goes live, making sure we're completely comfortable as a business that we're happy with the information that it's going to be providing us moving forward.

Q: Have there been any recent decisions that AI has made in terms of the business for Northern Powergrid?

A: Yes and no. AI has predominantly been around properly since the post-COVID era. That's when we've seen a big influx towards it. ChatGPT and tools like that. We want to stay on the right side of risk with it. So there definitely are elements where we're using it throughout the business, whether that's in our reporting, whether that's in our technology, whatever it might be. We haven't got a fully autonomous AI that's making decisions for us right now. It's still very much human backed. We would hope to get into that position in the future. But again, going back to that safety point: we need to make sure that it's safe and secure and it's going in the right direction; that we continue to test and learn in those environments before we're letting it fully automate.

Q: How do you make sure that AI or AI tools are understood by the public and the users rather than just the engineers?

A: It's about just making it really, really clear from that first interaction so that customers have that understanding from the very start.

Q: Has there ever been an instance where an AI has been failing, but you're not getting back the data to say that it's failing?

A: Yes, is the short answer. What a business should never do is have a chatbot and no failsafe behind it. You should always have the option of either getting transferred through to an agent through a live chat or having an option where it provides you with the number. [If] a customer just gets stuck in a constant loop with a chatbot and it's not answering the question... the way that we can detect that is through... a thing called a node in the background. It would flag if a chatbot would give someone an answer, say, 10 times in a row, and it failed to then pass it through to an agent. But there are instances where you will find that data is not readily accessible or that data wouldn't come through. So the only way that you can drive that technology forward and be able to do that test on an environment is if you have people like product owners, which we have in Northern Powergrid, that are constantly testing things both behind the scenes from a coding perspective, but also from a customer facing perspective as well. So literally getting on the laptops, logging on the website and deliberately trying to trick chatbots or live chats... because rightly you've pointed out that doesn't necessarily always make it to the back end. So we need to understand why that is. And the only way that we can do that is by putting ourselves in the customer shoes essentially.

Q: How long will data be held for?

A: It depends on the type of data provided, but the best answer is no longer than necessary. GDPR in the UK provides businesses with guidance on what data they can obtain and how long they should keep it.

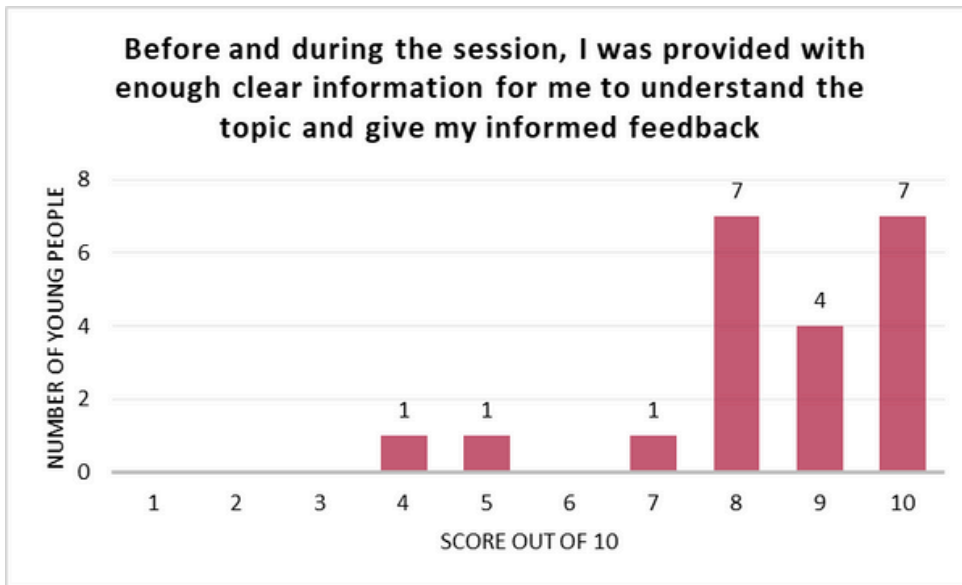
Q: With the grid going more digital and relying on internet access, how will you ensure security and reliability if external services go down, e.g., the cloudflare outage?

A: In its current state, cloud-based cyber security measures stored on physical servers. In terms of outages, we need to get into a place of building products internally so that we can engineer our own destiny, as opposed to reliance on others. A good example being AWS went down a few weeks and we were reliant on them to get us back up and running.

TO BE ANSWERED

Q: What will happen when a new solution is required to solve, say, a power outage; the AI can only apply what it has been taught already, especially in lower intelligence models?

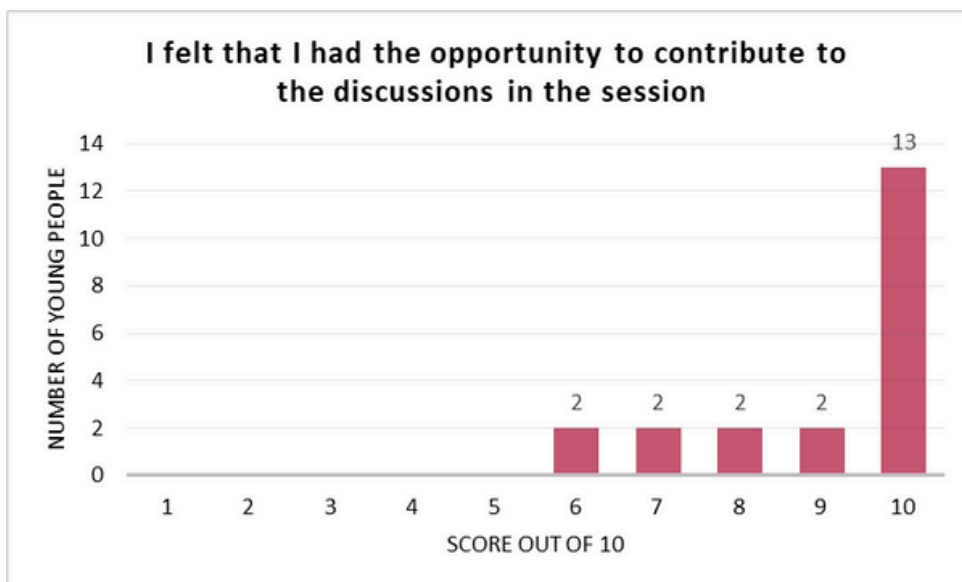
Appendix 4: survey results from the post-session feedback form (21 respondents who attended the session).



8.5
AVERAGE
1.d.p

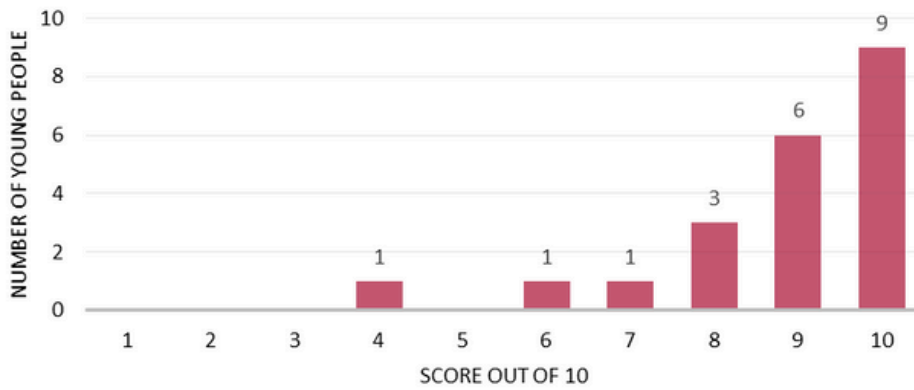


8.8
AVERAGE
1.d.p



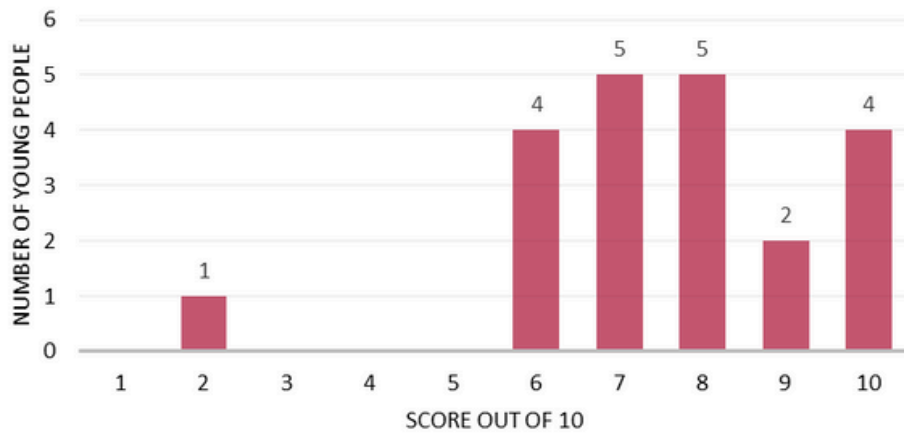
9.0
AVERAGE
1.d.p

I felt that my ideas were listened to and I felt like I was speaking with the right people from the business who will be making decisions about the topic



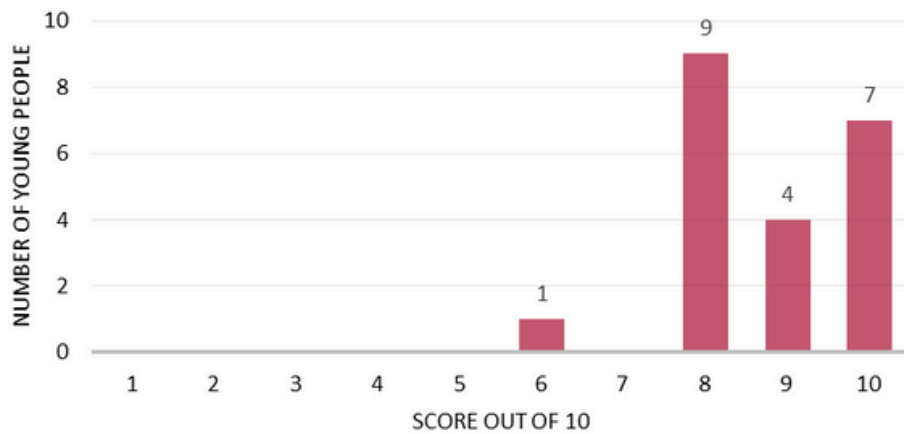
8.8
AVERAGE
1.d.p

It is clear to me how my ideas and insights will be used to influence the business and its future plans



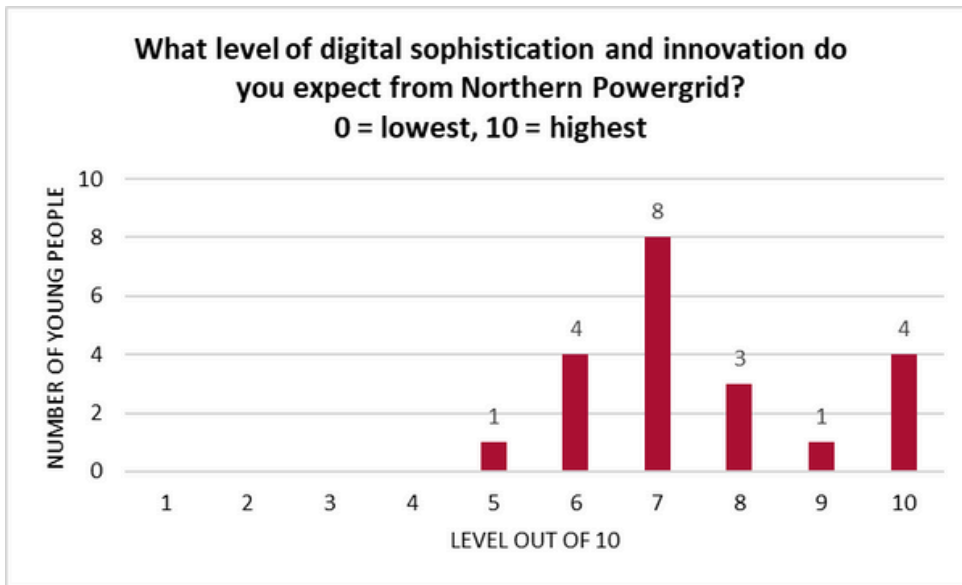
7.6
AVERAGE
1.d.p

Overall, how would you rate this session on a scale of 0 - 10?



8.8
AVERAGE
1.d.p

Appendix 5: survey results on Northern Powergrid's Digital Maturity Scale



7.5
AVERAGE
1.d.p