



ukai

# **Get Britain Growing: North West Conference AI Sprint Report**



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UKAI CEO, Tim Flagg held an in-conversation fireside with Mayor of the Liverpool City Region

## Foreword

The Get Britain Growing: North West Conference was held on 11th September 2025 in Liverpool, bringing together parliamentarians, local and regional government stakeholders, academics, investors, and industry leaders to explore ways to drive long-term growth in the North West region. The conference saw keynote speeches from influential voices across the North West, including Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, Steve Rotheram, and Chair of the Energy Security and Net Zero Select Committee, Bill Esterson MP. Through these keynote addresses, panel discussions on unlocking and driving holistic growth, and interactive Sprint Workshops, the event aimed to foster collaboration, innovation, and practical solutions to address regional barriers to growth.

I was pleased to facilitate the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Sprint Workshop, which was structured around the guiding question: how can AI drive growth in the North West? Participants were reminded that the sprint methodology is built around practical outcomes. Each sprint seeks not merely to diagnose systemic challenges but to produce implementable solutions that can shape policy, commissioning, and local delivery. In that spirit, this workshop aimed to translate evidence and local experience into a coherent framework for action.

Opening the discussion, participants emphasised the potential for the North West to become a trailblazer for AI adoption and innovation, recognising its globally recognised research centres, universities, and thriving scale-up community. However, fragmented investment streams, costly and deficient infrastructure, and a skills system that struggles to keep pace with employer demand have all constrained the region's ability to effectively harness AI. It was therefore determined that overcoming skills, infrastructure, and investment hurdles is crucial to unlocking economic growth.

Participants ultimately coalesced around a practical and implementable solution, a North West AI Pilot Scheme, coordinated by a new North West AI Hub in Liverpool. A North West AI Hub would provide a focal point for a regional AI skills strategy, for the long-term planning of data and energy infrastructure, and for a clearer investment offer that can attract both public and private capital into the region. Crucially, it would also provide a platform for the North West to position itself as an AI policy testbed for the United Kingdom, working with central government to demonstrate how an innovation-friendly regulatory environment can support responsible AI adoption and economic growth. Ultimately, Liverpool and Manchester should become global exemplars of AI Cities.

UKAI has an essential and important role to play, to convene industry – sharing knowledge and empowering a network to affect long-lasting change. The recommendations in this report equip us with a blueprint to realise that aspiration. The task now is to make the case for its implementation at a local, regional, and national level. I look forward to seeing this report inform that next stage to ensure that the North West is at the forefront of AI adoption, and to deliver on the mission to 'Get Britain Growing'.

**Tim Flagg**  
Chief Executive, UKAI





## Executive Summary

This report sets out the findings and policy recommendations from the AI Sprint Workshop, which explored the role of AI technology and businesses to drive economic growth across the North West, focusing on how to translate research excellence and entrepreneurial energy into practical deployment and tangible next steps. The workshop gathered participants – ranging from AI start-ups, investors, and major technology firms to universities and regulators, as well as NHS and local authority representatives – to examine how the region can position itself as a leader in responsible AI adoption to drive both productivity gains and high-quality job creation, while contributing to the UK's ambition to be a world leader in AI.

Participants agreed that the North West possesses the necessary and unique foundations to become a national exemplar for regional AI adoption. The region boasts universities with international reputations in computer, data, engineering, and life sciences; a diverse industrial base across health, advanced manufacturing, energy, and transport; and an emerging digital sector with rapidly growing startups and university spinouts. Despite this considerable potential, attendees began by recognising the regional challenges that have thus far prevented the North West from embracing the opportunities offered by AI. The distribution of research and development funding in the United Kingdom has historically favoured London and the South East. Digital infrastructure, particularly reliable high-bandwidth connectivity and resilient energy systems, remains variable outside metropolitan centres. The skills ecosystem struggles to keep pace with the needs of employers, and regulatory and investment pathways are often complex for smaller firms to navigate.

In this regard, the workshop prioritised three principal policy areas as keys to unlocking growth:

1. **Skills:** the region requires a step-change in data literacy and applied AI competence, involving engagement from the educational, public, and private sectors to enable workers at all levels to engage with AI as a practical tool that is relevant to their everyday lives rather than simply an abstract concept.
2. **Infrastructure:** growth will be constrained unless data and energy infrastructure is expanded and made affordable as a part of a coordinated and sustainable long-term plan, including the redevelopment of brownfield sites as innovation districts and the creation of sustainable pathways to renewable power for data-intensive activity.
3. **Investment:** fragmented funding streams and an uncertain regulatory environment slow decision-making and deter investment. A more coherent and innovation-friendly approach towards AI regulation and economic incentives by the UK Government is required to make the North West a more attractive destination for future investment.

The recommendations in this report align closely with the priorities outlined in the UK Government's AI Opportunities Action Plan,<sup>1</sup> published in January 2025. This report argues for the creation of a **North West AI Hub**, centred in Liverpool, to coordinate a proposed **North West AI Pilot Scheme**, convene partners and act as the regional interface with national bodies. To build such a scheme, stakeholders further advocated for a **regional skills strategy** that embeds AI literacy and applied capability from secondary education through to mid-career reskilling, for a coordinated approach to infrastructure planning, particularly across brownfield sites, and for a regional investment mechanism capable of attracting both public and private investment.

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, AI Opportunities Action Plan (CP 1241, 13 January 2025)

# 1. Background and Objectives

The North West is home to globally recognised AI research centres, including the Hartree National Centre for Digital Innovation (HNCDI) and the Institute for Data Science & Artificial Intelligence (IDSAl) at the University of Manchester, as well as a dynamic start-up community and strong demand from sectors such as healthcare, manufacturing, and logistics. Yet barriers remain, including access to finance, skills shortages, regulatory uncertainty, and fragmented infrastructure. The AI Sprint Workshop was designed as a collaborative policy exercise set within this context.

The immediate objectives of the sprint were for participants to identify the obstacles that currently restrict AI-driven growth, to prioritise a deliverable regional strategy, and to set out practical recommendations for central government and regional and local authorities to overcome the foremost challenges. Five priority areas were provided to participants prior to the sprint in order to focus the discussion:

## AI Deployment Across Key Sectors

- How can healthcare, manufacturing, logistics, and financial services in the North West adopt AI effectively?
- What lessons can be drawn from pilot projects, existing schemes, and early adopters?
- Where are the biggest productivity and cost-saving opportunities?

## AI Skills and Workforce Development

- Addressing the shortage of data scientists, machine learning engineers, and AI-literate leaders.
- Aligning university programmes, apprenticeships, and industry training with demand.
- Developing pathways for reskilling existing workforces in industries undergoing AI-driven transformation.

## About Us



UKAI envisions the UK as a global powerhouse for AI innovation, recognised for its dynamic ecosystem of pioneering businesses, unique financial landscape, world-class universities, and exceptional talent. UKAI sees AI as a key player in addressing society's biggest challenges, while unlocking new avenues for economic growth and social good. The UK can lead the world in responsible and ethical AI, setting a global standard for innovation with integrity.

UKAI's vision is for AI to benefit everyone, striking the right balance between groundbreaking innovation and protecting public interests. Achieving this requires close collaboration between government, businesses, and society. UKAI is committed to driving this interaction, ensuring that the right regulations, resources, and support systems are in place to maximise the potential of UK AI businesses.

UKAI believes that AI has the transformative power to not only drive economic growth but also to uplift communities and reduce social inequalities. By leveraging AI to upskill people, create new job opportunities, and make cutting-edge technologies accessible to all, the benefits of AI are shared across society. UKAI's vision is for AI to enhance communities, improving public services, healthcare, education, and more. By championing responsible and inclusive AI development, UKAI aims to create a future where everyone - regardless of background – has the opportunity to thrive in an AI-driven world.

As the champion for UK AI businesses, UKAI advocates for their interests by fostering collaboration, offering leadership, and building a thriving AI ecosystem that benefits workers, companies, society, and the broader economy. Our goal is clear: to ensure the UK remains a global leader in AI development, ethics, and innovation.

[www.ukai.co](http://www.ukai.co)



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