ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS MALBON

THE FUTURE OF WORK

Digital technologies are upending the workforce. The right research can tell us how.

Robots did not write this sentence, or any other part of *Nature*. But that could change. Dramatic shifts in labour are reshaping society, the environment and the political landscape. Consider this disorienting estimate from the World Economic Forum: 65% of children entering primary schools now will grow up to work in jobs that do not yet exist. This week, *Nature* asks: what light is research shedding on the future of work, and how will the changes affect scientists' working world?

On page 316, a News Feature explores which jobs are most at risk of being replaced by artificial intelligence and machine learning; whether a decentralized 'gig economy' will democratize work; and what programmes will best prepare workers. "There's a huge need, a huge opportunity, to study the changes," says economist Erik Brynjolfsson. And the scientific workforce is feeling these shifts. On page 419, a Careers Feature reports on people doing research outside the traditional career path. "I love the freedom," says Cecile Menard, an independent land-surface modeller in Edinburgh, UK, "but for other people, it may be too stressful."

Important lessons can be drawn from the past. On page 321, economic historian Robert Allen synthesizes three centuries of data to see when and where the relationship between wages and productivity was most like today's — and finds that some regions are in uncharted waters. These changes call for new socio-economic models and a revolution in education, concludes historian Yuval Noah Harari on page 324. And economist Ian Goldin argues on page 327 that our era has more parallels with the Renaissance than the Industrial Revolution. This time, he urges, "knowledge and enquiry must find a way to conquer prejudice and ignorance". ∎

THE FUTURE OF WORK
A *Nature* special issue