

Cato Rolea

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Summary

A senior leader at the intersection of international education and digital transformation. Combines 10+ years of deep sector expertise in UK Higher Education, building and managing 200+ partnerships across the Americas, Africa, and the Middle East, with a proven track record of leading complex technology initiatives. Spearheaded the end-to-end digitization of student mobility for 40,000+ students and, in a subsequent role, led AI and data strategy for critical Home Office and DfE contracts. A recognised innovator in applying AI to solve challenges in recruitment, student experience, and operational efficiency.

Core Skills

- **Leadership and Delivery:** Portfolio management, benefits realization, target operating model, service ownership, assurance and risk, vendor and commercial management, senior stakeholder engagement.
 - **Methods and Standards:** DDaT, GDS Service Standard, OKRs and KPIs, information security, ISO 27001, and AI management aligned to ISO 42001.
 - **AI and Data:** Microsoft 365 Copilot, Power Platform (Automate, Apps, BI), SharePoint, RPA, data governance, LLM apps (including retrieval and agents), Azure and Azure OpenAI, Google Cloud, Vertex AI and Gemini, Jira or Azure DevOps, ServiceNow.
 - **Internationalisation in Higher Education:** Recruitment, Partnerships, Education Abroad, TNE
 - **Languages:** Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian, Japanese.
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Project Innovation and Research

Portfolio and selected products can be seen here: <https://catorolea.com/latest-projects/>

- **AI for Learning and Policy:** Developed app experiments that convert papers into interactive AI web apps for learning and policy exploration.
- **AI Job Board:** Created an AI job board with aggregation, salary analytics, and matching.
- **Agentic AI Pilots:** Delivered Agentic AI pilots in operations and research and introduced an AI-assisted customer chat that reduced routine demand for over 7000 enquiries/day.
- **Sector Chatbots:** Built sector chatbots, voice agents, and a no-code agent builder deployable on web and social media including whatsapp messaging channels.
- **Rapid Prototyping:** Used Gemini (code + VEO 3 video), ChatGPT (code), Elevenlabs (Voice), Midjourney (Image + Video), Suno (music), and Runway ML (advanced video generation) for rapid prototyping.

Relevant Work Experience

Assistant Director for Digital Transformation | ECCTIS | Cheltenham, UK

February 2024 - Present

- Rebuilt the delivery model in 15 months: stood up Agile, Data Operations and Product Management from zero, with clear ownership, simple planning rituals and measurable outcomes aligned to Cyber Essentials Plus and ISO 27001.
- Led the audit, strategy, and roadmap for Digital and AI change aligned with contract delivery and compliance.
- Authored and implemented a responsible use policy for generative AI; created a strategic steering group and a practitioner community.
- Delivered Agentic AI pilots in operations and research and introduced an AI-assisted customer chat that reduced routine demand.
- Standardized project tracking and reporting by building SharePoint, Power Automate, and Power BI solutions to eliminate manual effort and improve accuracy.
- Designed and ran classroom sessions and launched LinkedIn Learning pathways, establishing a champions group to sustain adoption.

- Co-authored the AI and digital case for two successful multi-million-pound government tenders with the Home Office and the Department for Education, coordinating inputs across IT, Operations and Commercial.

Founder and Trustee | AI For Global Education

February 2025 - Present

- Leading a UK-registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) dedicated to advancing AI literacy and ethical AI adoption in global education.
- Collaborating with academics at Nottingham Trent University (UK), CASIO (UAE), and Harvard Business School (USA) to drive AI-focused educational research and policy advocacy.
- Developing and implementing AI literacy programs for students, educators, and policymakers, promoting digital inclusion and responsible AI use.
- Conducting research on AI's impact on learning outcomes, educational accessibility, and ethical AI governance.
- Advocating for AI policy frameworks that promote fairness, transparency, and accountability in education technology.

Founder and Product Director | UniGlobal Technologies

November 2022 - Present

- Driving the product development of the only AI-powered Career Toolkit tailored for the International Education field, designed to empower both students and professionals.
- Led initiatives to prototype and test emerging technologies, including AI-powered learning management systems, intelligent voice assistants, and tools supporting students and professionals.

Acting Associate Director | Nottingham Trent University

September 2023 - February 2024

- Responsible for implementing the University's internationalization strategy, "Connecting Globally," within the School of Animal, Rural and Environmental Sciences.
- Consulted and provided university-wide strategic direction on the implementation of AI in administrative, teaching, and learning workflows.
- Built operating rhythm for international activity in the School, including quarterly portfolio reviews and data-led progress reporting.

Senior Global Partnerships Manager | Nottingham Trent University | Nottingham

March 2022 - February 2024

- Developed and successfully managed a portfolio of over 200 partnerships across the Americas, Africa and the Middle East including MoU, MoA, Progression, Articulation, Exchange and Short Mobilities Agreements and Programmes.
- Commended in year one by the British Ambassador to Mexico, the UK Secretary of State for Education, the Ministry of Education in Peru and the Ministry of Culture in Cuba for partnership outcomes and sector impact.
- Worked with the Department for Business and Trade, the British Council and the FCDO on joint programmes and government-to-government engagement.
- Delivered vice-chancellor and ministerial-level visits and events across Africa and the Americas that generated new partnerships and raised NTU's profile.
- Managed budgets up to £200k and prepared an £800k British Council bid.

Mobility Online Project Coordinator/ Product Manager | Nottingham Trent University | Nottingham

January 2018 - March 2022

- Steered the end-to-end implementation of the Mobility Online platform across all nine academic departments, a pivotal tool to streamline scholarship applications and digitalize the global exchange process.
 - Convened and presided over the Mobility Online UK Forum, fostering an interactive platform for representatives from 11 UK universities to share knowledge and best practices.
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Guest Speaker and Events

- **Keynote Speaker:** Smart Technology and Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education | Arab Network For Quality Assurance and Accreditation (ANQAHE)
- **Guest Speaker:** Demystifying AI for Educators | University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Muscat
- **Facilitator:** A.I. in HE - From Foundations to Functionality | Nottingham Trent University, UK
- **Guest Speaker:** What's next for AI in EdTech? | Tank & The Business Desk
- **Guest Speaker:** AI in Quality Assurance in Higher Education | CHEA - Council for Higher Education Accreditation, United States of America
- **Guest Speaker:** *Introducing a framework for integrating generative AI into career and employability practices*, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory (AGCAS)
- **Guest Speaker: AI Abroad:** *Enhancing and complementing student and partner experience with Generative AI*, BUTEX
- **Guest Speaker:** *Neo-recruitment: The rise of AI agents in international education*, Enrolycon
- **Guest Speaker:** *GO-create international student services with AI: From theory to practice*, European Association for International Education (EAIE) in collaboration with Nuffic/National Agency Erasmus in Netherlands

Governmental work

- [Framework for developing joint Peru-UK university degrees](#) in collaboration with Advance HE, British Council, and the Ministry of Education in Peru
- Led an NTU TNE project in Mexico working directly with the British Embassy in Mexico, including [Jon Benjamin](#), the former British Ambassador to Mexico, and [Carol Van der Walt](#), current British Ambassador to the Dominican Republic
- Established an East Africa PHD hub in collaboration with the [Ministry of Education in Kenya](#), which has been crucial to fostering successful student and research projects in the country.

Publications

- **A.I. and the Changing Face of Higher Education** | QS - Quacquarelli Symonds
 - <https://www.qs.com/portfolio-items/qs-insights-magazine-july-2023/>
 - **Useful applications of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education** | Times Higher Education
 - <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/useful-applications-ai-higher-education-which-no-specialist-tech-knowledge-needed>
 - **500 Ways to engage with Generative AI in International Higher Education: A Practitioner's Guide** | Co-authored with Professor Vangelis Tsiligiris
 - <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1068409207>
 - **Bridging the Gap: Revising UNESCO's AI Competency Framework for University Educators** | Nottingham Institute of Education
 - https://www.ntu.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/2631344/Issue-3,-March-2025.pdf
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Education

MSCI International Relations and Global Issues

- University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK | Distinction
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Certifications

- **Product Management, Road Mapping and Strategy** | AHA!
- **Generative AI Development** | Microsoft
- **Business Analysis Foundation** | Project Management Institute
- **Leadership and Management** | The Institute of Leadership and Management
- **Agile Programme Management** | QA | **Agile Project Management** | Project Management Institute