£23 million to boost skills and diversity in AI jobs

- Funding for conversion courses will help underrepresented groups get tech jobs even if they have no previous experience in the field

- Companies encouraged to contribute to funding to boost skills pipeline for future workforce

Up to £23 million in government funding will create more AI and data conversion courses, helping young people from underrepresented groups including women, black people and people with disabilities join the UK's world-leading Artificial Intelligence (AI) industry.

Up to two thousand scholarships for masters AI conversion courses, which enable graduates to do further study courses in the field even if their undergraduate course is not directly related, will create a new generation of experts in data science and AI.

The UK has a long and exceptional history in AI, from codebreaker Alan Turing's early work through to London-based powerhouse DeepMind's pioneering research which will enable quicker and more advanced drug discovery.

AI underpins the apps which help us navigate around cities, stop online banking fraud and communicate with smart speakers.

The UK is ranked third in the world for private venture capital investment into AI companies (2019 investment into the UK reached almost £2.5 billion) and is home to a third of Europe's total AI companies.

The new scholarships will ensure more people can build successful careers in AI companies, create and develop new and bigger businesses, and will improve the diversity of this growing and innovative tech sector.

DCMS Minister for Tech and the Digital Economy Chris Philp said:

> The UK is already a world leader in AI. Today we're investing millions to ensure people from all parts of society can access the opportunities and benefits AI is creating in this country.
>
> We are doubling the number of AI scholarships previously available to underrepresented groups to build a diverse and inclusive workforce fit for the future of tech.

UK AI Council Chair Tabitha Goldstaub said:

Ensuring there is a diverse talent pool furthering AI developments is vital for the success of the technology and society.

These masters conversion courses welcoming people from non-STEM degrees attract a less homogeneous group which means the UK AI ecosystem benefits from graduates with different backgrounds, perspectives, and life experiences.

Obum Ekeke OBE, Head of Education Partnerships, DeepMind said:

The next generation of AI researchers must be representative of the world around us if AI is to benefit the whole of society.

These scholarships will help to build a stronger and more diverse AI community in the UK, and bring a wider range of experiences – as well as valuable multidisciplinary expertise – to the field.

The government is encouraging companies to play their part in creating a future pipeline of AI talent by match-funding the AI scholarships for the conversion courses. Industry support would get more people into the AI and data science job market quicker and strengthen their businesses.

An independent organisation, to be announced later this year, will be responsible for encouraging industry participation and investment into the AI Scholarships scheme.

First round of AI courses a roaring success

The first stage of the AI conversion courses in 2019, delivered by the Office for Students, supported 28 universities in England to set up and provide degree conversion courses in AI and data science.

The [£13.5 million AI Scholarship programme](#) enabled a diverse group of students to study AI and data science, as 76 per cent of scholarship students were women, whereas only 30 per cent of masters students on traditional computing courses are women. Nearly half, 45 per cent, of the scholarship students were black and 24 per cent had disabilities, boosting representation on the AI and data science courses.

The first phase of the AI courses also attracted tech talent outside of London and the South East, with 70 per cent of the total students and 84 per cent of the scholarship students based outside of these areas in England, levelling up AI and data science skills.

The programme is part of the government's [National AI Strategy](#), which commits to investing in and planning for the AI ecosystem over the next ten years, to boost the UK's leadership as a global science and AI superpower.

The new scholarships follow on from the [Industrial Funded AI Masters programme](#) supported by the government since 2019 to increase AI skills across

the UK with industry investment.

John Blake, Director for Fair and Access and Participation at the Office for Students said:

> The postgraduate conversion courses offer a valuable opportunity for students from all backgrounds to contribute fresh perspectives and innovation to data science and artificial intelligence. In turn, these courses provide an important opportunity for organisations of all sizes to address the digital skills gap and support the post-pandemic recovery right across the country.
>
> The enrolment data for the first year of the programme indicates that the courses are contributing to changes in the tech industry towards a more diverse workforce. I look forward to the next phase of the programme and seeing how universities and organisations are collaborating to support access for underrepresented students, and the subsequent successes of students as they continue to develop their learning and experiences in this crucial industry.

ENDS

Notes to editors An open competition will be held later this year for universities in England to bid for the scholarships. The next round of the AI scholarship scheme will start in April 2023 and will be available until 2025.

At the 2021 Conservative party conference in Manchester the Chancellor confirmed the creation of 2,000 AI scholarships, adding to the existing 1,000 AI and data science conversion course scholarships.

Courses are inclusive by design providing students with flexible access to study (e.g. evenings, remote options) and course content suitable for non-STEM graduates

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Office for AI are also looking to make more underrepresented groups eligible for the 2,000 AI scholarships.

A broker organisation will be established by April 2022 to support industry investment into this programme and provide information to industry across AI skills initiatives. If you would like to support the programme please contact AIskills@officeforai.gov.uk.

The Office for Students has developed a series of case studies about the students receiving scholarships, highlighting the benefits this investment has brought.

The National AI Strategy aims to secure broad public trust and support, and through the involvement of the diverse talents and views of society, focuses on three pillars:

- Investing in and planning for the long term needs of the AI ecosystem to continue our leadership as a science and AI superpower;
- Supporting the transition to an AI-enabled economy, capturing the benefits of innovation in the UK, and ensuring AI benefits all sectors and regions;
- Ensuring the UK gets the national and international governance of AI technologies right to encourage innovation, investment, and protect the public and our fundamental values.