

AI Leadership and Skills Strategy for Hampshire and the Solent

Facilitated by the AI Growth Alliance (AIGA)



A regional strategy for inclusive, responsible and employer-led AI adoption, 2026–2029

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Executive Summary

The AI Growth Alliance (AIGA) is a collaborative partnership bringing together education providers, employers, government, industry bodies and innovation organisations to accelerate the development of AI skills, capability and adoption across the region. By aligning workforce development, curriculum innovation, research, business support and digital inclusion activities, AIGA aims to create a coordinated ecosystem that equips individuals and organisations with the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to thrive in an AI-enabled economy. Through shared leadership and collective action, the Alliance seeks to ensure that the economic and societal benefits of AI are accessible to all communities, sectors and learners.

This strategy sets out a coordinated regional response to the opportunities and risks created by artificial intelligence across Hampshire and the Solent. It establishes a whole-system approach to building AI confidence, leadership capability and practical skills across businesses, public services, education, communities and the third sector.

The strategy is anchored in the region's distinctive economic assets, strengths of the Hampshire and the Solent SuperCluster, higher and further education capability, and strong partnership ecosystem. It focuses on inclusive access, employer-led delivery, responsible AI adoption and clear progression routes from foundational digital confidence through to advanced AI and data skills.

Between 2026 and 2029, the AI Growth Alliance will lead a programme of action focused on core AI skills, qualification and funding pathways, SME and microbusiness support, leadership development, regional learning infrastructure and measurable improvements in confidence, participation, adoption and progression.

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1. Strategic Context

The Hampshire and the Solent area is entering a period of rapid transformation driven by artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and data-led innovation. These changes present a major opportunity to strengthen productivity, enhance public services, and improve quality of life - but also pose risks of exclusion, workforce disruption, and widening inequality.

This strategy directly supports the ambitions of the UK Government's AI Opportunities Action Plan (2025), which identifies AI adoption, workforce capability, public service transformation and the development of a highly skilled talent pipeline as essential to securing the UK's future economic growth and international competitiveness.

The Action Plan highlights the need to increase AI adoption across organisations of all sizes, develop AI skills at every level, support AI-enabled innovation, and ensure that the benefits of AI are shared widely across society. Through its focus on digital inclusion, leadership development, SME engagement, lifelong learning, responsible AI

adoption, and stronger links between employers, colleges, universities and innovation partners, the Hampshire and Solent AI Leadership and Skills Strategy provides a regional delivery framework that translates these national priorities into coordinated local action, helping to build the skills, confidence and capability required for an AI-enabled economy.

The area benefits from a globally significant concentration of economic, defence, transport, and innovation assets, positioning the region as a strategic gateway and high-growth hub within the UK. Key anchors include Farnborough International (a world-leading centre for aerospace and global trade events), the Solent Freeport (driving international trade and investment), NATS (a global leader in air traffic management), the National Oceanography Centre, and critical national defence assets such as the home of the Royal Navy and the British Army.

These are complemented by major infrastructure and data assets such as Ordnance Survey, the Port of Southampton (the UK's leading cruise and container port), and Southampton Airport, alongside excellent connectivity via the M3 and M27 corridors, direct links to London, and access to international markets. Together with the region's emerging cluster-based strengths, research excellence, and

Digital infrastructure and community access will provide the foundations for inclusive participation.

innovation ecosystem, these assets create a powerful platform for AI adoption, advanced skills development, and globally competitive growth.

However, AI readiness remains uneven, with key barriers including low confidence, fragmented provision, and limited leadership capability.

The AI Leadership and Skills Strategy for Hampshire and the Solent is designed to support businesses and organisations of all sizes and across all sectors, including private, public, education, and the third sector. It takes a whole-system approach to AI adoption, recognising that economic growth, public service transformation, and community wellbeing are interconnected and require coordinated action across the entire regional ecosystem.

While AI will create significant opportunities for productivity, innovation and new forms of employment, it will also reshape existing roles and ways of working. The region must therefore support individuals, employers and communities to navigate workforce transition positively, ensuring that people whose roles are most exposed to automation or task substitution have access to timely advice, retraining opportunities, career development support and pathways into emerging

occupations. The objective is not simply to prepare people for new jobs, but to help existing workers adapt and thrive as jobs evolve.

Delivering this strategy requires a cultural shift from apprehension to curiosity, enabling individuals and organisations to embrace AI as a tool for positive change rather than perceived risk. Through a joined-up, inclusive, and cross-sector approach, the region will foster confidence, collaboration, and shared learning - unlocking transformational change that drives innovation, productivity, and social value for all communities.

This strategy provides a coordinated, inclusive, and employer-led framework to develop AI skills and leadership capacity across the region, positioning Hampshire and the Solent as a national leader in responsible, inclusive AI adoption.

This strategy applies to and is co-delivered with organisations of all sizes and across all sectors - private, public, education, and third sector, recognising that widespread AI adoption requires whole-system engagement.

2. Vision and Strategic Principles

A digitally confident, AI-enabled Hampshire and Solent where:

- Individuals, businesses, and communities can access and benefit from AI skills and tools
- Leaders are confident to adopt AI responsibly and strategically
- Opportunities are inclusive, accessible, and equitable
- AI is embedded into everyday life, work, and decision-making

This vision combines:

- Regional excellence – a nationally recognised centre for AI leadership and innovation
- Inclusive access – democratised learning, participation, and opportunity

Strategic principles

a. Confidence First

AI adoption will only happen at scale if individuals, employers and civic leaders feel

able to understand, question and use AI safely. This principle is appropriate because the region's key barrier is not simply access to technology, but confidence, trust and cultural readiness. A focus on curiosity, practical use and safe experimentation will help move people from apprehension to informed adoption.

b. Employer-Led and Demand-Driven

Provision must respond to real business need rather than generic assumptions about AI. This is particularly important in Hampshire and the Solent, where the economy includes globally significant sectors, complex supply chains, public services, education, charities, microbusinesses and SMEs. Our employer-led approach ensures that training is practical, relevant and linked to productivity, workforce transformation and sector-specific use cases.

c. Inclusion by Design

AI has the potential to widen existing inequalities if skills provision is not intentionally accessible from the outset. This principle recognises that digital confidence, connectivity,

affordability, disability access, rurality, social capital and deprivation all affect who can benefit from AI. Designing inclusion into delivery will ensure that women, disabled people, low-confidence learners, rural communities, adults in low-paid work, digitally excluded groups and people living in areas of high deprivation are not left behind.

d. Simple, Navigable System

The regional skills landscape is rich but can be difficult for employers, learners and communities to navigate. A simple system with clear entry points, mapped provision and a single front door is therefore essential. This principle is appropriate because the strategy depends on connecting people quickly to the right support, whether they are a learner seeking confidence, an SME looking for practical guidance, or a leader needing assurance on governance and risk.

e. Lifelong Learning Ecosystem

AI capability cannot be treated as a one-off qualification or short-term initiative. It will

require continuous learning as tools, risks, roles and opportunities evolve. This principle is appropriate because the region needs pathways for school and college learners, adults in work, career changers, leaders, technical specialists and communities. A lifelong learning approach supports resilience, progression and productivity across all ages and career stages.

f. Responsible and Ethical AI

Responsible AI must underpin all activity, ensuring that adoption is safe, transparent, accountable, fair and aligned to public value. This principle is particularly appropriate in a region with strengths in defence, maritime, health, public services, education, data and regulated sectors, where trust, governance and ethical decision-making are critical. Embedding responsible AI from the outset will build confidence and help organisations adopt AI in ways that improve outcomes without creating avoidable harm.

Taken together, these principles provide the strategy with a clear delivery test: every activity should build confidence, respond to real demand, widen participation, simplify access, support lifelong learning and uphold responsible AI practice. They are appropriate because they directly address the region's identified barriers while making best use of Hampshire and the Solent's assets, partnerships and sector strengths.

They also ensure that the strategy is not solely technology-led, but people-led: focused on practical confidence, inclusive opportunity, ethical adoption and measurable benefit for employers, learners, communities and public services.

3. Regional Strengths and Strategic Opportunity

The Hampshire and the Solent area is uniquely positioned to become a **national leader in applied, responsible AI**, combining world-class research, real-economy sector depth, and strong public-private collaboration. Unlike regions focused solely on technology development, the area's strength lies in its ability to **deploy AI at scale across critical industries**, supported by high-value assets such as defence infrastructure, globally significant transport and logistics hubs, advanced data institutions like Ordnance Survey, and strong academic partnerships. This creates a powerful environment for **testing, adoption, and commercialisation of AI solutions in complex, real-world settings**, particularly in regulated and mission-critical sectors. The region's collaborative ecosystem - through AIGA and aligned partners - further enables **rapid knowledge transfer, workforce development, and inclusive access**, positioning Hampshire and the Solent as a leading UK testbed for **practical, ethical, and productivity-driven AI adoption**.

- Life Sciences and Health (NHS partners, biomedical research, health innovation)
- Digital and Creative Industries (AI, data, immersive tech, gaming, media)
- Professional and Business Services (finance, legal, consultancy, AI-enabled services)

Cross-cutting enablers across all sectors include:

- AI and data innovation
- Advanced manufacturing and engineering
- Clean growth and environmental sustainability (blue-green economy)
- Skills, talent, and workforce development

Regional Higher and Further Education Supply Chain

The Hampshire and the Solent area benefits from a broad and complementary education ecosystem that combines university research excellence, higher technical specialism, applied digital expertise and extensive further education delivery. Collectively, this gives the region the capability to support AI and digital skills development from entry-level confidence building through to advanced technical specialisation, research, innovation and commercialisation.

The region's universities bring significant strength in AI, data science, cyber security, digital transformation, engineering, health innovation, creative technologies, ethics and responsible AI. Their contribution extends beyond degree-level provision: they support applied research, knowledge exchange, business engagement, innovation partnerships and leadership development. This is particularly important for enabling AI adoption in complex, regulated and high-value sectors such as defence, maritime, aerospace, health, public services and professional services.

Universities play an additional and distinctive role within the regional AI ecosystem through research, innovation, knowledge exchange, consultancy and commercialisation activity. As generators of new knowledge and applied research, universities help organisations understand emerging AI technologies, evaluate their potential application, and accelerate innovation adoption.

SuperCluster Sector Strengths

The Hampshire and Solent SuperCluster is built around a distinct mix of high-growth, high-value sectors where the region has nationally and internationally recognised strengths:

- Defence and Security (Royal Navy, British Army, MOD ecosystem)
- Marine and Maritime (Port of Southampton, marine engineering, autonomous vessels)
- Space and Aerospace (Farnborough International, Space South Central, advanced aviation)

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Through Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs), innovation vouchers, consultancy services, research collaborations, incubators and spin-out support, universities can help businesses translate AI research into commercial products, services and productivity improvements. Their international research networks and industry partnerships also provide an important mechanism for attracting investment, talent and innovation opportunities into Hampshire and the Solent.

Further education colleges provide the scale, reach and flexibility needed to make digital and AI skills accessible to communities, learners and employers across the region. They are central to technical education, apprenticeships, T Levels, adult reskilling, Skills Bootcamps, short courses and employer-led provision. Their strength lies in connecting local people and businesses to practical, work-ready skills, particularly for SMEs, microbusinesses, career changers and learners who may not otherwise access higher-level digital pathways.

Together, universities and colleges create a joined-up talent pipeline that can support inclusive AI adoption at every level. This combined expertise enables the region to build foundational digital confidence, develop applied workplace capability, grow specialist AI and data talent, and support leaders to adopt technology responsibly.

By aligning this education infrastructure with employer demand and regional economic priorities, the Hampshire and the Solent area can position itself as a national exemplar for inclusive, practical and ethical AI skills development.

Strategic Contribution to the AI Skills Ecosystem

Together, these institutions form a cohesive and complementary talent pipeline, supporting:

- Entry-level and foundational skills through FE and community provision
- Higher technical and applied skills through South Coast Institute of Technology and vocational pathways
- Advanced research, innovation, and specialist capability through universities
- Leadership, ethics, and transformation capability across all sectors

This collaborative ecosystem enables the area to:

- Develop homegrown AI talent at all levels
- Support business adoption and workforce transformation
- Align education and training provision with real-world sector demand
- Deliver inclusive, lifelong learning pathways

By aligning this education infrastructure with employer demand and regional economic priorities, the Hampshire and the Solent area can position itself as a national exemplar for inclusive, practical and ethical AI skills development.

4. Strategic Objectives

• Build universal digital confidence and AI literacy

This objective focuses on ensuring that individuals, employers and communities understand what AI is, how it can be used safely, and where it can add value in everyday life and work. It is important because confidence is the foundation for adoption: without basic digital capability and practical AI literacy, people are more likely to feel excluded, anxious or passive in response to technological change.

• Strengthen AI leadership and decision-making capability

This objective supports senior leaders, boards, managers and civic decision-makers to understand AI opportunities, risks, governance requirements and return on investment. It is important because leadership confidence is a key system bottleneck: organisations will not adopt AI responsibly or at pace unless leaders can make informed decisions, manage risk and align AI use to strategic priorities.

• Enable SMEs and microbusinesses to adopt AI effectively and affordably

This objective ensures that smaller organisations can access practical, low-cost and relevant support, rather than being left behind by programmes designed for larger employers. It is important because SMEs and microbusinesses form a significant part of the regional economy; if they cannot adopt AI confidently, the productivity and competitiveness benefits of AI will be unevenly distributed.

• Establish clear skills pathways from entry to advanced capability

This objective creates a visible progression route from basic digital confidence through workplace AI use to advanced data, AI engineering and specialist technical skills. It is important because learners, employers and providers need to understand how courses, qualifications, bootcamps, apprenticeships, higher technical routes and existing modules connect, and how individuals can progress over time without duplicating or replacing provision that already works.

• Create a connected, navigable skills ecosystem

This objective aims to simplify a complex landscape by mapping provision, clarifying entry points and creating a single front door for AI skills support. It is important because the region already has significant education, employer and community assets, but their impact is reduced if learners and organisations cannot easily find, understand or access the right support.

• Ensure equitable access and inclusion across all communities

This objective embeds inclusion into the design, delivery and funding of AI skills provision. It is important because AI adoption could otherwise widen existing inequalities linked to digital exclusion, rurality, disability, gender, affordability, confidence, prior educational experience and deprivation. Inclusive delivery will ensure that the benefits of AI are shared across the whole region, including communities living in areas of high deprivation and those least likely to access AI skills independently.

• Develop a regional response to AI core skills requirements, aligned to the

FutureDotNow was sponsored by the UK Government through the Department for

Science, Innovation and Technology and provides a common framework for defining the core digital and AI capabilities needed by individuals and organisations. It is important because a shared model will help providers, employers and funders align their activity, avoid duplication and ensure that provision is built around recognised skills needs rather than disconnected initiatives.

• Provide clarity on formal qualification routes and their availability across the region

These objectives map regulated qualifications, non-regulated learning, short courses, bootcamps, apprenticeship units, higher technical provision and degree-level routes. It is important because AI qualifications are still emerging, and learners and employers need clear information on what is available now, what is developing, and which routes are most appropriate for different needs.

• Establish a funding methodology for AI core skills delivery across local businesses, communities and current students

This objective identifies how AI core skills provision can be funded sustainably across different audiences, including employers, adult learners, community groups and students

already in education. It is important because without a clear funding model, access will remain patchy and provision may only reach those organisations or individuals able to pay privately.

- **Strengthen Research, Innovation and Commercialisation Pathways:**

This objective focuses on translating AI research and innovation into practical economic and public value. It is important because long-term regional competitiveness depends not only on developing skills but also on accelerating innovation, supporting business growth and creating new opportunities for investment. Universities, research organisations and innovation partners will play a key role in connecting employers with expertise, supporting knowledge exchange, facilitating research collaboration and enabling commercialisation of AI-enabled products, services and processes.

- **Support workforce transition and career mobility in an AI-enabled economy**

This objective focuses on helping individuals, employers and sectors anticipate, plan for and respond positively to the changing nature of work created by AI adoption. It recognises that AI will reshape tasks, roles and workforce structures across many sectors, and that successful adoption will depend on supporting people to adapt with confidence. This will include workforce planning, job redesign, redeployment support, retraining pathways, careers advice and targeted support for individuals in roles most exposed to automation or significant task change. It is important because the strategy must not only build new AI skills but also help existing workers and employers manage transition fairly, ensuring that AI-enabled growth strengthens opportunity, mobility and inclusion rather than increasing insecurity or disadvantage.

- d. **Inequality and Access**

AI adoption has the potential to reinforce existing inequalities if access to skills, devices, connectivity, confidence and support is uneven. Barriers linked to digital poverty, rurality, disability, gender, age, prior educational experience, language, caring responsibilities, low social capital and living in areas of high deprivation can all affect who benefits from AI-enabled opportunities.

- This challenge is important because a strategy that improves productivity but leaves communities behind would fail to deliver inclusive growth. Addressing inequality from the outset will help ensure that AI skills provision reaches those who are least likely to access it independently, supports social mobility and enables more people to participate confidently in learning, work and civic life.
- This is particularly important for further and higher education widening participation priorities, where AI skills must support social mobility rather than create a new divide between those with early access to AI-enabled learning and those without.

- e. **Leadership Capability Gap**

AI adoption is often limited less by technology than by leadership confidence. Boards, senior teams, managers and civic leaders may be uncertain about where to start, how to assess risk, how to govern AI use, how to evaluate return on investment, or how to align AI adoption with organisational purpose and workforce planning.

- This challenge is important because leadership behaviour sets the pace and tone of adoption. Without informed leadership, organisations may either avoid AI altogether or adopt tools in an unmanaged way that creates operational, ethical, legal or reputational risks. Building

leadership capability is therefore essential to ensure that AI adoption is strategic, responsible and aligned to measurable benefit.

- f. **Skills System Lag**

The pace of AI change is moving faster than the formal skills system. Regulated qualifications, funding mechanisms and national guidance are still developing, while employers, learners and communities need immediate support to understand and use AI safely. This creates a gap between emerging demand and available, clearly funded provision.

- This challenge is important because the region cannot wait for a perfect national qualification framework before acting. A flexible approach is needed that combines regulated and non-regulated learning, apprenticeship units, bootcamps, higher technical pathways, employer-led short courses and community provision. Addressing skills system lag will ensure the region can respond quickly while still building towards recognised, sustainable and high-quality progression routes.

- g. **Workforce Transition and Career Mobility**

AI will change the nature of work across many sectors, particularly where routine, administrative, transactional or data-processing tasks can be automated or significantly augmented. While this is expected to create opportunities for productivity gains and higher-value work, it may also require individuals and organisations to adapt to changing job requirements, redesigned roles and new workforce structures.

- This challenge is important because successful AI adoption depends on helping people transition with confidence. Employers will need support with workforce planning, job redesign and redeployment, while workers will need access to retraining, careers advice and flexible learning opportunities. Without effective transition support, workforce disruption could reduce confidence in AI adoption and increase inequalities between those able to adapt quickly and those at greater risk of displacement.

5. Core Challenges

- a. **Confidence and Culture**

AI adoption across the region is constrained by uncertainty, fear of risk and uneven understanding of what AI can and cannot do. For many individuals and organisations, the pace of change can feel overwhelming, particularly where there is limited experience of digital transformation or concern about job displacement, ethics, data protection and unintended consequences.

- This challenge is important because confidence is the gateway to participation. Without a cultural shift from apprehension to informed curiosity, employers will delay adoption, leaders will avoid strategic decisions and individuals may miss opportunities to improve productivity, access services or develop new career pathways. Addressing confidence and culture is therefore fundamental to every other part of the strategy.

- b. **SME and Microbusiness Exclusion**

Many SMEs and microbusinesses do not have the time, capacity, internal expertise or financial flexibility to engage with complex skills systems or explore AI adoption independently. Existing programmes can feel designed for larger employers, with language, funding rules and delivery models that do not reflect the realities of small business operations.

- This challenge is important because SMEs and microbusinesses make up a substantial part of the regional economy and employment base. If they are excluded from AI support, productivity gains will be concentrated among larger organisations, widening competitiveness gaps and limiting inclusive regional growth. The strategy must therefore provide simple, practical, affordable and trusted routes into AI adoption for smaller organisations.

- c. **Fragmentation and Navigation**

The region already has significant strengths across universities, colleges, employers, public services, community organisations and national platforms, but the overall skills landscape can be difficult to understand. Learners and employers may struggle to identify what is available, which provision is appropriate, how courses connect, and whether funding or progression routes apply.

- This challenge is important because fragmentation reduces impact. Even high-quality provision will not deliver regional transformation if people cannot find it, understand it or see how it relates to their needs. A more connected and navigable system is essential to avoid duplication, improve referrals, make funding easier to access and enable a coherent regional AI skills pathway.



6. Strategic Pillars

Pillar 1:

Digital Foundations for All

A region-wide commitment to digital inclusion:

Develop a shared regional AI core skills framework using the FutureDotNow model to guide content, progression and validation of existing provision

- Review regulated qualification and funding routes, including post-devolution opportunities
- Community digital hubs and learning spaces
- Free or low-cost access to devices, connectivity, and training

Targeted programmes for excluded groups, including communities living in areas of high deprivation

- Library and community-based delivery
- Delivery through public, education, and third sector partnerships

Pillar 2:

Workplace Digital and AI Readiness

Develop essential workplace capabilities across sectors:

- Digital tools, collaboration platforms, cybersecurity
- Data literacy and critical thinking
- Hybrid and digital working capabilities
- Applicability across private, public, education, and voluntary organisations
- Train-the-trainer support for FE, HE, community and employer educators so they can build the confidence and capability needed to deliver AI skills at scale

Pillar 3:

AI Awareness and Applied Skills

Build practical, accessible AI capability for all organisations:

- “AI for everyday work” training using relevant apprenticeship units and applied workplace frameworks
- Prompting, automation, and productivity tools
- Sector-specific AI applications (defence, maritime, health, creative, public services)
- AI onboarding programmes tailored for SMEs and microbusinesses, supported by FutureDotNow-style assessment of business need
- Supporting the Government’s AI Skills Boost programme
- AI Champions programme
- Peer learning and shared problem-solving approaches
- A regional educator enablement model that supports trainers, lecturers, community tutors and workplace learning leads to adapt AI content for different audiences

Pillar 4:

Advanced Data and AI Skills

Strengthen technical capability through:

Foundation programmes, Skills Bootcamps, apprenticeships, Higher Technical Education, HTQs, Level 4–5 technical routes and HE provision

- Data analytics, machine learning, cloud and AI engineering
- Sector-specific technical pathways
- Applied AI research and innovation programmes; Knowledge Transfer Partnerships and industry-led research projects; Business access to university AI expertise and specialist facilities; Support for AI commercialisation, incubators and spin-outs; Collaborative AI challenge funds and demonstrator projects.

Collaboration across FE colleges, universities, employers and innovation partners, recognising FE’s critical role in higher technical and applied AI/data talent pipelines

Pillar 5:

Leadership and CEO Confidence

Address the key system bottleneck across all sectors while developing senior, board-level and emerging AI leadership capability:

- AI Executive Leadership Programme using relevant apprenticeship units and leadership frameworks where appropriate
- Emerging leaders strand for team leaders, early career professionals, operational managers and AI Champions who drive day-to-day adoption
- Board-level briefings and decision frameworks
- Organisational AI readiness and transformation support
- Risk, governance, and ethical leadership training
- Peer learning networks and leadership cohorts (preferred delivery model)
- Support for leaders in SMEs, public services, education, and third sector organisations

Pillar 6:

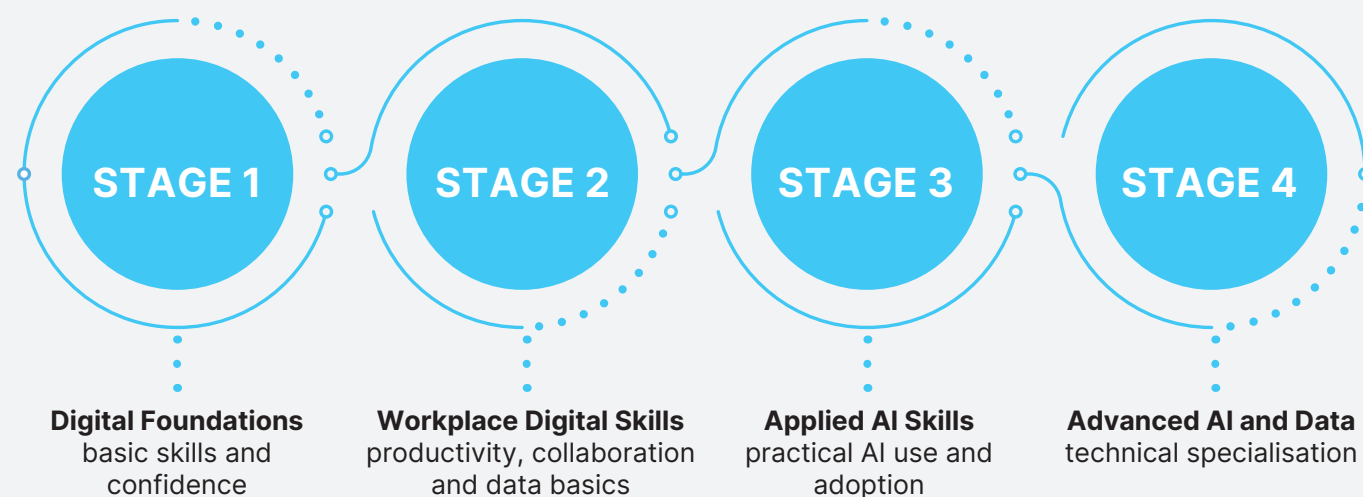
Connected Learning Ecosystem

Create a simple, unified system:

- Hampshire and the Solent AI Skills Portal (“single front door”)
- Searchable, mapped training provision
- AI Skills Chatbot and guidance tools
- Employer toolkits and sector case studies
- Integration with national platforms
- Accessible to all organisation types and sizes



7. AI Skills and Leadership Framework



The stages describe a capability model, not regulated qualification levels. They are intended to help learners, employers and providers understand progression in confidence, workplace use and technical specialisation while allowing existing courses, modules and qualifications to be mapped against the framework.

Cross-Cutting AI Leadership Framework: “AI Driving Licence”

- Understanding AI
- Prompting and evaluation
- Ethical awareness
- Decision-making capability

8. Delivery Model and Governance

Inclusive Ecosystem Delivery

The strategy is delivered through a fully cross-sector partnership model, including:

- Private sector and professional bodies – businesses of all sizes (micro, SMEs, large employers) and representative bodies
- Public sector– local authorities, health and other public services
- Education sector – schools, FE colleges, independent training providers, universities
- Third sector – charities, community organisations, social enterprises and inclusion partners

Governance and Delivery Partners

- Employers and business representative organisations (FSB, Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and Isle of Wight Chamber of Commerce, Business South, BCS etc)
- Public sector bodies (local authorities, Hampshire and the Solent Combined County Authority, DWP)
- Education and training providers
- Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSEs)

Key Structures

- AI Skills & Leadership Steering Group
- Employer Advisory Board
- Inclusion and Community Access Group
- Educator and Trainer Enablement Group
- Training Provider Network
- Emerging Leaders and AI Champions Network

9. Priority Actions, 2026–2029

a. Build Regional AI Confidence and Core Skills

- Develop a shared regional AI core skills framework aligned to the FutureDotNow skills model, enabling providers to map and validate existing AI induction, digital literacy and applied AI provision
- Run a regional AI awareness campaign focused on confidence, curiosity, safe adoption, and practical everyday use
- Create an AIGA trust mark for ethical, inclusive and responsible AI learning and adoption, including accreditation of courses, modules and learning resources that meet agreed standards
- Showcase cross-sector success stories to demonstrate impact across businesses, public services, education, and communities

b. Clarify Qualification, Funding, and Delivery Routes

- Map regulated and non-regulated AI, digital, and data qualification routes available across Hampshire and the Solent
- Review current and emerging funding routes, including post-devolution opportunities, to support AI core skills delivery
- Develop a funding methodology that enables access for businesses, the wider community, and current students in the education system
- Identify gaps where existing qualification and funding routes only meet the needs of a minority of learners or employers

c. Support SMEs, Microbusinesses, and Leaders

- Develop AI onboarding toolkits tailored to SMEs, microbusinesses, public services, education, and third sector organisations
- Use FutureDotNow-style assessment of business need to identify practical AI and digital capability gaps

- Establish peer learning cohorts and AI Champions to support shared problem-solving and adoption confidence
- Deliver workplace AI readiness audits and action plans for organisations at different stages of maturity
- Create an emerging leaders and AI Champions strand to support team leaders, early career professionals and operational managers who influence day-to-day adoption

d. Create the “Single Front Door” for AI Skills

- Launch a Hampshire and the Solent AI Skills Portal as a single front door for employers, learners, communities, and providers
- Provide clear information on available courses, qualification routes, funding eligibility, and progression pathways
- Simplify navigation for all users, including SMEs, microbusinesses, adult learners, community partners, and current students

e. Establish AI Learning Infrastructure

- Develop community hubs, AI learning spaces, and provider-led delivery centres across the region
- Create an AI Learning Bank and learning management system to support modular, accessible, and reusable learning content
- Enable free, subsidised, and employer-funded access routes so provision can reach excluded groups, businesses, and learners at scale

f. Strengthen Talent Pipeline and Formal Progression

- Align FE, HE, apprenticeship, Skills Bootcamps, Higher Technical Education, HTQ and adult learning provision into clear AI and digital progression pathways



- Use relevant apprenticeship units and frameworks to shape applied AI training where full qualification routes are not yet established
- Expand early career, entry-level, higher technical, HTQ and Level 4–5 technical routes into AI-enabled roles across priority sectors
- Support progression for current students as well as adults already in work or seeking reskilling

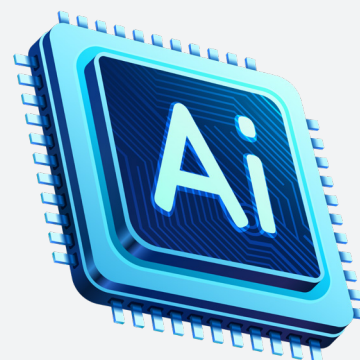
g. Scale Leadership Development and Governance Capability

- Deliver executive AI leadership programmes using relevant apprenticeship units and leadership frameworks where appropriate
- Develop an emerging leaders pathway for team leaders, supervisors, early career professionals and AI Champions to support practical adoption within teams

- Provide board-level briefings, governance frameworks, and ethical decision-making tools
- Create cross-sector leadership cohorts to build shared confidence across businesses, public services, education, and the third sector

h. Establish a regional AI innovation and knowledge exchange programme

- Linking universities, colleges, employers and public sector organisations to accelerate applied research, AI adoption, commercialisation and productivity improvement across priority sectors.



10. Strategic Enablers

Successful delivery of this strategy will depend on a set of practical enablers that turn ambition into sustained action. The first is joined-up funding, drawing together opportunities from national departments, innovation programmes, devolved skills funding, employer investment and emerging lifelong learning routes. A coordinated funding approach will be essential to avoid short-term, disconnected activity and to ensure that AI core skills provision can reach businesses, communities, current students and adults seeking to reskill.

Public-private partnership will also be critical. No single institution can deliver the scale of change required, and the strategy will rely on employers, universities, colleges, local authorities, public services, business representative organisations and community partners working as a coordinated ecosystem. These partnerships will help align provision with real demand, share expertise, support employer engagement and create trusted routes into AI adoption for organisations of every size.

Digital infrastructure and community access will provide the foundations for inclusive participation. AI skills development cannot be separated from access to devices, connectivity, learning spaces and local support. Community hubs, provider-led delivery centres and digital learning platforms will therefore be important in ensuring that provision reaches people who may not engage through traditional education or employer training routes.

Accredited training, micro-credentials and flexible recognition routes will help create confidence in the quality and value of learning. As formal AI qualifications continue to emerge, the region will need a blended approach that uses regulated provision, apprenticeship units, short courses, bootcamps, Higher Technical Education, HTQs, Level 4–5 technical routes and employer-led learning coherently. This will allow individuals to build skills progressively while giving employers clearer signals about capability and readiness.

Finally, bursaries and targeted funding will be required to ensure that inclusion is delivered in practice rather than simply stated as an ambition. Support for learners, SMEs, microbusinesses, community groups and digitally excluded residents will be essential if AI adoption is to strengthen social mobility, widen participation and ensure that the benefits of innovation are shared across Hampshire and the Solent.



11. Success Measures

Success will be measured first by the extent to which **confidence in AI increases** across sectors, organisation sizes and communities. This will include evidence that individuals feel more able to understand, question and use AI safely, and that employers are moving from curiosity or uncertainty into practical adoption. Increased confidence should be visible across private, public, education and third sector organisations, with particular attention to SMEs and microbusinesses that may otherwise find AI adoption difficult to access or prioritise.

A second measure of success will be **the scale and quality of AI adoption** by employers, especially smaller organisations. This should include increased use of AI tools to improve productivity, customer service, workforce planning, operational efficiency and innovation. The strategy should also demonstrate that employers are accessing practical support, completing readiness assessments, participating in peer learning, and adopting AI in ways that are ethical, proportionate and aligned to their business needs.

Leadership participation and capability will provide another important indicator of impact. Success will be shown through engagement in executive AI leadership programmes, board-level briefings, governance support, emerging leader pathways, AI Champions activity and cross-sector leadership cohorts. More importantly, it should be demonstrated through improved organisational decision-making, clearer AI governance, stronger risk management and greater confidence among leaders at all levels to make informed investment and adoption choices.

The strategy must also show measurable progress in **reducing digital exclusion** and widening participation. This will include improved access to devices, connectivity, community learning, targeted bursaries and inclusive support for groups that face barriers to digital and AI skills development, including people living in areas of high deprivation. Success should be assessed not only through participation numbers, but through evidence that learners from under-represented and excluded groups are progressing, gaining confidence and accessing new opportunities.

Progression into **AI, data and digitally enabled roles** will be a key long-term measure of whether the regional talent pipeline is strengthening. This includes progression from foundational

learning into higher-level study, apprenticeships, bootcamps, employment, career change and advanced technical roles. Measures should capture both specialist pathways into AI and data occupations and broader progression into AI-enabled roles across the region's priority sectors. Innovation and Economic Impact: Measure the number of AI-related knowledge exchange partnerships, university-business collaborative projects, AI innovation funding secured, AI spin-outs and start-ups supported, research commercialisation activity, inward investment linked to AI capability, and new AI-enabled products, services and processes developed within regional organisations.

Finally, success will be assessed through **employer, learner and stakeholder satisfaction**.



The strategy should demonstrate that the system is easier to navigate, provision is relevant to real need, partnerships are adding value, and learners and organisations feel supported throughout their AI journey. These qualitative measures will be important alongside numerical indicators, because the overall ambition is not only to increase activity, but to create a trusted, inclusive and sustainable regional AI skills ecosystem.

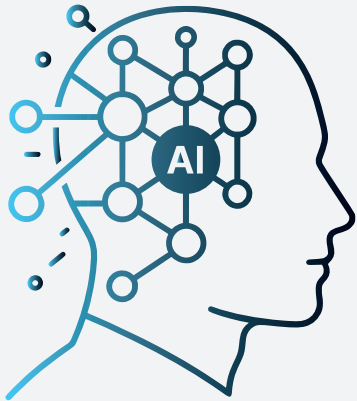
12. Conclusion

This strategy represents more than a response to technological change - it is a deliberate programme to enable a regional cultural shift from hesitation to confidence, from fragmentation to coordination, and from passive awareness to active adoption. By embedding a joined-up, inclusive, and cross-sector approach, this will create the conditions for positive transformational change that is felt across businesses, communities, and public services alike.



The Hampshire and the Solent area can become a national model for AI leadership and skills by:

- Designing a system that works for all organisations
- Embedding inclusion and accessibility from the outset
- Supporting leadership confidence and practical adoption
- Aligning a strong, cross-sector partnership ecosystem



Through sustained investment in skills immersion at every level - from digital foundations to advanced AI capability - the area will build a resilient and future-ready talent pipeline, ensuring that individuals can continuously adapt, progress, and thrive in an evolving labour market. This will not only support workforce readiness but also act as a catalyst for economic growth, driving productivity, innovation, and competitiveness across the economy.

This strategy recognises that ultimately, the Hampshire and the Solent area has the assets, partnerships, and ambition to become a national exemplar of inclusive, responsible AI adoption - where technology, skills, and leadership come together to deliver sustainable prosperity and improved wellbeing for all.

Crucially, this strategy positions AI not simply as a technical tool, but as an enabler of better outcomes for people and places. By empowering organisations of all sizes and across all sectors to adopt AI responsibly, the region can unlock new opportunities for high-quality employment, inward investment, and business growth, while also improving public service delivery and community resilience.



In the longer term, the impact extends beyond the economy. Increased integration of AI - underpinned by strong leadership, ethical frameworks, and inclusive access - has the potential to support healthier, longer, and more productive lives, enabling individuals to access better services, make more informed decisions, and participate more fully in society. It will enhance career pathways, social mobility, and quality of life, ensuring that the benefits of innovation are shared widely.

13. Implementation Roadmap

The roadmap translates the strategy into a phased delivery programme from mobilisation through to regional scale and sustainability. It is designed to maintain momentum while allowing the AI Growth Alliance and partners to test, refine and scale activity in response to employer demand, learner need and emerging national policy.

	Phase 1 Mobilise and Align 2026	Phase 2 Pilot and Prove 2026-2027	Phase 3 Scale and Integrate 2027-2028	Phase 4 Sustain and Lead 2028-2029
Strategic Focus	Create the delivery foundations and shared regional framework.	Test practical delivery with employers, learners and communities.	Extend delivery across the region and embed progression pathways.	Embed sustainability and position the region as a national exemplar.
Key Activities	Establish governance structures; map existing provision and funding routes; agree the FutureDotNow-aligned core skills framework; identify priority sectors, communities in areas of high deprivation and SME cohorts; design the single front door, trust mark approach and initial communications campaign.	Pilot AI core skills validation and mapped provision; run SME and microbusiness readiness audits; launch AI awareness activity; test leadership briefings, emerging leader pathways and peer cohorts; develop community access routes and train-the-trainer support; trial the AI Skills Portal prototype and employer toolkits.	Scale successful pilots; expand AI Champions, train-the-trainer activity and leadership cohorts; integrate FE, HE, apprenticeship, bootcamp, Higher Technical Education, HTQ and adult learning routes; launch the full AI Skills Portal; strengthen employer referrals; develop micro-credentials and recognised progression routes.	Secure ongoing investment; refresh provision against emerging AI developments; publish impact evidence; strengthen the AIGA trust mark; promote regional case studies; align with national qualification and funding changes; prepare the next strategy cycle.
Outputs	Steering group, employer board, provider network, inclusion group, provision map, funding methodology and implementation plan.	Pilot curriculum, readiness tools, leadership programme, inclusion delivery model, portal prototype and early case studies.	Regional delivery network, live portal, expanded learning bank, recognised progression pathways and larger employer/community cohorts.	Sustainable funding model, annual impact report, mature governance, recognised quality framework and next-phase delivery plan.
Success Evidence	Partners mobilised; baseline measures agreed; delivery priorities confirmed.	Participation, confidence gains, employer feedback and evidence of practical AI adoption.	Increased reach, improved navigation, progression into further learning and measurable employer adoption.	Sustained participation, improved productivity evidence, stronger talent pipeline and national recognition.

Delivery discipline:

Each phase should be supported by clear ownership, quarterly reporting, learner and employer feedback, equality impact monitoring and annual review against the strategy's success measures.

Appendix 1: Diagrammatical Summary of the Strategic Pillars

The six strategic pillars work together as a connected pathway: building inclusion and confidence, developing workplace readiness, enabling practical AI adoption, growing specialist capability, strengthening leadership, and creating a simple regional system that connects learners, employers and providers.



Pillar 1
Digital Foundations for All
Inclusive access, core digital confidence, community delivery and removal of barriers to participation.



Pillar 2
Workplace Digital and AI Readiness
Essential workplace capability, digital tools, collaboration, cyber awareness, data literacy and productivity skills.



Pillar 3
AI Awareness and Applied Skills
Practical AI use, prompting, automation, sector applications, SME onboarding and AI Champions.



Pillar 4
Advanced Data and AI Skills
Specialist technical pathways in data analytics, machine learning, cloud, cyber, AI engineering, innovation, Higher Technical Education, HTQs and Level 4–5 technical routes.

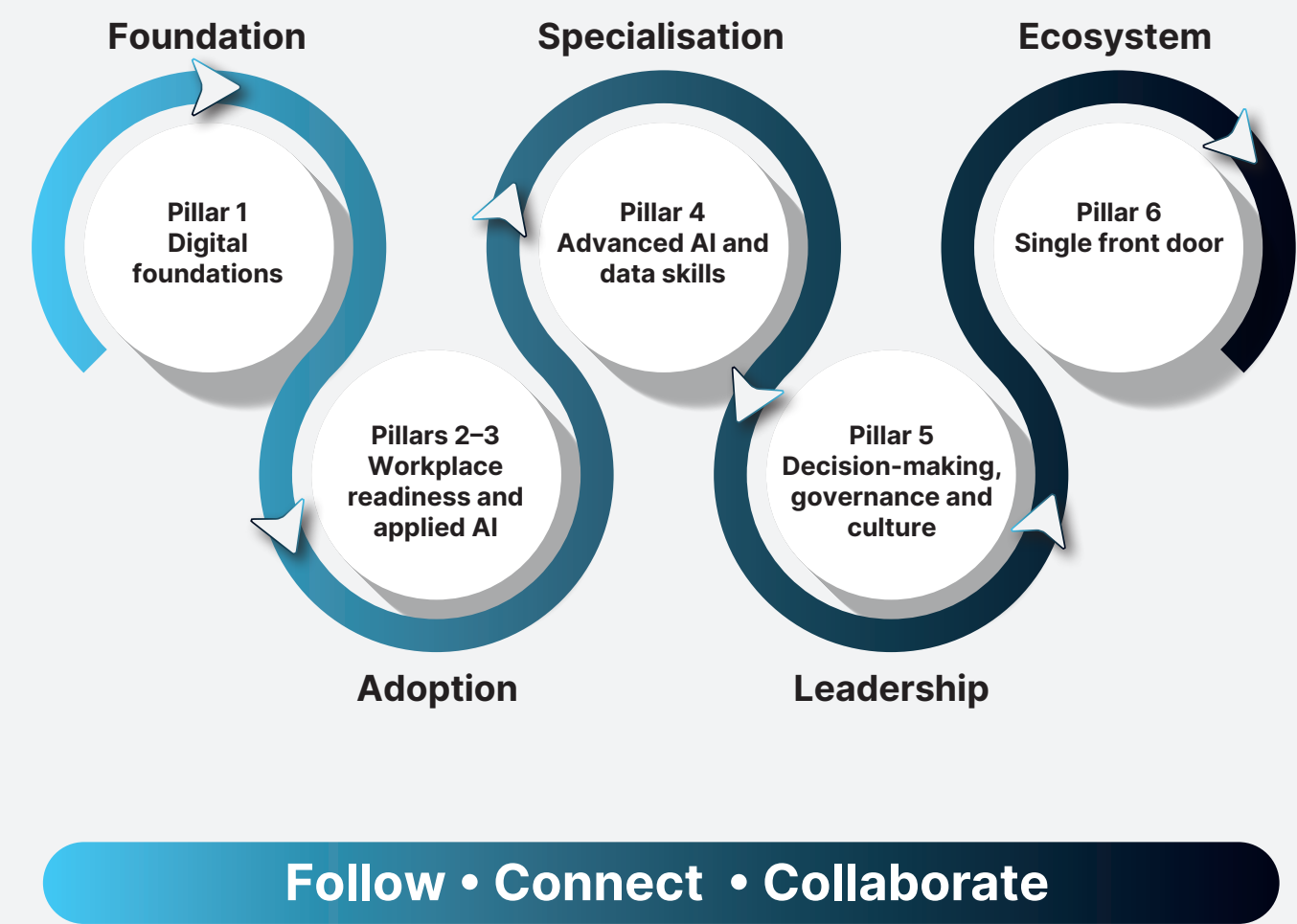


Pillar 5
Leadership and CEO Confidence
Board, executive, senior and emerging leader confidence, governance, risk, ethics, ROI, organisational transformation and AI Champions.



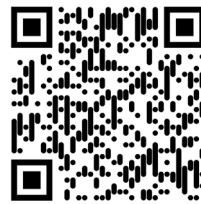
Pillar 6
Connected Learning Ecosystem
A single front door, mapped provision, guidance tools, employer resources and coherent regional pathways.

Strategic flow: Digital inclusion and confidence create the foundation for workplace readiness; workplace readiness enables practical AI adoption; practical adoption creates demand for advanced and higher technical skills; advanced skills require confident leadership at senior and emerging levels; and all activity is connected through a single, navigable learning ecosystem.





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