



CDN FUTURES LAB

CULTIVATING RESILIENT COLLEGE CHANGEMAKERS

Programme Brochure 2026-27

If innovation, enhancement and transformation are strategic priorities, how are we building the confidence, capacities and capabilities needed to deliver them?

INTRODUCING FUTURES LAB

A new programme building on CDN's work in insights and innovation.

As we know, Scotland's colleges are navigating unprecedented complexity: AI; workforce challenges; demographic change; financial pressures; quality enhancement; continuous improvement.

As a sector, we don't only know what *has* changed but we can see the impact of it all around us, and we have ideas on what *can* change. The question is whether we are giving people who can make that change happen the full, realised opportunity to do so?

WHAT IS IT?

Futures Lab is a capability-building approach designed to help colleges develop the confidence, creativity and agency needed to thrive in uncertainty.

Using a **Curiosity to Confidence** framework, we aim to support every college, every step of the way to develop staff confidence not just in spotting opportunities and navigating complexities but testing out ideas and turning their insights into action.

This is *not* another project. It's not another innovation initiative or process.

It's about people: cultivating the capacities, confidences and capabilities in people that sit at the heart of sector developments now and in the future. Capabilities like curiosity, reflection, collaboration, experimentation, learning and continuous improvement.

It will also support colleges to engage with the TQEF, helping to ensure that quality enhancement is not simply something people participate in, but something they actively shape and continuously improve.

Sustainable transformation doesn't happen through frameworks alone. It happens when people have the confidence to question, explore, experiment and act.

Are you and your team willing to take the leap?

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Futures Lab aims to empower people with the confidence, creativity, capability and capacity to navigate complexity, embrace uncertainty and create meaningful change.

Through our “**Curiosity to Confidence**” framework people move from noticing signals and making sense of emerging patterns, to imagining new possibilities, testing ideas and translating concepts into action.

People are given the space, support, tools and permission to turn small ideas into meaningful interventions; small experiments into mighty impact.

The ultimate goal is the cultivation of agency, trust, autonomy and creative confidence needed to address the sector’s most pressing challenges.

With our support, people develop the confidence to question, explore, experiment and act, becoming curious and confident changemakers capable of shaping positive change within their own contexts.

THE PROGRAMME

We offer workshops for staff across the college, in a format tailored to your needs, from lecturers to board members, support staff to executive teams. We use our facilitation techniques and our **Curiosity to Confidence** framework to take people from passive observers of change into confident changemakers who have the agency, trust, and autonomy to shape a positive future for their institutions.

We believe this is not just a creative process, but a strategic engine for institutional resilience in challenging but exciting times.



THE CURIOSITY TO CONFIDENCE FRAMEWORK

The Framework provides the building blocks and toolkit for our sessions and for ongoing staff engagement.

Stage	Capacity	Capability Developed	Mindset	Strategic Contribution
Curiosity	Openness	Confidence to embrace uncertainty	<i>"What is happening around us?"</i>	Creates the conditions for innovation by acknowledging ambiguity, surfacing diverse perspectives and recognising that complexity is often the starting point for change.
Questioning	Inquiry	Confidence to ask questions	<i>"What are we noticing?"</i>	Surfaces new signals, perspectives and opportunities by encouraging questioning, observation and exploration beyond existing assumptions.
Synthesis	Sensemaking	Confidence to navigate complexity	<i>"What's really going on here?"</i>	Creates coherence from complexity by identifying patterns, themes and areas of potential value across diverse inputs.
Possibility	Imagination	Confidence to imagine alternatives	<i>"What could these ideas be?"</i>	Expands strategic options by reframing challenges and envisioning alternative futures, solutions and opportunities.
Selection	Judgement	Confidence to make informed choices	<i>"Which should we pursue?"</i>	Focuses energy and resources by identifying the most promising opportunities, balancing ambition with feasibility and determining where experimentation can create the greatest value.
Experiment	Creativity	Confidence to try something new	<i>"Let's find out."</i>	Reduces uncertainty through action by testing ideas in low-risk ways and generating evidence for what might work.
Prototype	Agency	Confidence to take action	<i>"What does this look like in practice?"</i>	Turns ideas into tangible interventions by making concepts visible, actionable and open to feedback and refinement, making use of the new technologies available in our rapidly changing environment.
Discovery	Learning	Confidence to learn and adapt	<i>"What have we uncovered?"</i>	Generates new knowledge and insight by uncovering what has been learned, what has changed and what new questions now emerge.
Reflection	Critical reflection	Confidence to adapt and evolve	<i>"Looking back and forward..."</i>	Consolidates learning and informs future action by helping people make meaning from experience, celebrate progress and identify opportunities for continued growth and innovation.

THE WORKSHOPS

How you roll out Futures Lab sessions depends on the demands of your college timetable strategic priorities. We will work with you to plan the right approach, but the following gives you a basic outline of the core workshops available. We can deliver the basic workshops free of charge as part of the core CDN offer, while for more bespoke support we can discuss costs on a case by case basis.

➤ WHOLE-COLLEGE CHANGE CHALLENGE

“We are experiencing change fatigue.”

Future Lab Focus Curiosity to Confidence: From Uncertainty to Action

Session Summary This signature Futures Lab experience helps participants make sense of complexity, identify opportunities, generate ideas and take practical action. Rather than seeing uncertainty as a barrier, participants learn to use it as the starting point for exploration, experimentation and innovation.

Builds:

Confidence

- Acting despite uncertainty
- Testing ideas safely

Capabilities

- Futures thinking
- Creativity
- Collaboration
- Sensemaking

Capacity

- Space, permission and support to innovate

➤ COLLEGE BOARD MEMBERS

“How do we ensure the college remains resilient, responsive and sustainable in an increasingly uncertain future?”

Future Lab Focus Futures Thinking, Horizon Scanning and Strategic Sensemaking

Session Summary This session could help board members explore emerging trends, potential disruptions and future opportunities affecting the college sector. Participants could develop the confidence to discuss uncertainty, ask strategic questions about long-term resilience, and consider multiple possible futures when making decisions.

Builds:

Confidence

- Discussing uncertainty and complexity
- Looking beyond current performance measures

Capabilities

- Strategic foresight
- Systems thinking
- Future-focused governance

Capacity

- Space for longer-term strategic conversations

SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAMS

"We have a strategy, but gaining engagement and turning it into action is difficult."

Future Lab Focus Collective Sensemaking and Systems Mapping

Session Summary This session could help leaders bring people into strategic conversations. Participants explore how to create shared understanding of complex challenges, engage stakeholders in problem-solving and build collective ownership of change.

Builds:

Confidence

- Facilitating strategic conversations
- Working collaboratively across boundaries

Capabilities

- Systems thinking
- Strategic storytelling
- Collaborative innovation

Capacity

- Cross-college engagement and alignment

MANAGERS

"My team relies on me for all the answers."

Future Lab Focus Curiosity, Coaching and Team Innovation

Session Summary Managers could explore practical tools for developing more autonomous and proactive teams. The session focuses on asking better questions, fostering ownership, supporting experimentation and creating psychological safety.

Builds:

Confidence

- Encouraging experimentation

Capabilities

- Facilitation
- Reflective practice
- Team development

Capacity

- Greater initiative and ownership within teams

LECTURERS AND PRACTITIONERS

“Change often feels like something that happens to me rather than something I influence.”

Future Lab Focus Creative Confidence and Small Experiments

Session Summary This session could focus on helping participants recognise their own agency and influence. Participants generate ideas, test assumptions and design small experiments that can create meaningful improvements within their own context.

Builds:

Confidence

- Speaking up
- Trying new approaches

Capabilities

- Creativity
- Problem-solving
- Experimentation

Capacity

- Permission and opportunity to contribute

CURRICULUM LEADERS

“How do we ensure our curriculum remains relevant in a rapidly changing world?”

Future Lab Focus Future Trends and Curriculum Innovation

Session Summary Participants could examine emerging trends and future scenarios impacting learners, employers and society. Using creative thinking techniques, they explore opportunities to evolve curriculum design and prepare learners for future challenges and opportunities.

Builds:

Confidence

- Testing new approaches
- Responding proactively to change

Capabilities

- Futures-informed curriculum design
- Opportunity spotting
- Creative problem-solving

Capacity

- Time and space for innovation

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES AND STUDENT SUPPORT TEAMS

“The pace and complexity of change is increasing across our systems, our workforce and the communities we support.”

Future Lab Focus Human-Centred Innovation and Future Scenarios

Session Summary Participants explore emerging learner needs through futures scenarios, systems thinking and human-centred approaches. The session helps teams identify opportunities to evolve services and create more responsive support models.

Builds:

Confidence

- Navigating ambiguity
- Designing new approaches

Capabilities

- Service innovation
- Empathy-led design
- Futures literacy

Capacity

- Flexibility and adaptability

PRINCIPALS

“I can’t personally drive every change initiative across the college.”

Future Lab Focus Building Agency and Distributed Leadership

Session Summary This session could explore how you might create the conditions for innovation, ownership and initiative across an organisation. Participants identify ways to empower others, build trust and develop cultures where staff feel confident shaping change rather than waiting for permission.

Builds:

Confidence

- Trusting others to lead and innovate
- Leading through uncertainty

Capabilities

- Culture-building
- Distributed leadership
- Changemaker development

Capacity

- Shared ownership of strategic priorities

FROM CURIOSITY TO CONFIDENCE: CULTIVATING RESILIENT COLLEGE CHANGEMAKERS

Strategic Rationale: Why Colleges Engage

Investing in Workforce Resilience

Shifting staff from passive observers to confident changemakers with agency and autonomy



De-Risking Innovation Through Action

Low-risk experimentation generates evidence of what works before committing significant capital.

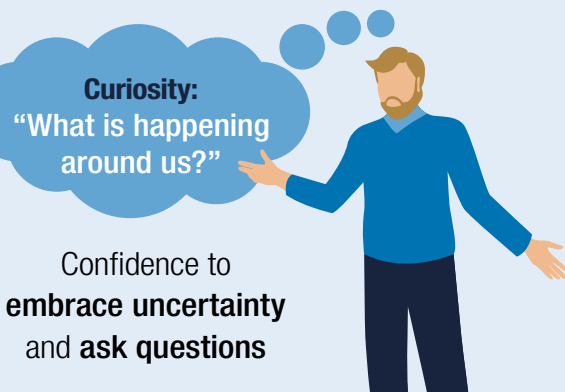


Aligning with Vision 2030

Reframing complexity into opportunities for revenue growth, sustainability and digital transformation.

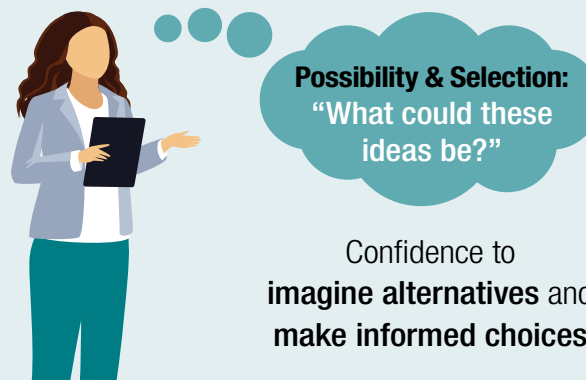
SENSING AND SENSEMAKING

Embracing change, detecting new signals through curiosity, and creating coherence through synthesis.



REFRAMING AND STRATEGIC FOCUS

Using imagination to envision possibilities and selecting the highest-value opportunities for investment



TESTING, ADAPTING, AND EVOLVING

Moving from experiments and prototypes to institutional discovery and reflective practice.



CDN FUTURES IS MORE THAN A PROGRAMME!

The Futures Lab programme is part of CDN's wider support for futures thinking in the college sector.

Alongside the programme, we're:

- Developing our Futures Hub on CDN LearnOnline
- Delivering the FEAST programme for embed small but mighty changes in every day practice
- Publishing CAIRN Journal twice a year with the latest college-based research

DON'T TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT!

To hear examples of how colleges have engaged with our futures work and the impact it's had, you can listen to testimonials from **UHI Moray** and **Glasgow Clyde College** by clicking on these links.



LET'S TALK!

We hope that you'll want us to work with you to help create or accelerate the innovative culture of your college.

Please contact us via
futures@cdn.ac.uk
to discuss your needs.

MORE FROM CDN

Futures Lab works in conjunction with CDN's other programmes to provide an integrated approach to enhancement, including:

- The Quality Culture Development Programme
- The Changing Learner
- Generative AI Series
- CDN Leadership Programme

Please contact us for more information



www.cdn.ac.uk