[2,500 new places on artificial intelligence and data science conversion courses now open to applicants](#)

- Up to £24 million of funding from government, universities and industry partners will help bolster the introduction of new and diverse talent into digital and tech roles

- 2,500 places will be available, with 1,000 scholarships offered to students from underrepresented backgrounds

- Funding has been awarded to 18 universities who are working with partner providers to deliver courses in 28 universities and colleges across England

Graduates will have the opportunity to [apply](#) for a place on new artificial intelligence (AI) and data science masters courses starting in autumn 2020, Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden announced today (Wednesday 10 June). .

The move will enable 2,500 people to develop new digital skills or retrain to help find new employment in the UK's cutting-edge AI and data science sectors.

The government has joined forces with the Office for Students, universities and industry partners to create a fund of up to £24 million to increase the number of highly-skilled workers in AI and data science roles. The cash will provide places for graduates from a range of backgrounds – both those that have a degree in science, technology, engineering, maths or social sciences and those that have studied other subjects to date. Scholarships will be made available to support applications from diverse backgrounds.

Applicants could include people returning to work after a career break and looking to retrain in a new profession, under-represented groups in the AI and digital workforce. 1000 scholarships will specifically target the female, black and disabled demographics.

Statistics from a Tech Nation and Royal Society report reveal women make up only 19 per cent of the tech workforce and people from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background represent just 4 per cent of the UK tech industry.

Successful students will have flexible access to study and course content so they can fit their studies around their daily lives. Students will undertake

paid work placements to help maximise their employment opportunities at the end of their course which could see them land roles as machine learning engineers, data scientists, research scientists or AI architects.

The announcement is part of the government's commitment to increase R&D investment to 2.4% of GDP by 2027.

Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

> It is vital we increase diversity across our tech sector and give everyone with the aptitude and talent the opportunity to build a successful career.
>
> This will help make sure artificial intelligence developed in the UK reflects the needs and make-up of society as a whole which will also help mitigate the risk of biased technologies being developed.
>
> Through these new AI and data science conversion courses we are working with industry and academia to develop and maintain the best AI workforce in the world.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway said:

> From disease diagnosis to driverless vehicles, demand for a diverse new pipeline of talent in the AI and digital workforce has never been greater.
>
> By working with our leading universities and industry partners, I am delighted that we are providing students from all backgrounds the chance to upskill and help tackle some of the most complex challenges of our time.

Creating a more diverse future workforce will help with the design of new technology that has the potential to help tackle some of the greatest social challenges of our time – from protecting our environment to transforming the way we live and work and also saving lives by detecting signs of diseases earlier.

Chris Millward, director for fair access and participation at the Office for Students, said:

> In recent years we have seen significant and increasing demand for digital skills in a range of fields. From healthcare and biosciences, to industry and transport – harnessing artificial intelligence and data science will be crucial in tackling significant global challenges for years to come.
>
> It is also critical that graduates from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to gain the skills that employers need. With new AI

and data science conversion courses across the country, and scholarships available to students from underrepresented backgrounds, this programme will both help tackle skills gaps and increase choice and opportunities for all students.

AI Skills Champion Dame Wendy Hall quote:

It is imperative that we continue to grow the pathways that supply good AI and Data Science jobs. Introducing new and diverse talent will continue to maintain the UK's position as a global leader in AI and Innovation. These conversion courses and the scholarships attached demonstrate the importance we place on diversity and talent.

Mark Martin MBE, co-founder of UK BlackTech said:

The new AI and data science courses and scholarships will help boost uptake of these technologies across the country and prepare the next generation to tackle some of the world's biggest challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic and social injustices.

It's important we encourage more homegrown talent from different backgrounds to access these opportunities so we can develop better tech tools, services and organisations that truly reflects our nation.

In addition to these new conversion courses, the Government is also supporting industry-funded AI Masters, prestigious Alan Turing Institute AI research fellowships and 16 dedicated Centres at universities across the country to train 1000 extra AI PhDs.

To boost the use of AI in the public sector the World Economic Forum has published new guidelines to help the public sector embrace the technology to help drive efficiencies and prepare for future risks.

The guidance will also help established companies, start-ups and new entrants to the AI sector compete on a level playing field for government contracts and drive adoption of ethical practices by tech companies.