

# AI apprenticeship to close digital skills gap holding back millions of workers

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**First apprentices starting on AI and automation practitioner apprenticeship. It's open to all employers and supporting drive to upskill millions by 2030.**

- Skills England launches Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation practitioner apprenticeship to help businesses boost productivity and adopt emerging technology safely and responsibly
- Wider AI training now available also includes new apprenticeship unit and short courses made available with tech companies for the AI Skills Boost programme to upskill 10 million people
- AI has the potential to add £400 billion to the economy by 2030. Jobs directly involving AI activities expected to rise from 158,000 in 2024 to 3.9 million by 2030
- Employers across all sectors urged to sign up, as first apprentices start on apprenticeship

A new apprenticeship will help businesses and their workforce to reap maximum benefit from incredible new and emerging AI technology.

Skills England worked with employers to design and develop the AI and automation practitioner apprenticeship.

Apprentices will learn to identify where AI and automation can save time, reduce costs and improve performance. They will focus on solving real-world problems that slow down organisations - such as duplicated data entry and needlessly repetitive manual processes. Many businesses use multiple digital tools that do not talk to each other. AI and automation practitioners will help integrate these systems.

Added to this, apprentices will be shown how to use AI in a safe and responsible way. This includes protecting sensitive data, avoiding bias, and complying with regulatory requirements.

AI adoption could boost the UK economy by up to £400 billion by 2030 through enhancements in innovation and workplace productivity. But while projections show that jobs directly involving AI activities could rise from 158,000 in 2024 to 3.9 million by 2035, research carried out by academic Dr Nisreen Ameen with support from Skills England found major challenges among employers with upskilling.

This new level 4 apprenticeship has been made available to all employers, regardless of what sector they work in. The first batch of apprentices is starting on the 18-month programme this month.

## **Work and Pensions Secretary Pat McFadden said:**

Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming our economy, and I am determined that young people across the country are equipped to seize the opportunities it brings. That means investing in the skills and training that will define the jobs of the future. Through our apprenticeship reforms, we are creating genuine pathways into the high-skilled, high-growth industries that AI is creating – so that a young person’s chances are not determined by their background or where they grew up. The fourth industrial revolution is already under way – our job is to make sure Britain is ready for it.

## **Minister for AI, Kanishka Narayan said:**

AI offers so much potential to grow our economy, create new opportunities for people, and help businesses boost their productivity. This can only be realised when businesses, small and large, have the skills needed to adopt and use AI to its fullest. Through our AI Skills Boost initiative – a commitment to upskill 10 million workers with key AI skills by 2030 – and new AI apprenticeships like these, we are making sure our workforce has the skills needed to effectively adopt AI and make the UK a leading AI nation.

The new apprenticeship is part of a much-improved wider AI skill training offer, which includes a new apprenticeship unit unveiled today. Apprenticeship units are shorter programmes, lasting between 1 and 16 weeks, aimed at adults in the workplace. They deliver the knowledge and skills needed in a targeted area, making them ideal for addressing specific skills gaps quickly.

Skills England also worked with major tech companies to ensure courses chosen for the AI Skills Boost programme, launched in January by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, provide the right level of quality and capability.

Every adult in the UK is eligible to take these courses free of charge, in support of the government’s drive to provide 10 million workers with the AI skills they need by 2030. And everyone who completes courses, which have been successfully checked against Skills England’s skills for work benchmark, will receive digital badges recognising what they have learned.

## **Phil Smith, chair of Skills England and co-chair of the government’s Digital Skills Council, said:**

AI is moving at an incredible pace and everyone can benefit if we train people to maximise productivity gains in a responsible way. Skills England has worked rapidly with employers to make sure this new apprenticeship and the wider AI skills offer provides what businesses need right now. I want to urge businesses across the country to recruit an apprentice or sign up for a course.

The group of employers who advised on skills needs for the new apprenticeship reflected a broad range of sectors and involved many smaller businesses.

**Crispin Read, chief executive and founder of The Coders Guild, a training provider delivering the apprenticeship, said:**

We've got 12 apprentices starting this month, with a lot more in the pipeline, and the interest and need is the highest we've ever experienced. What excites me most is the potential this creates. People bringing real domain knowledge - understanding of a business, an industry, a customer - and adding serious technical capability. AI and automation skills combined with industry experience is a powerful combination, and for SMEs in particular, that's a genuinely exciting prospect.

**Essex Recovery Foundation is training staff through the apprenticeship. Laurence Hickmott, their chief executive officer, said:**

Our charity amplifies the voices of people affected by addiction to shape better recovery services across Essex. So much of what we do depends on listening, connecting, and influencing, and I could see how AI could strengthen that work. We're a small team with a big mission, so we need to support our people with skills to make maximum difference. The AI and automation apprenticeship felt like the right fit for us.

**Toby Jones, who works for Visit Somerset and was among the first people to start on the apprenticeship, said:**

I'm very much of a 'do it to learn it' mindset and the new AI apprenticeship is right up my street. I work in marketing and can see AI needs to be a key part of the profession, so it will be massively helpful to become a trained expert. It's going to be really good to get ahead of the curve.

To find out more about how to recruit for the apprenticeship visit Training providers for Artificial intelligence (AI) and automation practitioner (level 4).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ai-apprenticeship-to-close-digital-skills-gap-holding-back-millions-of-workers>