

# Press release: New funds to boost diversity of people working in digital and tech jobs

- £1 million Digital Skills Innovation Fund will help people from underrepresented groups gain the skills they need to work in digital roles.
- An additional £400,000 will help older and disabled people get life-changing digital skills.

People from underrepresented groups with the potential to become tomorrow's tech stars are set to be given new digital skills as part of a push to improve diversity in the digital economy and address local skills challenges. A new £1 million Digital Skills Innovation Fund is now open for bids from Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Combined Authorities for initiatives which specifically aim to help people take up digital roles.

The funding will be used to help women, disabled people, people from minority backgrounds or those living in lower socioeconomic areas to succeed in digital roles such as data analysts, programmers, cyber security specialists, software developers and marketers.

Research reveals 17 per cent of women make up the tech workforce and are underrepresented in the uptake of digital qualifications. Unemployed adults are five per cent more likely to lack the basic digital skills than the national average.

A new £400,000 Digital Inclusion Fund has also been launched to help older and disabled people acquire digital skills. Innovative projects are expected to include the teaching of basic skills such as booking GP appointments online, using apps to communicate with friends and family, and making the most of search engines.

The fund, which opens in September, will also harness the power of tech to get people online and support the Digital Strategy which sets out Government's ambition to create a world-leading digital economy that works for everyone.

Minister for Digital Margot James said:

It is crucial everyone is able to take advantage of digital technology, whether it is to learn how to use the internet or develop the skills to work in a tech role.

If we want to maintain our position as a world-leading digital economy we need to work with industry, local authorities and the voluntary sector to develop solutions so no-one is left behind.

Local Enterprise Partnership Network chair and Digital Skills Partnership board member, Christine Gaskell, said:

As the rate of technological change and innovation continues, 'tech' is becoming increasingly integrated within every sector and industry. We share the aspiration to ensure that more people have the skills and creativity that will enable them to contribute to, and benefit from, new economic opportunities and deliver more inclusive growth.

There are huge opportunities for regions to benefit and Local Enterprise Partnerships have a vital role to play in helping people and organisations develop the skills they need to realise their potential. Any initiative with the aim to make more people tech savvy and to bring more women and young people into the sector to create new start-ups and unearth the next digital superstars has to be welcomed.

As such, we are working with Government through the Digital Skills Partnership to bring together key partners at national and local level to close the digital skills gap that currently exist.

John Fisher, Chief Executive, Citizens Online said:

We know it's becoming increasingly important that everybody in our society has the skills and confidence to be online; yet disabled people are four times more likely to lack essential digital skills than the general population and 28 per cent of those over 60 are offline.

We're delighted that this fund will test new ways of offering support to these marginalised groups, often with complex needs, to enable people to live better lives with the benefits that being online can offer.

These initiatives will complement Government's existing work to boost digital skills provision across the country. This includes £170,000 Government funding to support the Tech Talent Charter which is a commitment to ensure greater diversity in the tech workforce of the UK and implement recruitment and retention policies that will support women in digital and technology roles.

Our Digital Skills Partnership has seen Government, businesses, charities and voluntary organisations joining forces to deliver over 2.5 million free training opportunities in areas such as basic online skills, cybersecurity and coding.

In addition to this, the Government has established two Local Digital Skills Partnership pilots in Lancashire and the Heart of the South West which brings

together businesses, charities, the education sector and public sector organisations to tackle local digital skills challenges to build thriving and inclusive local economies.

## Notes to editors

- Contact the DCMS Press Office on 0207 211 2210.
- The Digital Skills Innovation Fund will open on 27 August and bids need to be received by 28 October 2018. Grants of between £200,000 and £500,000 will be available.
- It also aims to encourage collaborative working between LEPs, local government, voluntary sector, youth organisations, charities, employers and training providers to address local skills challenges and share good practice.
- The guidance document and application template is available on the [Digital Skills Partnership GOV.UK page](#)
- The Digital Inclusion Fund is being managed by Citizens Online and will launch in September 2018. The pilot projects will run up to January 2020.
- [Citizens Online](#) are digital inclusion experts, who have worked in over 50 communities across the UK since 2000. They help organisations make sure the switch to online doesn't exclude people and are passionate about digital inclusion. Their approach is based on detailed evidence and strong, local partnerships. Further information on the fund can be found [here](#)
- [Lloyd's Consumer Digital Index 2018](#) reveals older and disabled people are the slowest to adopt basic digital skills and also have the [lowest internet usage](#).