



Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology

Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP
Secretary of State for Science,
Innovation and Technology

100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ

The Rt Hon the Baroness Stowell of Beeston
MBE
Chair
Communications and Digital Committee
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

Secretary.State@dsit.gov.uk
17th April 2024

Dear Baroness Stowell,

I was grateful for the opportunity to give evidence to your Committee on Tuesday 6 February. I committed to write to the Committee to provide further information regarding UKRI's approach to dispersing funding for doctoral students researching artificial intelligence (AI).

UKRI has a broad AI investment portfolio of more than £1 billion, including £85 million announced in February 2024 for nine new AI Research Hubs. On doctoral training provision, the government invested £117 million in 12 new AI Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs) in October 2023, building on the £100 million invested in 16 AI CDTs in 2018. Together these investments are expected to support up to 1,900 students.

On 12 March, I announced the next phase of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's (EPSRC) CDT initiative, including a further five AI CDTs to be launched, increasing the total number of new AI CDTs to 17. I am pleased to confirm to the Committee that this will boost the annual recruitment of doctoral candidates in this field to at least 230 student starts per year, strengthening the national pipeline of AI skills.

We recognise the need to embed AI skills more broadly across the research and innovation ecosystem in universities, companies, computing infrastructure, our public services and institutes. The demand for highly skilled AI researchers and innovators is rising significantly across all sectors of the economy, as evidenced by the high levels of business participation in the CDTs. At the time of award, the 17 new AI-specific CDTs had over 450 different project partners across business, public and third sectors. The 2023 investment of £117 million leveraged £71 million from these partners, which includes funding for over 300 students. The five new CDTs announced on 12 March comprise £37 million of government funding, leveraging an additional £31 million from partners. UKRI is committed to engaging investors,

partners and businesses to facilitate additional investment opportunities in AI skills and PhD training.

The 17 new AI CDTs were selected through a competitive process with all proposals undergoing rigorous independent peer review. They will play a critical role in ensuring that we build the UK's long-term pipeline of AI talent and skills. The AI centres are part of wider UKRI and EPSRC doctoral training investments, supporting related disciplines including mathematics, semiconductors, telecoms, quantum technologies and research computing. EPSRC's Doctoral Training Partnerships support approximately 1,000 doctoral studentships annually, providing flexible funding to research organisations, including the AI Research Hubs, and supporting students of both AI and other critical technologies. Ensuring a balanced portfolio that supports the broad digital ecosystem and safeguards the strength of the UK's world leading science base is vital for supporting our AI ambitions.

AI doctoral places form but one part of the government's portfolio of investments into AI skills and talent. Starting with commitments made in the AI Sector Deal, and continued in the National AI Strategy, the government has funded a broad package of AI skills and talent initiatives throughout the education pipeline. This will help to address the skills gap, support citizens and businesses to take advantage of AI technologies and drive economic growth. In addition to AI doctoral funding, this £313 million investment includes the Industrial Funded Masters in AI programme, one of the first programmes of its kind to boost the market for AI master's degree courses. Our investment further provides £66 million to develop the Turing AI Fellowships Programme and £30 million for our AI and Data Science Conversion Course and Scholarships Programme, which funds new AI master's courses and 2,600 scholarships for students underrepresented in the tech industry.

I finally wanted to highlight to the Committee the recently published draft of our AI Skills for Business Guidance, which outlines the AI skills and competencies required in business settings. We expect the final version to be published shortly, building on the expert stakeholder feedback we have received. This guidance will help businesses to understand their AI upskilling needs, support training providers to design courses to address industry AI needs, and help employees to identify their own skills gaps.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michelle Donelan', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP
Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology