

Emanations:

Making sure no one is left behind
in the AI revolution

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Topic overview

This case study explores how **Emanations**, a Kent-based AI consultancy, is developing a community-centred model for AI adoption through local Innovation Hub and sandbox initiatives. For AI consultancies, one of the biggest challenges is the business and delivery model: traditional, top-down consulting approaches are less likely to work in a fast-changing AI landscape. Emanations addresses this with a model based on open collaboration, co-creation, and open-source principles, while recognising that AI training requires experiential, hands-on learning. Grounded in responsible AI principles, the approach aims to enable inclusive, democratised, locally rooted AI skills development and experimentation, with Medway and the wider Kent area proposed as an initial pilot location.

An inclusive vision for the future

Artificial intelligence is often presented as a set of powerful tools delivered at scale: cloud-based platforms and off-the-shelf systems designed to work anywhere and for any purpose. Yet for many people and organisations, this model creates a sense of disenfranchisement rather than empowerment. Access to the skills and resources required to make the most of these AI-driven products remains uneven, and concerns around aspects such as data privacy can create additional barriers.

Research from the Institute of Directors, for example, finds that **40% of British businesses cite skills and training gaps**, as well as data privacy and security concerns, as obstacles to AI adoption. Meanwhile, only **14% of UK workers report having advanced AI fluency**, and **1.6 million UK adults are offline**, unable to engage with digital platforms at all.

Emanations was formed in response to this significant skills and access gap. Led by co-founders Shabbir Hussain and Ijlal Hassan, the consultancy works with local organisations and communities in Kent to make AI more accessible. The founders' core belief is that AI capability is a critical skill that cannot be built through theory alone: it must be experienced, and it must be delivered locally.

As Ijlal explains: "AI has transformative potential, but unless it is understood, shaped and accessed by all parts of society, it risks reinforcing inequality and limiting opportunity – exactly the opposite of the inclusive future we envision."

Participating in The Alan Turing Institute's Turing Way Practitioners Hub and running a series of pilot workshops has helped Emanations articulate and refine this approach, reinforcing the importance of openness, collaboration, ethical awareness and responsible experimentation as foundations for any AI innovation ecosystem.

Addressing the AI skills and access gap

Through its consulting and training work, Emanations identified a recurring set of challenges that limit AI adoption at local level. While interest in AI is high, confidence and understanding are often low. Schools, colleges, SMEs and community organisations also frequently lack the resources or infrastructure needed to experiment with AI in practice.

One major barrier to experimentation is data protection. SMEs and public sector organisations are often unwilling or unable to share data in cloud-based environments. At the same time, many existing AI training offerings rely heavily on online courses or vendor-specific platforms. In Emanations' experience, these approaches struggle to sustain engagement – especially for learners who are new to AI or lack ongoing support to apply learnings in their day-to-day activities.

This disconnect reinforced Shabbir and Ijlal's view that AI training cannot simply be delivered as a set of webinars. Without hands-on experimentation and local mentorship, learning remains abstract and completion rates are low, at around 15% for online courses according to Shabbir. These observations shaped Emanations' decision to move beyond traditional consultancy models towards something more embedded and participatory.

Inspired by [**Stanford University's AI4ALL summer camps**](#), Emanations has therefore proposed the creation of an AI Innovation Hub in Medway: a physical space where residents, students, educators, SMEs and public sector organisations can learn about AI, experiment safely, and even develop new tools. Alongside this, Emanations has been running interactive pilot workshops for local people – explored later in this case study – on a variety of AI-focused topics.

A sandbox model for safe local experimentation

The proposed Hub is built around a sandbox model. Rather than relying on cloud-based systems, Emanations has been developing AI tools that can run offline on local infrastructure – initially on standard laptops using open-source technologies. This approach reduces cost and lowers data-sharing risks.

Shabbir says: “AI should not replace people – it should amplify their potential. Our sandbox and Innovation Hub concept enables inclusive, community-driven AI adoption, increasing access to skills, mentorship and practical experimentation across our region. By creating secure, locally accessible AI sandboxes and innovation pathways, we will empower people – from school learners to community organisations and local businesses – to engage with AI ethically and confidently, opening opportunities for innovation, skills development, and equitable participation.”

The ambition is to scale this idea into a wider testbed with greater compute capacity, enabling more advanced experimentation while retaining local oversight and governance. Ijlal says: “Plausible examples could include, for instance, a local construction firm that prototypes an AI tool to review past projects and estimate timelines and costs for new bids, saving time and improving confidence when tendering for work. Or it could be a Kent care provider piloting an AI-assisted rota and capacity planning tool, using existing staffing data to better match shifts to demand. The potential is endless.”


Importantly, the Hub is not designed as a closed-off product or as a consultancy offering. Instead, Emanations envisions it as a shared ecosystem, where activities happen alongside and with the input of the community, rather than being delivered top-down.

Testing the concept with pilot workshops

While the Innovation Hub itself is still in development, Emanations has been piloting its approach through a programme of locally delivered AI workshops funded via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in partnership with Medway Council.

Emanations committed to delivering ten workshops, targeting a total audience of 300 participants. At the time of writing, the team has delivered five workshops and reached approximately 280 people, with strong feedback from community host venues including local secondary schools and public libraries. One of those venues, Brompton Academy in Gillingham, said the session was “well-planned ... and challenged our students’ thinking and broadened their possibilities on how to use AI correctly, and in a way that will benefit their academic progress”. Shabbir and Ijlal note that the experiential pilot workshops have increased participants’ confidence in using AI – including its ethical use – and made them more likely to innovate in their own contexts.

The workshops are deliberately tailored rather than standardised: topics have ranged from ‘AI and the future of work’ to the responsible and ethical use of generative AI in education, as well as sessions exploring emotional intelligence and communication in an AI-driven world. In each case, the emphasis has been on gaining a practical understanding of how AI systems work, what they can and cannot do, and what responsible use looks like.



These sessions have also strengthened Emanations' belief that experiential learning is essential. Rather than short presentations, participants are encouraged to engage directly with tools and explore implications around ethics, misinformation, environmental impact and digital inequality. The positive feedback from delivery partners, meanwhile, has helped build confidence within Emanations that the concept can be scaled up, while also informing the design of the proposed Innovation Hub.

A defining feature of Emanations' approach is its emphasis on inclusive access. The Innovation Hub is intended to cater for a wide spectrum of participants – from young people and jobseekers who have little prior knowledge of AI, through to individuals and organisations exploring more advanced applications. Shabbir describes encounters during the pilot workshops with attendees who simply wanted to understand what AI is, alongside discussions about complex use cases such as health data analysis or logistics optimisation. This diversity of needs has shaped the team's vision for a Hub that caters for a range of entry points, reflecting Emanations' ambition to create a model that can simultaneously nurture beginners, create a pipeline of innovative real-world solutions, and boost the local economy.

Drawing on Shabbir's IBM-accredited expertise in AI governance, Emanations also plans to implement clear ethical guidelines and strong data protection mechanisms as part of the Hub's operation. While these policies are still being developed, the intention is that participants will retain control over their data, with offline or partitioned environments reducing the risk of unintended data sharing.

Implementing learnings from The Turing Way Practitioners Hub

Participation in the Turing Way Practitioners Hub has reinforced this emphasis on ethics and governance, as well as mirroring Emanations' own ethos of open collaboration and community-building. As Ijlal notes, discussions with peer organisations around subjects such as stakeholder management and intellectual property have helped clarify what should be built into the Innovation Hub from the outset.

Beyond thematic alignment, the structure of the Practitioners Hub itself has influenced how Emanations is thinking about delivery. The combination of regular online interaction with periodic in-person engagement has provided a reference point for designing a Hub that respects participants' availability constraints and personal circumstances while allowing for the type of deep, face-to-face interaction that many people value.

Reflecting on this, Shabbir explains that the Practitioners Hub has offered reassurance that Emanations' proposed direction is sound, while also providing concrete ideas about how to balance flexibility and structure when working across diverse stakeholder groups.

Challenges: Timing, funding and mindset

Amid its growing momentum, Emanations nonetheless faces several challenges. One is timing: Shabbir describes the team as being "ahead of its time" in proposing local AI Hubs before national policy had begun to move in a similar direction. Early conversations with Medway Council demonstrated interest, but also caution – particularly given Emanations' status as a relatively new company at the time of the initial discussions.

Another constraint is funding: while the current workshop programme is supported through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, establishing a fully operational Innovation Hub will require additional investment. Emanations is preparing to apply for further funding in the next cycle, while also exploring complementary sources of support.

To ensure its ambitious plans are successful, Emanations must also work to change mindsets around AI. Across schools, colleges, SMEs and public sector organisations, AI is still widely perceived as complex, risky or inaccessible. Shabbir notes that lack of information and confidence remain among the biggest barriers to adoption, and that sustained engagement is required to shift perceptions.

Next steps: Making a case for the Innovation Hub model

Looking ahead, Emanations' immediate priority is to complete the current Medway workshop programme and use the evidence gathered to strengthen the case for a local Innovation Hub. The intention is to position Medway as a pilot location, offering a practical demonstration of how community-based AI sandboxes can support skills development and responsible adoption.

In the longer term, the Emanations team sees this model as replicable beyond Medway and Kent. While the operational details will evolve, the underlying principles of local delivery, experiential learning, open collaboration and embedded ethics are intended to remain constant. The Innovation Hub, says Ijlal, will enable Emanations to develop “world-class experiential training by allowing learners to work on real projects, experiment with cutting-edge AI tools, and engage in collaborative problem-solving in a safe, guided environment”. The model could be used to scale training, workflows and best practices across schools, colleges and other organisations in the UK – and potentially even internationally.

Crucially, says the Emanations team, the Innovation Hub approach now aligns closely with the UK government's developing national AI policies and priorities, in areas such as sandbox-based experimentation (such as the proposed AI Growth Lab), inclusive skill-building, workforce transformation, and reduction of digital inequalities.

Reflections on *The Turing Way* Practitioners Hub

“Our experience with The Turing Way Practitioners Hub really captured the spirit of what we are trying to do. The focus on open collaboration, ethics and shared learning aligns closely with our vision for a community-led AI Innovation Hub. The programme has helped us think more clearly about how to design something that is not just a technical platform, but a space where people can learn, collaborate and build responsibly together.”

Shabbir Hussain,
Founder and CEO of Emanations



Key takeaways

- AI capability is most effectively built through locally delivered, experiential learning – not through theory alone.
- Without accessible, local learning opportunities, there is a risk that many people and organisations will be left behind as AI adoption accelerates.
- Partnerships with councils, educators and communities are critical to sustainable adoption.
- Safe sandbox environments can lower barriers to experimentation with AI around data protection and cost.
- Community-led AI Innovation Hubs offer a way to bridge national policy ambitions with local impact.
- Responsible AI principles are strongest when embedded from the outset.

Contributors and acknowledgements

This case study is published under *The Turing Way Practitioners Hub* 2025–26 Cohort – case study series. The Practitioners Hub is *The Turing Way* project that works with experts from partnering organisations to promote data science best practices. In 2025, The Turing Way team welcomed **Ijlal Hassan, Shabbir Hussain, and Sarah Hassan from Emanations Ltd**, as Experts-in-Residence to discuss and share their implementation approaches to data science and AI, as well as build additional skills around best practices in responsible, ethical, and collaborative working. We thank them for leading the development of this case study.

The Turing Way Practitioner’s Hub was supported by Innovate UK BridgeAI from 2023–2026. BridgeAI empowers UK businesses in high-growth sectors, driving productivity and economic growth through the adoption of Artificial Intelligence. The programme bridges the gap between developers and end-users, fostering user-driven AI technologies.

With a focus on ethics, transparency, and data privacy, BridgeAI aims to build trust and confidence in the development of AI solutions. Strengthening AI leadership, supporting workforces, and promoting responsible innovation, BridgeAI shapes a collaborative and AI-enabled future.

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The Turing Way Practitioners Hub’s 2025–26 Cohort was co-delivered by **Arielle Bennett**, Senior Researcher – Open Source Practices and **Dr Ann Borda**, Senior Research Community Manager. **Stuart Gillespie** is the technical writer for this case study, and others in the series. **Léllé Demertzi** is the Research Project Manager. **Dominica D’Arcangelo** is the Case Study Liaison for this case study.

The Turing Way Practitioners Hub, designed and launched in 2023 by Dr Malvika Sharan, aims to accelerate the adoption of best practices. Through a six-month cohort-based program, the Hub facilitates knowledge sharing, skill exchange, case study co-creation, and the adoption of open science practices. It also fosters a network of ‘Experts in Residence’ across partnering organisations.

For any comments, questions or collaboration with *The Turing Way*, please email: theturingway@gmail.com

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