# AI fluency now essential across UK workforce, not just in tech roles



Artificial intelligence is no longer the domain of technology specialists—it has become central to business operations across all sectors. From content creation to data analysis and workflow automation, AI tools are spreading rapidly, yet workforce readiness is not keeping pace.

A growing skills gap poses a major barrier. Seventy-five per cent of hiring leaders report recruiting AI talent without building sustainable pipelines of qualified candidates. Sixty-three per cent say they struggle to find applicants with adequate AI expertise. This disconnect threatens to stall innovation and undermine the UK’s competitiveness in a fast-changing global economy.

The solution lies in expanding AI fluency beyond technical teams. Employees across departments—from marketing and HR to finance and operations—must understand how to work effectively with AI. Practical AI skills now include breaking tasks into segments AI can support, critically evaluating AI-generated outputs and using tools to streamline workflows.

The productivity gains are clear. HR teams use AI to draft job descriptions and summarise feedback. Finance professionals automate reporting and flag irregular spending. Marketing departments generate campaign ideas and visuals in seconds. But these benefits depend on employees receiving proper training, not just access to tools.

AI is increasingly seen as digital labour—more like a colleague than a tool—requiring workers to learn prompt engineering, ethical oversight and contextual reasoning. Structured training programmes are vital. Without them, businesses risk inefficiencies and flawed decision-making.

In response, employers and educators are rolling out targeted training. General Assembly’s AI Academy offers role-specific programmes. Intel’s ‘Digital Readiness’ and ‘AI for Workforce’ initiatives provide hundreds of hours of free training through community colleges. Google’s $120 million ‘Grow with Google’ fund supports global AI learning partnerships.

Sector-specific efforts are also underway. Georgia Tech’s Artificial Intelligence in Manufacturing (AIM) programme, backed by US federal funding, helps workers at small and mid-sized factories build AI skills and long-term career pathways.

While AI promises vast gains, experts warn that adoption must be inclusive. The IMF and others highlight generational divides in AI skills, with younger workers often more proficient than older colleagues. Without broad-based training, inequality could widen.

Even sustainability professionals report a digital skills gap that threatens effective AI use in environmental work. The World Economic Forum predicts that nearly 40% of workers will need reskilling due to AI-related disruptions—underscoring the need for national efforts to build fluency and embed ethics in AI deployment.

Cultural resistance to AI adoption—driven by scepticism or fear—can be as limiting as technical barriers. Organised training fosters confidence and collaboration, helping businesses move from passive AI use to strategic integration.

The message is clear: AI is reshaping work now. Companies that delay workforce training risk falling behind in productivity and innovation. Equipping employees with the skills and mindset to work confidently with AI is a necessary first step. By aligning efforts across industry, education and government, the UK can lead in creating a responsible, inclusive AI economy.

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/ai-is-here-your-workforce-should-be-ready/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/society-equity/sustainability-profession-scrambles-fill-extreme-gap-digital-skills-harness-2024-11-28/> - The sustainability sector is facing a significant digital skills gap, hindering the effective use of AI in addressing environmental challenges. Despite AI's potential, many professionals lack the necessary skills. Over two-thirds of executives report a moderate-to-extreme skills gap, and the World Economic Forum predicts substantial worker skill disruptions due to AI, necessitating reskilling for 40% of the workforce. Initiatives by governments, organizations, and companies aim to bridge this gap through education, such as IBM’s free online platform offering AI courses tailored to underrepresented groups. Businesses like PwC and Arup are developing AI tools and training programs to enhance their workforce’s capabilities. Experts emphasize the importance of awareness and ethical considerations in AI use for sustainability, highlighting the need for ongoing adaptation to evolving technologies.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/26772553fe7ed82b535b41a8169ac078> - Intel's chief people officer, Christy Pambianchi, discussed the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace with the Associated Press. She highlighted the importance of training employees to use AI responsibly as its commercialization grows. Pambianchi noted that AI conversations in the workforce have intensified, particularly with the rise of generative AI tools. Intel is expanding AI education through initiatives like the 'Digital Readiness' program, partnering with over 100 public-private entities across 28 countries. Their 'AI for Workforce' initiative provides over 500 hours of free AI content to U.S. community colleges, supporting job readiness and new certifications. This program specifically targets broader accessibility, with 40% of participating schools being Minority-Serving institutions. Pambianchi emphasized the need for responsible AI implementation, maintaining human oversight in decision-making processes, and engaging employees transparently to harness AI's potential while considering ethical concerns.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/google-pushes-global-agenda-educate-workers-lawmakers-ai-2025-01-25/> - Google is actively working to shape public understanding and regulatory policies on artificial intelligence (AI) as global AI regulations develop. The company prioritizes educating the workforce through AI training programs to foster better AI policies and opportunities, creating a beneficial cycle. Facing scrutiny in its advertising and search businesses, Google offers measures to appease regulators, like selling parts of its ad tech business. Globally, governments are drafting regulations to address AI-related issues, such as privacy and copyright, and Google seeks to influence this narrative. CEO Sundar Pichai announced a $120 million fund for AI education, and initiatives like the 'Grow with Google' program aim to provide AI skills. Real-world application programs such as 'Skilled Trades and Readiness' are being implemented in collaboration with community colleges. Economist David Autor has been hired to study AI's workforce impacts, emphasizing that AI can create more practical training experiences. Ultimately, Google aims to guide the integration of AI into jobs, expecting most roles to include some AI component.
5. <https://time.com/6302984/ai-jobs-career/> - Jana Soldicic, an event planner from Germany, initially explored AI through generative tools like ChatGPT and DALL-E, which piqued her curiosity to understand the technology better. She pursued this interest by taking the Elements of AI, an online course by MinnaLearn and the University of Helsinki, which enhanced her knowledge of AI's operation beyond simple interactions with public tools. This knowledge has empowered her in her work, aiding in creating unique event materials that were previously difficult to visualize. AI is projected to significantly transform workplaces, potentially automating up to 70% of tasks by 2045, with both threats and opportunities for workers. Experts suggest that familiarity with AI tools will be essential for maintaining competitiveness. Courses by platforms like LinkedIn Learning and Google Cloud Skills Boost are designed to equip workers with necessary AI skills, emphasizing understanding fundamental AI principles over specific tools due to the fast-evolving technology landscape. Ultimately, AI can enhance productivity and efficiency across various professional fields. Workers are recommended to experiment with AI tools and learn how they can be applied to their specific tasks, ensuring that they stay ahead in an increasingly AI-integrated work environment.
6. <https://www.axios.com/local/atlanta/2024/11/12/program-encourages-manufacturers-workers-to-embrace-ai-technology> - The Georgia Artificial Intelligence in Manufacturing program (AIM) is an initiative launched by Georgia Tech to help manufacturing workers acquire skills in artificial intelligence and emerging technologies. This program, one of the 21 winners in the $1 billion Build Back Better Regional Challenge competition, aims to support small and mid-sized manufacturers in adopting smart technology and to establish a pipeline of skilled workers. Despite some concerns about AI potentially replacing jobs, the program endeavors to equip workers with necessary skills to either secure or retain employment. Donna Ennis, co-director of Georgia AIM, emphasizes the goal of improving businesses and developing career pathways through education. The grant funding for AIM will last four years, and efforts are underway to sustain the program through additional state funding and future planning.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/ee8b752a-ba3e-4ecd-9a1f-2964828a73de> - Valentina Romei's article 'AI will widen inequality, IMF warns' discusses the potential impact of artificial intelligence on work, highlighting concerns raised by the IMF. The response letter emphasizes that while AI poses significant challenges, it also offers an unprecedented opportunity to enhance productivity and work quality. The author asserts the importance of upskilling employees and providing them with the necessary tools and resources to adapt to AI-driven changes. There's a notable concern about the generational gap in AI usage, with Gen Z more familiar with generative AI compared to older generations, spotlighting the need for inclusive AI literacy. The letter calls for a proactive approach from employers to build AI skills at scale and emphasizes a collaborative effort between government, academia, and businesses to mitigate AI-driven disruptions.