



There is no doubt that robotics will have a major impact on the economy; but how seems a little hard to read at the moment. The current mood – perhaps exemplified by a [2017 report](#) from the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) and a [January 2018 report](#) by the Centre for Cities – is that automation will deepen economic divisions across the country.

The Centre for Cities report suggests that 1 in 5 existing jobs in British cities are likely to be displaced by 2030 as a result of automation and globalisation – 3.6m jobs in total – with retail occupations, customer service roles and warehouse jobs among those most at threat. Cities in the North and Midlands more exposed to these job losses than wealthier cities in the South.

The RSA's [Age of Automation](#) report published in September 2017 aims to bring a more reasoned voice to the discussion of automation on jobs and the economy. One of the report's main conclusions is that AI and robotics are more likely to alter jobs than to eliminate them. Many tasks, it argues, remain outside the scope of machines to deliver; particularly those demanding manual dexterity and deeper forms of creativity and communication. A more important question is how AI and robotics will alter the substance of the many jobs that remain in place.

[Seven in ten people](#) in the UK are currently in jobs that are likely to need redesign and workforce retraining. New technologies like artificial intelligence and robotics will generate significant productivity gains and economic growth but will also change the nature of work. [The supply of work](#) for people leaving school with limited or no qualifications will decline significantly as jobs requiring limited educational attainment become fully automated and up to one third of work requiring a university degree could be automated by 2030.

This does not necessarily mean that one third of these jobs will disappear – but rather that one third of the constituent activities of most jobs will go. These changes will challenge current educational and workforce training models, as well as business approaches to [skill-building](#). Mid-career job training and worker redeployment will be essential.

Much will come down to the choices we make as a society. However, as the RSA report argues, these choices will be largely irrelevant unless the UK accelerates its take-up of AI and robotics – an area where we are falling behind our main competitors.

Implications for Gwent

It's easy (in early 2018) to believe that unemployment is likely to rise and opportunity is likely to fall – but it's important to take away the key message that it is tasks that are going to be automated rather than jobs. In some cases (where a job is made up of tasks that will all be automated), the jobs will disappear. In other cases (where only some elements of the job can be automated), jobs will change.

Other things will change as well. People will not always have to go to a place of work to do their work. People will not necessarily have to – or choose to – work for one employer. People can generate ideas and work with ideas.

Many people are going to need skills development but perhaps more than that, society needs a more sophisticated narrative and discourse on the nature of work. They need to become used to thinking differently about jobs and skills.

Perhaps Gwent is ideally placed to lead the change of narrative locally.