PM plans with Nvidia's Jensen Huang to make UK an 'AI maker'

'Tech First' programme to train 7.5 million workers in AI by 2030

Penny Horwood
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The announcements came thick and fast on day one of London Tech Week with the emphasis on private and public investment in digital and AI skills and infrastructure

In his opening keynote at London Tech Week, Sir Keir Starmer enthusiastically positioned Britain as the ideal environment for tech entrepreneurs to launch and scale their businesses, envisioning the country as "an AI maker, not just an AI taker."

Amid his strong endorsement of the transformative potential of generative AI in the public sector and the entrepreneurial spirit of his audience, in his remarks the Prime Minister clearly identified the two primary challenges the UK faces in becoming a tech superpower: infrastructure and skills.

On the former, the PM announced a $1 billion investment to expand the UK's high-performance computing capacity twentyfold. On the latter, he unveiled an ambitious plan to train 7.5 million workers in AI by 2030.

Skills Pipeline

Nvidia will support this effort by sponsoring a "talent pipeline" and establishing a new Nvidia AI Technology Centre in the UK, which will provide practical training in AI, data science, and accelerated computing, with a focus on foundational model development, embodied AI, materials science, and earth systems modelling.

Sir Keir said:

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"We're also going to bring the full powers of government with a new Tech First training programme. That's up to one million young people trained in tech skills—that will be so crucial for their future. That's a £185 million investment, embedding AI right through our education system, starting in our secondary schools with subjects like computer science. At universities, a new scholarship programme for high-flying students—supporting the best and brightest personally, so they can focus on their research on the next frontier."

Amanda Brock, CEO of Open UK, welcomed the announcements but cautioned on the scale and nature of skills development:

"Whilst some of these skills can be learned in education systems, some can only be learned by doing. Starmer announced his 'Tech First' training program with one million young people being trained. If this is also over five years, 200,000 a year will not be enough to build a tech sector."

She continued:

"Shifting our skills gap needs practical training, learning good practices and how to do it in real life, not just education. Many people - whether young or re-trainers - are leaving code camps already and failing to get jobs here in the UK. In fact, these numbers have been rising. These people need access to the skills that would be learned in their first jobs to build their careers.

"One way to reach the success Starmer aspires to and to benefit from the potential of transformative AI is through contribution to open and collaborative projects, gradually learning and refining taught skills to build a living CV on GitHub, Hugging Face or other collaboration tool. These living CVs open individuals up to a global job market, without talent flight and the need to leave where they are from."

Other experts echoed Brock's emphasis on flexible career pathways.

Sheila Flavell CBE, COO of FDM Group, commented: "It's encouraging to see the government prioritising skills development to help young people unlock opportunities in the tech sector.

"There must be a continued focus on building accessible pathways into these careers, such as apprenticeships, which play a vital role in this, supporting lifelong learning and upskilling to meet the needs of a dynamic workforce. By investing in high-quality training and promoting greater diversity in tech, we can empower the next generation to drive innovation and strengthen the UK's position as a global leader in digital industries."

One factor that the PM may have overlooked in his quest to embed AI skills throughout the education system is the critical shortage of computer science teachers, especially in economically disadvantaged areas where a third of schools don't even offer computer science A-level.

Recruiting and retaining high-quality computer science teachers is difficult due to higher public sector salaries and a curriculum focused on the coding skills that AI has already begun to render obsolete.

A strategy for the fast recruitment and improved retention of computer science teachers is necessary if the wider ambitions of the government on AI skills are to be realised – especially if the government is to meet its target on ensuring that opportunities reach all areas of the UK.

Goldilocks for AI

Despite these challenges, the Prime Minister's enthusiasm for the potential of the Uk as an AI superpower was shared by Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, who took part in a discussion with Sir Keir and minister for investment Poppy Gustafson.

Huang said that the country was in a "goldilocks circumstance" with "one of the richest AI communities anywhere on the planet", adding that it has the "best universities, amazing start-ups and incredible thinkers in computer science". Huang highlighted that the UK ranks third globally in AI VC investment anywhere in the world, behind the US and China.

The ecosystem is missing just one thing, Huang argued and that's infrastructure. Seamus Dunne, MD for UK & Ireland at Digital Realty, agrees.

"For the UK to achieve its growth ambitions, we need action in the form of faster planning approvals and quicker grid connections, alongside clear and stable regulation. Without that, we simply cannot unlock the tens of billions in private capital that's needed for the energy and digital infrastructure that AI demands.

"This level of transformation requires partnership, he continued. "The Government must lay down clear policy signals and incentives, while industry delivers the innovation and technical firepower. Nail that, and the UK won't just train AI – we'll deploy it where it matters most, from life sciences to finance to frontline public services."

Confident in the UKs potential, Huang has launched the first UK sovereign AI industry forum in partnership with major British firms including BAE Systems, BT, Babcock, National Grid and Standard Chartered.

The forum pledges to strengthen the UK's domestic computing capabilities twentyfold and support the nation's booming AI startup ecosystem with a £1.5bn investment.

"This is a huge vote of confidence for the UK", the PM said. "We are truly leaning into this, and we are excited about the potential this could, and will have on millions on people".

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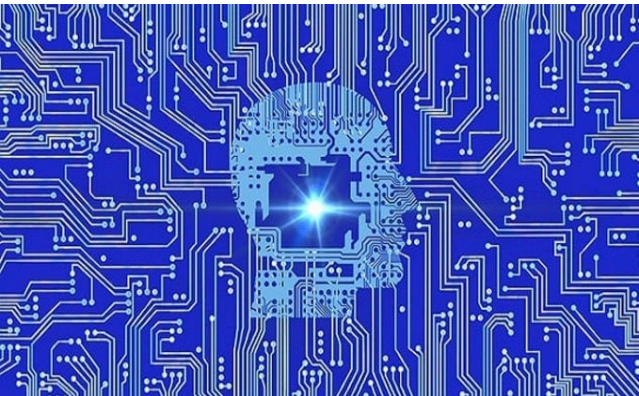
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