

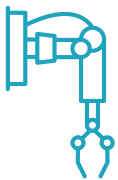


AI: Is Scotland ahead of the game?

Scotland is often described as the “best wee country in the world”, but can this “wee country” be seen as a centre of excellence for the development of artificial intelligence (AI)? Absolutely!

From the establishment of new centres for AI at a number of our universities to the exciting Scottish based technology start-ups that are looking to innovate further in this sector, Scotland is well placed to make its mark on the development of artificial intelligence and take advantage of the future opportunities available in this space.

So, what is the big deal about AI?



AI and its importance for Scottish businesses

AI essentially refers to systems or technology which is designed to perform certain tasks that would normally require human intelligence such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making and translation between languages.

AI means different things to different people; even as you are reading this you will no doubt have thought about self-driving cars, robots that can impersonate humans, Amazon’s Alexa and many more examples. Its importance cannot be understated. It is progressively becoming part of every day life and companies across the world are realising the commercial benefits of investing in AI.

In a time of economic uncertainty, the benefits of AI for businesses cannot be underestimated. The development of AI can reduce operational costs, increase efficiency, grow revenue and improve customer experience. The ability for businesses to customise customer needs and content is a huge attraction for consumers and can act as a clear differentiator between competitors.



AI use in Scotland and Future Opportunities

In October 2018, CBI Scotland along with the University of Edinburgh hosted an event at the University’s new Bayes Centre covering data-science and artificial intelligence. At the event, Minister for Trade, Investment and Innovation Ivan McKee MSP stated:



Scotland is well placed to be a global leader in the development of artificial intelligence and other digital technologies. These emerging trends present exciting opportunities for Scotland and can be a key driver for growth and productivity.

You can certainly see why. At the turn of the millennium, the University of Edinburgh was home to one of the first AI departments in the world and now the Bayes Centre is at the heart of innovation in AI for the University. The Bayes Centre is the first of five 'data innovation hubs' being created as part of the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal, to foster closer collaboration between industry and academia. The centre will, through activities across education, research, and innovation, work to power the interaction of people, data and systems. With the centre likely to host up to 600 researchers, students and partners from a wide variety of industries and sectors, it is almost certain to be a beacon for AI development and growth in Scotland.

Separately, the University has already announced partnerships with Wayra UK (Telefonica's open innovation programme, in relation to an AI and Blockchain accelerator aiming to accept 20 start-ups per year with the aim of providing advice and mentorship to take ideas through to investment) and Cisco (to collaborate on opportunities in AI and data driven innovation). The University is a key player in developing entrepreneurship across AI in Scotland.

It is not only Edinburgh where opportunities lie for AI development. The University of St Andrews revealed in November 2018 that it was launching a GBP 15m centre to assess how AI could improve patient diagnoses, treatments and outcomes in the health sector. In addition, Glasgow was recently earmarked for a GBP 15.8m artificial intelligence health research centre to be based at the University of Glasgow's Clinical Innovation Zone at the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital. The centre's work will look to deliver significant benefits for patients through developing more rapid treatment for strokes, expert chest x-ray reading, rapid and more accurate diagnosis in gynaecological disease and colon cancer and partly automated mammogram analysis for breast cancer screening. AI will be at the forefront of such developments.

In the private sector, Edinburgh-headquartered Big Data uses artificial intelligence to put customer data at the heart of their clients' digital transformation programmes and already has a number of global clients including AirAsia and Selfridges. Big Data have announced a partnership with Incremental Group (the Glasgow based leader in data science and digital technology services) as it looks to develop scale, flexibility and add expertise to meet increasing demand for Big Data's services, whilst extending Incremental Group's reach into the travel and retail sectors.

These developments, along with Scotland's reputation for emerging and established tech companies offers an exciting basis for Scotland to have global reach in AI.



What does the future hold?

Clearly, Scotland is making substantial progress in both the private and public sectors in the development for AI technology. These developments, combined with world-leading facilities, infrastructure and development capabilities look set to strengthen Scotland's place as a centre of excellence for AI technology.

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