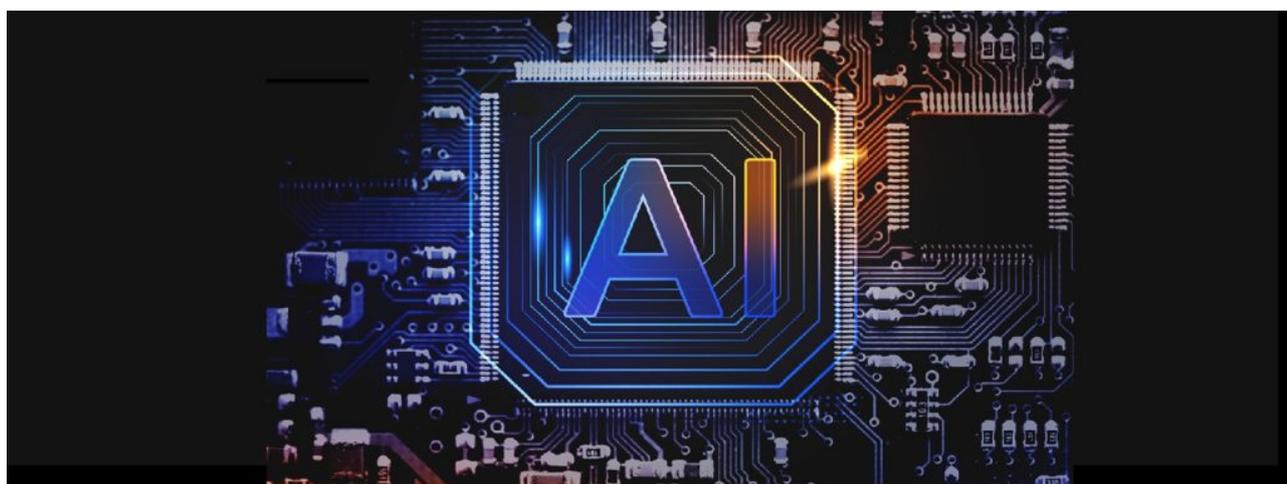


# PM launches national skills drive to unlock opportunities for young people in tech

9 June 2025



**Pupils across the country will be given the skills and tools needed to get the AI-powered jobs of the future thanks to a new skills programme launched by the Prime Minister today (Monday 9 June).**

At the heart of the skills drive, and as part of the upcoming modern Industrial Strategy, is a new £187 million government “TechFirst” programme to bring digital skills and AI learning into classrooms and communities and train up people of all ages and backgrounds for the tech careers of the future.

Today’s announcements show this government is laser focused on investing in the futures of young people across Britain, knocking down barriers to opportunities, regardless of where they grow up.

It comes as research commissioned by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) shows that by 2035, around 10 million workers will be in roles where AI will be part of their role or responsibilities in some form, with a further 3.9 million in roles directly in AI.

The flagship strand of this programme “TechYouth” - backed by £24 million of government funding - will give 1 million students over three years across every secondary school in the UK the chance to learn about technology and gain access

to new skills training and career opportunities.

There will also be an online platform to inspire and educate students about the potential of computing and tech careers - building on CyberFirst's Explorers which has access to most secondary schools in the UK with 100,000 students registered already. This will bring together learning tools and training opportunities in a streamlined accessible space.

In each of the UK's regions and nations, a local delivery partner will be selected by DSIT to run the programme and deliver activities to schools and colleges in local areas.

The AI sector alone is valued at £72.3 billion and is projected to exceed £800 billion by 2035. It is growing 30 times faster than the rest of the economy, employing over 64,000 people across more than 3,700 companies.

But despite these strengths, access to AI skills in the UK remains one of the biggest barriers to growth—especially for startups, scaleups, and regions outside London. According to a TechNation report released today, one in three UK tech founders say the availability of top talent is their biggest barrier to growth.

That's why the government is backing young people and investing in skills as an engine of economic growth—putting more money in people's pockets and breaking down barriers to opportunity as part of the Plan for Change.

This package underpins the upcoming industrial strategy and also delivers on the government's manifesto commitment to create higher-quality training and employment paths by empowering local communities to develop the skills people need and putting employers at the heart of our skills system.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said:

“We are putting the power of AI into the hands of the next generation - so they can shape the future, not be shaped by it.

“This training programme will unlock opportunity in every classroom - and lays the foundations for a new era of growth.

“Too many children from working families like the one I grew up in are written off. I am determined to end that.

“This programme is the Plan for Change in action – breaking down barriers, driving innovation, and giving every young person the chance of a good, well paid job and a bright future.”

TechFirst will also support over 4,000 graduates, researchers, and innovators through three additional strands:

- TechGrad (£96.8m) – will support 1,000 exceptional domestic students a year with undergraduate scholarships in areas like AI, cyber security, and computer science. This will also go towards 100 Research MSc places in key tech sectors, and 100 elite AI scholarships. Applicants will be able to apply to the scheme online and those successful will have their bursaries paid from a central fund.
- TechExpert (£48.4m) – will give up to £10,000 in additional funding to 500 domestic PhD students conducting research in tech with the aim of accelerating cutting-edge innovation, strengthen the UK’s research pipeline in strategic technology sectors, and ensure that emerging talent is supported to contribute to national tech leadership.
- TechLocal (£18m) – will offer seed funding to help regional innovators and small businesses develop new tech products and adopt AI. A panel made up of local tech businesses will be established in each region to decide which applications have merit, with the necessary checks then done centrally by Innovate UK.

Major industry players including IBM, BAE Systems, QinetiQ, BT, Microsoft and the Careers & Enterprise Company – the national body for careers education – have backed the initiative.

TechFirst builds on the success of the CyberFirst programme, which has already helped hundreds of thousands of young people gain cyber security skills.

Science, Innovation and Technology Secretary Peter Kyle said:

“We are getting Brits ready for jobs of the future by helping millions across the country gain vital digital skills in AI and beyond.

“Embedding these skills into our education system and local communities will help people of all backgrounds and ensure tech talent flourishes in every corner of our nation.

“These partnerships with industry will translate skills into real jobs and economic growth, putting more money in people’s pockets and breaking down barriers to opportunity. This is our Plan for Change in action - investing in the skills that will power our economy and deliver prosperity for working people across the country.”

Jensen Huang, Founder and CEO, NVIDIA said:

“AI developers power the next industrial revolution. AI talent, skills and research are crucial ingredients in the UK’s mission to become an AI maker, not an AI taker. We’re delighted to partner with the government to train the next generation of AI developers, capable of finding new cures for diseases, discovering new materials and building world-class AI companies.”

Google EMEA President, Debbie Weinstein, said:

“Our AI Works report revealed that £400bn worth of economic growth awaits the UK, but half of this depends on workers embracing and using AI. That’s precisely why we’re thrilled to join this crucial initiative, essential for supercharging AI upskilling, unlocking AI-powered growth and cementing the UK’s position as an AI leader.”

Carolyn Dawson OBE, CEO of Founders Forum Group and Tech Nation, said:

“AI will transform every industry - but we can only unlock its full potential if we ensure the UK’s workforce has the skills to keep pace. This national upskilling programme is an ambitious and necessary step - not just to boost productivity, but to make sure we’re equipping the UK to participate in and benefit from the AI-driven economy. At Tech Nation, we’ve long championed the power of both homegrown talent and global expertise - whether that’s through supporting founders to scale or endorsing the UK’s Global Talent Visa. We’re proud to support initiatives that help the UK remain globally competitive”.

Leon Butler Chief Executive of IBM UK and Ireland said:

“Boosting technology skills across the economy is key to the UK maintaining its leadership position in AI. Having helped millions globally to develop new AI skills with our IBM SkillsBuild programme, we are delighted to partner with the UK government to help equip workers with vital tech skills. This complements our

long-standing commitment to programmes such as CyberFirst, which we are excited to see expand. We look forward to continuing our support as the programme grows.”

Darren Hardman CEO of Microsoft UK said:

“Artificial Intelligence represents a generational opportunity, already transforming the way we live, work, and innovate. For the UK to remain globally competitive, we have to equip people with the skills they need to be successful in an AI-powered economy. Microsoft is proud to be playing its part, by training one million people with AI skills this year, and by supporting millions more through this new initiative.”

Intuit EMEA General Manager Leigh Thomas said:

“AI is a growth enabler for small and medium-sized businesses, levelling the playing field, by giving them the opportunity to access the sort of technology solutions that larger businesses have access to. The announcement today is a great step forward in improving their bottom line, and we look forward to collaborating with Government and other private sector partners to accelerate knowledge, understanding and adoption of AI tools by the businesses that need it most.”

Alongside TechFirst, the Prime Minister also announced a new government-industry partnership to train 7.5 million UK workers in essential skills to use AI by 2030—equivalent to around 20% of the UK workforce.

Leading technology companies including Google, Microsoft, IBM, SAS, Accenture, Sage, Barclays, BT, Amazon, Intuit, and Salesforce have signed up to the partnership. They have committed to making high-quality training materials widely available to workers in businesses - large and small - up and down the country free of charge, over the next five years.

Training will focus on enabling workers to use and interact with AI systems such as chatbots and large language models to boost productivity across a wide range of roles. Sector-specific training will also be developed to meet the needs of industries from healthcare to finance to manufacturing.

These companies will meet the Technology Secretary Peter Kyle this week to

discuss how to meet the 2030 target, agree a terms of reference and will convene regularly to track progress.

Following his speech, the Prime Minister will join NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang for an “in conversation” event to discuss the challenges of closing the AI skills gap and the potential of AI to transform public services and drive economic growth.

This comes as the government and NVIDIA today signed two Memorandums of Understanding, supporting the development of a nationwide AI talent pipeline and accelerating critical university-led research into the role of AI in advanced connectivity technologies. In addition, NVIDIA will expand its AI lab in Bristol to other areas of the UK to accelerate UK research in AI.

Today’s package follows the Department for Education’s [announcement of the board members for Skills England](#), a new body which will work with employers and local leaders to shape training policy and delivery. Skills England will identify and tackle skills shortage in key Industrial Strategy sectors such as digital, creating more opportunities for young people.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister hosted a private reception at Chequers with leading tech CEOs and investors—including Eric Schmidt (Former CEO & Chairman of Google), Angie Ma (Faculty AI) Demis Hassabis (Google DeepMind), and Alex Wang (Scale) —to reaffirm the UK’s position as a global tech leader.

Tomorrow, he will welcome business leaders and entrepreneurs to Downing Street, including 16-year-old AI entrepreneur Toby Brown, who recently secured \$1 million in Silicon Valley funding for his startup, Beem.