

The  
Economist

EDUCATIONAL  
FOUNDATION

AI: education and the future of work

Eco-anxiety

Prisons: what's their purpose?

Business and politics: what could go wrong?

Immigration: divisive policies

JANUARY 22ND TO MARCH 28TH 2024



# TOPICAL TALK FESTIVAL

The world's biggest news festival  
for young people



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#### Student

Usra Academy, Nigeria

*I have achieved a lot from Topical Talk Festival... On the Hub, I learned how to understand other people's opinions and I learnt to respect them. I have learned about important topics that are relevant to young people like me. I've developed my writing and creativity skills and I've learnt to put my ideas together and express them in a way that others will understand and learn from. I understand why someone might think differently from me. The Hub has educated and enlightened me about different crucial issues that are important to me and my community.*

#### Teacher

Octavian Goga High School, Romania

*Teaching the curriculum year after year can become boring and it can really lack excitement after a while. Topical Talk lessons were like a breath of fresh air in the monotony of the Romanian school curriculum. On my own I would not have been confident to talk about current affairs of the world.*



# TOPICAL TALK FESTIVAL

JANUARY – MARCH 2024



Between January 22nd and March 28th 2024, students took part in a ten-week Topical Talk Festival – the world's biggest news festival for young people.

This magazine gives readers a taste of some of the fantastic discussions, ideas and work from across the Festival.



### How did it work?



Each week, teachers led a classroom discussion about the news using a Topical Talk Headlines lesson.



Then, students logged into the Festival Student Hub and joined conversations about different issues in the news with peers from across the globe.



Students responded to expert challenges, took part in live lessons and were supported in their discussions by volunteers from corporate partners.



At the end of the Festival, students created Standpoints – their final say about their favourite Festival topic in written, audio or video format.



 Some comments have been edited for clarity.



# Festival in numbers

Topical Talk Festival 2024 was a huge success thanks to the fantastic efforts of participating teachers and students across the world.

## TOP TOPICS

-  **AI: education and the future of work**  
6,584 comments
-  **Eco-anxiety**  
3,640 comments
-  **Prisons: emergency in Ecuador**  
3,039 comments

## COUNTRY CONTRIBUTORS

Top country contributors

-  **United Kingdom**
-  **Egypt**
-  **United States of America**
-  **India**

## VOLUNTEERS

**61** volunteers joined discussions

36 volunteers from **KPMG, Clifford Chance LLP** and **PA Consulting** helped to develop the discussions and 25 volunteers from **The Economist** helped to moderate contributions.

The Volunteer Award for outstanding discussion support went to **Rebecca Roth-Biester** from Clifford Chance LLP.



## TOPIC AI: education and the future of work



### energetic\_tornado

Kali Gandaki Academy, Nepal

Robots with AI could be well-suited for jobs like manufacturing and assembly as they can perform repetitive tasks with precision. AI-powered robots could navigate and organise inventory with reduced human error. But there are certain skills and qualities that humans possess which make us uniquely suited for certain jobs. For example, jobs that require creativity, empathy, complex decision-making, intuition, emotional intelligence and the ability to connect with others on a deeper level.

### intelligent\_orchard

Rhemaville Christian Academy, Nigeria

I agree because the conception of AI and machines was brought about by the need for some kind of assistance to humans to make their work faster, more "perfect" and more efficient. Humans needed

to be able to keep up with their own growth which is why machines were brought into the picture. AI is really helping humanity a lot in many ways but being too reliant on our own inventions could be disastrous. Humanity can't be called humanity when it consists mainly of robots, can it? We still need to be able to retain those jobs that really make us human. Using AI is helpful but that is all that it is supposed to be: an aid to humans.

### smart\_goji

Caleb British International School, Nigeria

I'm not sure about this because although it is logical to assume that AI cannot be creative, actually it is simply not entirely true. Creativity is using original ideas to create something. And at first glance you might think AI does not have the ability to create something original, however it actually does. Today computers can compose music, create art, and write novels. It might seem unnatural now or even repetitive and robotic but with time I am sure AI will improve. Why do you think even today people find it hard to distinguish between good AI pieces and real human ones? We just need to give AI time.

## TOPIC Immigration: divisive policies



### decisive\_mouse

Livingstone Academy, United Kingdom

Immigration is a massive issue in the UK and I believe it requires immediate action from the government and politicians. I strongly believe that refugees should be allowed into the UK with open arms because they are escaping from life-threatening situations and need to get to safety.

The UK has a new plan to send immigrants to Rwanda. The amount of money that it costs to send immigrants to Rwanda is high and it doesn't save the UK any money. It would be cheaper to have immigrants live here with the resources the UK usually provides. I think the UK government is showing very little empathy towards refugees (who could have been escaping war or abuse) by shipping them off to a different country, which might not be safe for them either.

I understand one of the main reasons that the government is worried about immigrants coming into the UK is that there aren't enough resources to support them. For example, the NHS is already strained and people have extremely long waits to get appointments and see doctors.

However, I am concerned most about immigrants' safety. I firmly believe that migrants should be allowed into the UK no matter what. Some migrants might even be able to help our country. For example, they could apply to be doctors and this would reduce waiting times for UK citizens.



## TOPIC Eco-anxiety



### marvellous\_hedgehog

The Mayflower Centre, Romania

I believe that balance is the key to this matter. Currently, I mostly see negative news about the climate and almost no positive news. Because of that, I often prefer not to watch anything of the kind. It makes me feel like everything is going downhill. However, it isn't true. There are a lot of people who are actually working hard to solve the problem of climate change. I feel like they are not being talked about enough. They need to get the credit they deserve for it. Also, if more successful campaigns were presented on TV, then maybe more people would watch them and think that there is still a chance. They might feel empowered by positive information and start helping too. Although, on the other hand, if people only hear positive facts, then

they are very likely to believe everything is alright and that they don't have to put any effort into it. That's why, from my point of view, people should have access to all information about the actual climate situation – with the good and the bad.

### dependable\_juniper

Elite Scholars Academy, United States of America

As you said: balance is key especially when it comes to spreading information via news, social media, or website articles. When people hear terrible stories of how glaciers are breaking and ocean levels are rising, people worry for their lives. Whereas if people hear the positives along with the negatives, people can conjure up ideas about what they could do. For example: "if I recycle more, then I can help stop so much plastic pollution in the ocean" or, "if I go to this protest and post on my social media, people might see that they too should help the Earth".



## TOPIC Prisons: what's their purpose?



### accurate\_outcome

Uckfield College, United Kingdom

I think knowledge of the outside world would be crucial for a prisoner's integration back into society. This is because without this knowledge of current affairs, their minds might be stuck in the society they left when they were imprisoned. For example, there may be things like Artificial Intelligence – and its impact on society – that they might have no idea about.

Without knowledge of the outside world, newly released prisoners might step into a society that they don't recognise. The transition of leaving prison is difficult enough without the added pressure of trying to figure out what has happened in the world while they've been locked away.

For however long someone might have been in prison – be it a year or twenty years – they will have missed a big world news story that might affect their

lives. Take inflation for example: prisoners might leave prison and enter a "culture shock" where prices are higher than they ever could've imagined. The idea of the outside world may scare some prisoners so keeping them updated with what is going on might help to lessen this fear and make them feel as if they are still a small part of the society they left.

In conclusion, I think this knowledge of the outside world and current affairs is crucial to helping prisoners to re-enter society in the most easy and non-disturbing way – both for them and for the community they are entering.



## TOPIC

## Business and politics: what could go wrong?



whether each instance of a business getting involved in politics will help our environment and society positively or negatively.

**pioneering\_heart**

Latino College Prep Academy,  
United States of America

In my opinion, businesses being unbiased during elections is crucial to keep elections balanced because people need to be able to vote for who they think best fits the role and not who their favourite brand supports. If a brand has a big following it could convince people to vote for a leader, who might not be able to provide what the community needs.

**affable\_plantain**

Elite Scholars Academy,  
United States of America

I think businesses should be allowed to encourage people to vote for one particular candidate in an election because businesses are affected by politics. If a business owner uses a business to suggest that someone should vote for someone or something, then I think that is their right.


**fantastic\_song**

Cantonment Public School and  
College, Bangladesh

My answer to the question of whether corporations should be allowed to participate in politics is neutral because there are compelling arguments on both sides of this debate. On the one hand, businesses can bring about positive changes and contribute to social progress by participating in political activities. They often have resources, expertise, and influence that can be leveraged for the greater good. On the other hand, when businesses engage in politics, there is a risk of unfair influence that can distort decision-making processes and increase inequalities within society. The influence of large corporations can change the way people think and behave. Therefore, it is important to understand

## TOPIC

## The Enhanced Games: are they fair?



to have proper sports training should be allowed to use drugs. But I disagree. Putting aside the "fairness" aspect of things, there might be extremely dangerous medical side effects. Some people might say that if everybody who participated in a sporting event took drugs, then it would be fair. But I think different drugs and dosages might have different side effects and this could give unfair advantages.

**unassuming\_cloudberry**

Gymnasium am Rotenbühl, Germany

I agree with your overall opinion that doping in the Enhanced Games is not fair and should not be supported. However I also believe the idea of seeing how far humans can push themselves with every drug available is interesting. It is just morally very questionable.

**awesome\_speech**

Boutcher CofE Primary School, United Kingdom

The Enhanced Games is a new international competition in which the use of performance-enhancing drugs is allowed. In my opinion, in most cases, this is unacceptable. My reasons are that it is not a fair way of winning and it doesn't show talent, sportsmanship and winning or losing gracefully – especially at the highest stage of sports and athletics. It might also cause significant health depletions and make people addicted or even dependent.

Some people in my class have suggested that people who are not fortunate enough



## TOPIC

## The Indian election: what do you want from your leader?


**fascinating\_road**

Choithram School, India

I believe that the more money we spend on health and education, the better-off India will be. These two elements have the power to positively alter every component, including rates of poverty, GDP, infant mortality rate, economy, literacy rates – the list goes on! One of the issues my country is having at the moment is a lack of reliable policy information, despite the fact that individuals in rural areas are receiving news about the election, for example, through newspapers and radios. Another major issue is corruption. In order to address this issue, a perfect leader for India would prioritize the application of existing laws over the creation of new ones.

**Precious\_swan**

Usra Academy, Nigeria

As a young person I would like our elected leaders to focus on improving the health sector in my country so that everyone will have easy access to medical facilities. I would also like the government to spend more money on education because it will allow people who are less privileged to have access to free education. By doing so the government could empower more people.

**thankful\_brain**

Mary N. Raptou School, Greece

I think that a leader in my country should focus more on our safety concerning weather conditions. The leader needs to implement more eco-friendly solutions to prevent pollution – especially in big cities. Also, a better system for predicting extreme weather conditions could be useful in Greece.



## TOPIC

## Women in media


**protective\_effort**

Gimanzija Zupanja, Croatia

During the last few decades, we have seen many young women and female teenagers become faces of movements like environmental activism, women's and girl's rights, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and finally gun control. We've witnessed several young women skyrocket to almost celebrity status for their work, for example: Malala Yousefzai, Greta Thunberg, Rachel Corrie, Emma Gonzalez, and many others. So why are teenage girls and young women usually the sparks that ignite the flame of larger movements organising and fighting for progressive causes?

The number of activists is nothing new, as we could see, back in the 1960s young women were also fighting for progressive causes like freedom of

speech and racial equality. However, today we can see that girls are some of the most active voices in activist circles. I think this is because of the intersection of oppression, because they are not risking losing comforts that patriarchy gives to boys, and because boys are mostly raised to naturally ignore the inherent inequality in their society.

In conclusion, women have led and been the trailblazers for progressive causes, their successes have been reported the world over. It is a given that almost everyone in the year 2024 has heard of at least one of these women, and that is what gives them the power to change the world.



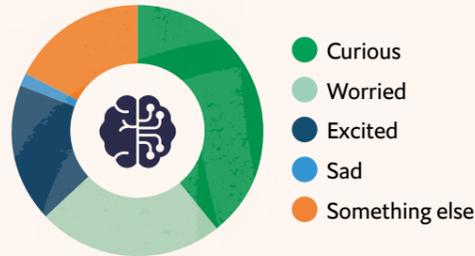
# Poll results



Throughout the Festival students voted to show their opinions on some big questions. Take a look at the results.

## POLL 1

How do you feel about the future of AI?



**fairminded\_satsuma**  
IB Arthur School, Ghana

I picked "excited" in the survey because I have faith that AI's future holds great potential for positive transformation in the world. In my opinion, introducing AI technologies could cut costs, solve challenging issues and even create new things that could be advantageous to humanity at large. Particularly in my country, I am hopeful that AI will significantly contribute to economic growth, employment, better health care and education.

## POLL 2

If you had to pick one, which opinion do you agree with most?



**adventurous\_river**  
Mary N. Raptou School, Greece

Balanced news is the key. If we only hear good news then people may believe that everything is OK with the planet.. This might make us feel relieved... but we'll ignore the real problems our planet has. Nature has changed over the years and is still changing. We need to know all the real facts to be prepared for the future.

## POLL 3

If a celebrity is the "face" of a brand, should the brand be able to control what they do and say in public?

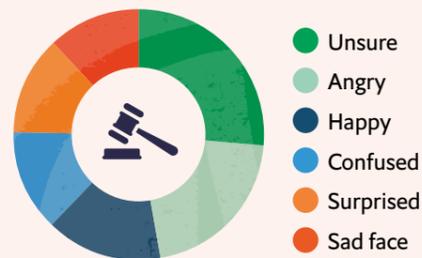


**peaceful\_grape**  
Futures Languages School, Egypt

I think that companies shouldn't have complete control over celebrities that work as the "face" of their brand... nor should they have zero control over them. If a company has complete control over all the actions and choices of a celebrity it will harm both the celebrity and the company's reputation. But if a celebrity has total freedom to do and say anything they want, they might get themselves – and the brand – into a scandal.

## POLL 4

What's your reaction to the UK's Rwanda policy?

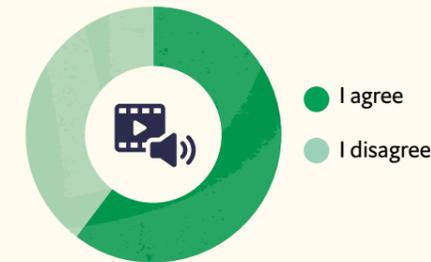


**ambitious\_panther**  
Usra Academy, Nigeria

This result was not what I was expecting because I thought more people would be more angry at UK's Rwanda policy. I think it is not fair for the government to send the immigrants away to another country after what they might have gone through, facing dangerous challenges on the way to seek refuge in the UK. It is good for countries to welcome people with open arms as it improves unity amongst people in the world.

## POLL 5

We asked whether you agreed with the statement: "Women are better at reporting about women and men are better at reporting about men."



**triumphant\_context**  
Rani Bilashmoni Government Boys High School, Bangladesh

I thought most people would disagree with the statement but according to the results of the poll, most people agree. I think this statement shows gender inequality. Every journalist should report objective, unbiased and accurate information to the audience. There should be no discrimination between men and women while reporting the news. Both men and women can report on either. Both men and women should report independently on any subject regardless of gender. We all need to remember that both men and women have the ability to report.

## POLL 6

Should athletes that take performance-enhancing drugs have to reveal that to others? For example, in a sports competition?



**openminded\_olive**  
Elite Scholars Academy, United States of America

We know that athletes take drugs in order to improve their performance in sports – it's happening. However I think they should have to reveal it because it is not fair to others that rely on their natural strength and power.

## POLL 7

Would you like to be the leader of your country one day? Yes or no?

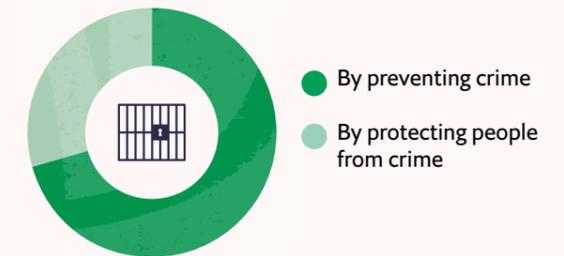


**unbiased\_groundhog**  
Kali Gandaki Academy, Nepal

I would love to be the leader of my country one day and be the best role-model for everyone. I would work towards meeting the needs of the citizens. As I have seen many poor people in my country, I would provide them with important things like education, a place to live and food. I would promote equality and justice for every citizen. I would make decisions that benefit the well-being and progress of my nation.

## POLL 8

What's the best way for governments to keep people safe?



**marvellous\_hedgehog**  
The Mayflower Centre, Romania

I think that opening more prisons and hiring more police officers isn't going to work that well for preventing crime – you don't usually open more prisons expecting them to be empty. I believe that in order to reduce crime, more educational programmes and social support should exist. Many people steal because they are poor and they need food and money. Many people have felt abandoned by the government, so they decided to take matters into their own hands.

# Topical Talk Festival 2024 experts



Hearing from experts helps students to develop well-informed opinions about the news. Take a look at the people who supported students this year.



## Phyllida Swift

Phyllida is an appearance activist reshaping the negative narrative surrounding scars in the public eye. She is a TEDX and United Nations speaker and has featured in Forbes and several other channels.



## Zanny Minton Beddoes

Zanny joined *The Economist* in 1994 and became the publication's first female Editor-in-chief in 2015. She is the recipient for the 2017 Loeb Award for Breaking News and was named one of the "Most Powerful Women in the World" by Forbes.



## Luba Kassova

Luba is an award-winning evidence-based storyteller, journalist and TEDx speaker. She is dedicated to speaking up for those who are silent or silenced and her writing has been quoted or published in over 300 news outlets in more than 75 countries.



## Selam Gebrekidan

Selam is an investigative reporter for the *New York Times*. She has reported on the British criminal justice system, the centuries-long trial of Haitian debt, corruption in South Africa and the misuse of money.



## Catalina Ruiz-Navarro

Catalina is a Colombian-Caribbean feminist activist and journalist living in Mexico City. She is the Editor-in-Chief of *Volcánia*, the co-creator of Amazona TV and is a weekly columnist for *El Espectador* and *El Heraldo* in Colombia, writing on feminist topics.



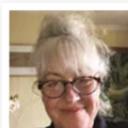
## Josie Verghese

Josie has worked for the BBC for 20 years. As assistant editor for BBC News, she leads the award-winning BBC Young Reporter media literacy project and focuses on sourcing and commissioning stories from underserved and unheard young audiences.



## Daniel Hulme

Daniel is an expert in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and an investor in Emerging Technologies. He's the Chief AI Officer at WPP, co-Founder of Faculty AI and advisor to responsible AI and AI assurance start-ups.



## Caroline Hickman

Caroline is a practising psychotherapist, lecturer at the University of Bath, UK, and international authority on climate psychology. She delivers talks and workshops about the climate crisis and its impact on mental health.



## Richard Nash

Richard is a Senior Global Advisor for Corruption, supporting the integrity of electoral processes and addressing political and administrative corruption issues that undermine democracies.



## Abhinandan Sekhri

Abhinandan is the co-founder and CEO of Newslaundry, a reader-supported media critique, news and current affairs website. He regularly delivers lectures and hosts panel discussions on journalism and the importance of the independence of the media.



## Raman Rai

Raman works in artificial intelligence at PwC. She is on a mission to drive digital inclusion for marginalised communities involving women and children around the world.



## Emma Hogan

Emma Hogan is *The Economist's* Asia Editor. She has appeared regularly on the BBC, Sky News, CNN and CNBC, while she has spoken on BBC Radio 4, BBC World Service and LBC Radio.



## Richard Hughes

Richard works with public-sector organisations and providers of public services to help them make improvements. The majority of his career has been spent in the justice system – and he has worked with police, prosecutors, courts, prisons, probation and youth offending teams to deliver change.



## Jérôme Mangelinckx

Jérôme has a lot of experience in drug policy reform, prison reform, and human rights. Additionally, he played a key role as a Co-Founder of the Research Centre on Drugs and Human Rights (CIDDH), a Peruvian NGO dedicated to protecting the human rights of those most vulnerable to the impacts of the war on drugs in Latin America and the Caribbean.



## John Ferguson

John is the head of Economist Impact's globalisation, trade and finance practice. He works with businesses across different countries and industries to help them to navigate changes they might have to make because of things that are happening in the news. For example, climate change, the development of AI and other political issues.



## Jonathan Birdwell

Jon is the global head of Policy & Insights at Economist Impact. Economist Impact is a thinktank – a team that does research to help people to understand important topics in the news. Jon has just got back from Davos – a town in Switzerland that hosts the World Economic Forum.



## Robert Guest

Robert helps to decide what news stories appear in *The Economist*. His previous roles include foreign editor, US editor, business editor, Washington correspondent, Lexington columnist and Africa correspondent.



## Aron D'Souza

Aron is the president of the Enhanced Games and leads a global movement of athletes who believe in science. He aims to end "exploitative practices" during international sports events.



## Joycelyn Longdon

Joycelyn is an environmental justice activist and academic. As the founder of ClimateInColour, an online education platform for the climate curious, she supports critical conversations about climate change and eco-anxiety.

### reliable lobster

#### IB Arthur School, Ghana

Joycelyn Longdon taught me that by harnessing our climate anxiety, we can become more aware of the issues facing our planet and more motivated to make changes in our own lives. And when more and more people start making these changes, we can create a ripple effect that leads to positive change on a larger scale.

# Awards

## Alastair Burnet Award

The Alastair Burnet Award is named after the former editor of *The Economist* newspaper. This award goes to one outstanding class that has shown an impressive commitment to the Festival and made exceptional contributions throughout the project.

The award was given to **Mary N. Raptou School in Greece.**



Watch the moment they heard they had won!



The school received £1,000 to spend how they choose, as long as it builds on students' achievements in the Festival. For example, they may choose to buy recording equipment to set up a news club or give students a budget to take action on one of the topics that most inspired them during the Festival.



## Standpoint Awards

A Standpoint is a student's final say on one of the Festival 2024 topics. Students could submit Standpoints in written, audio or video format and the winners were chosen by senior editorial staff at *The Economist*. Winners received a goodie-bag of prizes and a trophy.

Take a look at our five winners' work and the judges' feedback by scanning the QR codes!

**poetic\_statement**  
Schiller-Gymnasium, Germany



**jolly\_gazelle**  
St Thomas' Catholic Primary, United Kingdom



**delightful\_lemon**  
Gymnasium am Rotenbühl, Germany



**agreeable\_aspect**  
Shri Natesan Vidyasala Mhss, India



**fabulous\_editor**  
International Public School October 2, Egypt



## Global Discussion Awards

Throughout the Festival students won stars for thoughtful contributions that showcased good speaking, listening, problem-solving and creativity. The students and classes with the most stars won a Global Discussion Award certificate.

Scan the QR code to see the global leaderboards!



# Thank you to our volunteers and supporters

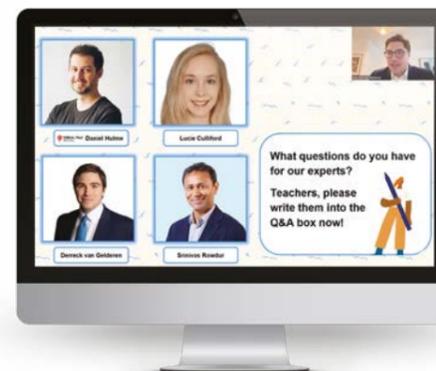
Topical Talk volunteers are professionals who specialise in industries like law, finance and business. They support students throughout the Festival by guiding discussions, linking current affairs to the world of work and providing expertise during live lessons.

- polite\_pomegranate**  
Kassie Braun Memorial Schools, Nigeria

I personally think that the media is good for elections. Social media platforms might sometimes help the spread of fake news about a particular candidate, but overall I think the media is good. Citizens of a country need to be aware of what is going on.
- Marie**  
Secretary @ Clifford Chance

Very good points, polite\_pomegranate. Citizens do need to be informed about what's going on in their country, but what problems can it cause if they see lies and fake news online or in the media before they vote?
- polite\_pomegranate**  
Kassie Braun Memorial Schools, Nigeria

When citizens see fake news online before the day of an election, they might be discouraged to vote – particularly for candidates whom they heard something bad about. Another problem it might cause is a lack of trust for social media and it might be hard to know what to believe.



Topical Talk Festivals rely on help from funders and supporters. This Festival was made possible by the following organisations.

	British Council
	Clifford Chance
	Eranda Rothschild Foundation
	Garfield Weston Foundation
	KPMG
	The PA Foundation
	Portal Trust
	The Economist Group



