

# City Region Deal to tackle digital skills gap

A major part of the Edinburgh and South East City Region Deal is given the go-ahead today. The £661m Data Driven Innovation scheme will train 100,000 people in data skills over the next decade, from computer science specialists to traditional jobs that will increasingly use data.

*The University of Edinburgh and Heriot-Watt University announce that they will work together to train 100,000 people in data skills and help 1,000 organisations through data*



Data Science Workshop, Newbattle High School.  
PHOTO Lesley Martin

Two of our universities, The University of Edinburgh and

Heriot-Watt University, have today launched a new plan to improve digital skills across south east Scotland.

They say that this new venture will transform Edinburgh and its surrounding area into the data capital of Europe. This was promised by the Prime Minister when she visited Edinburgh to sign the deal last month.



## Prime Minister arriving at The Informatics Building

It is estimated that Scotland needs around 13,000 extra workers each year with data skills as the workplace is transformed. The Scottish Government's Digital Strategy, published in 2017, included plans to tackle this digital skills gap while growing the Scottish economy.

Together, the two universities will increase the provision of data science teaching for their students, and support schools and colleges across the region to provide digital skills teaching and training. The region's supercomputing capabilities will also be strengthened with investment in a data analysis facility, which will help 1,000 organisations use data to innovate within their sectors.

Secretary of State for Scotland, David Mundell, said: "This exciting project – backed by £270m of UK Government investment – will ensure that the UK leads the world in technologies of the future and benefits from the economic growth opportunities this brings.

"By giving 100,000 people, and 1,000 companies, the skills and capability they need to drive innovation through big data and artificial intelligence, this partnership working will help maximise the potential of these sectors – a key goal of the UK Government's Modern Industrial Strategy."

Professor Charlie Jeffery, Senior Vice Principal, University of Edinburgh, said: "The University's strengths in data science have been driving innovation in the public and private sectors, for the past decade and more, through our research and the skills our graduates bring into the regional economy. The City Region Deal will now give us the capacity to do much more across a wider range of sectors, including healthcare, robotics and fintech. But perhaps the most important part of the Deal is our commitment to ensure people in the region can build the skills to flourish in the data-driven economy.

“So we are working not just in our universities, but also with schools, colleges and businesses so people have the opportunities to develop data skills across their life-course. This could include young people about to enter the workforce, women returning after career breaks, or people looking to reskill in mid-career. We know that data-driven innovation will bring economic growth – we want that growth to be inclusive and open to all.”

Professor Richard A Williams, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Heriot-Watt University, said: “By working in partnership we can ensure our city community can prosper and achieve its obvious potential as the leading international research hub for digital innovation. Our frontier research and educational skills in digital technology and its application in artificial intelligence and robotics are already shaping and driving the future and taking Scottish innovation to the world.”

Jarmo Eskelinen has been appointed to lead the Data-Driven Innovation initiative. He comes to Edinburgh from his previous role as Chief Innovation and Technology Officer of the London-based Future Cities Catapult initiative.

Welcoming his new role, Jarmo Eskelinen said: “Data is the new soil, and collaboration the seeds. The Data-Driven Innovation initiative is unique in its ambition and scale. It’s been designed to reach out to the whole City Region, so we can develop and test new services to meet the needs of our citizens.

“I am extremely honoured to join the programme team and have the chance to collaborate with and learn from the world-leading experts of the two Universities. I look forward to helping a diverse range of organisations benefit from the fast-developing field of data-driven innovation.”

The £1.3bn [Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal](#) was announced by the Prime Minister and First Minister at the

University of Edinburgh on 7 August. It aims to drive growth for everyone across the area and includes investment in transport, housing, culture and skills and employability.