# UK launches £187m TechFirst scheme to boost AI skills in schools



The UK government has pledged £187 million to a new programme aimed at equipping one million secondary school pupils with essential digital and artificial intelligence (AI) skills. Known as TechFirst, the scheme will integrate AI and digital education into schools and local communities over the next three years to prepare young people for the jobs of the future.

“This training programme will unlock opportunity in every classroom,” said Prime Minister Keir Starmer, adding that it could lay the groundwork for a new era of economic growth. He described the initiative as a response to challenges faced by children from working families and a step towards ensuring equal access to well-paid employment.

TechFirst forms part of the government’s forthcoming Industrial Strategy and its broader “Plan for Change,” which aims to dismantle barriers to opportunity and drive economic development. Research from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology predicts demand for AI skills will surge, with an estimated 10 million jobs involving AI by 2035.

A core element of the programme, TechYouth, will receive £24 million to provide students with insights into technology careers and access to training. An online platform will also be created to inspire learners and improve access to educational resources, drawing on the success of the CyberFirst scheme, which has already attracted over 100,000 student registrations.

Major technology firms including NVIDIA, Google, Microsoft, IBM and BT have pledged support. These companies will provide high-quality training materials for up to 7.5 million workers by 2030, aiming to enhance productivity across sectors from healthcare to manufacturing.

The initiative also targets the tech sector’s skills shortage. A recent TechNation report found that one in three UK tech founders cited limited access to talent as their biggest barrier to growth. TechFirst is positioned as a key measure to address this challenge and strengthen the UK’s standing in the global tech economy.

Industry leaders welcomed the announcement. Jensen Huang, CEO of NVIDIA, said AI talent would be critical to the UK’s tech future, while Google EMEA President Debbie Weinstein called the move vital for unlocking economic growth. Executives from IBM and Microsoft echoed the need to align workforce skills with the demands of an AI-driven economy.

The programme builds on successful models like CyberFirst, which has played a key role in developing cybersecurity expertise among young people. Delivery will focus on local partnerships and adaptable training tailored to regional needs.

Alongside the main programme, three further strands will support graduates, researchers and local businesses, creating a pipeline of talent across education and industry. The investment signals a clear commitment to closing skills gaps and preparing the workforce for a rapidly changing job market.

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## Bibliography

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