



NUdata PhD student Luke McMullen (left) pictured with Dr Jason Byrne, Senior Data Scientist at consumer health company Haleon

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Boost for North East data science training centre

The North East's specialist data intensive science training centre has reached a major milestone following an event bringing together the next generation of data scientists and employers from across the UK.

[NUdata](#) is a £1.3 million Centre for Doctoral Training, jointly run by Northumbria and Newcastle Universities and part funded by the UK government through the [Science and Technology Facilities Council](#) (STFC).

The centre, which [opened last year](#), connects world-leading researchers from both universities with PhD students with a passion for big data and organisations across the UK looking to invest in and build on their data science expertise.

It recently held its first industry event, with organisations including the BBC, the Met Office and the National Audit Office attending to find out how they can work with staff and students from NUdata to incorporate data science into their day-to-day activity.

One of the organisations involved was [Haleon](#), a leading consumer health company formed through the de-merger from British pharmaceutical business GSK, which manufactures products such as Sensodyne toothpaste, Panadol painkillers and Centrum vitamins.

Dr Jason Byrne is a Senior Data Scientist within Haleon's data science team and believes bringing together commercial and academic expertise is beneficial for all involved.

He said: "Academia and industry can often be siloed from each other, but through NUdata we are able to work together, applying the latest research to real-life scenarios.

"As an organisation we need to ensure that the data we gather within our business is representative and covers the diversity of our consumers. Working with NUdata enables us to work with scientists and students who apply rigour in their scientific methods.

"It's also about innovating and ensuring we have access to the latest skills and thinking. The skills the students bring to our organisation compliments our data science work, ensuring our business strategy is set up to deliver value to our end consumer.

"The benefit for the students is exploring the different ways they can apply their knowledge. The skills they are learning are cutting edge and placements are a great way to see how that knowledge can be applied in the real world.

"It's a rewarding process for everyone because the partnership allows us to

deliver new ways of working and product innovation while at the same time fitting with the student's passions and values.”

Luke McMullan is among NUdata's first cohort of PhD students. He applied following a Masters in Astrophysics at Edinburgh University where he developed an interest in solar physics and machine learning. He was drawn to Northumbria University due to its international reputation for excellence in both fields.

Luke will spend six months of his four-year doctorate on an industrial placement, with the recent NUdata event being the first opportunity to meet with the organisations he may work with.

He said: “Sometimes as a PhD student you can get very focussed on your particular area of research, and you forget that the skills you are learning are extremely well regarded and open up many doors.

“Events such as this give us the opportunity to meet with people from organisations using data science and find out more about how we can apply our skills out there in the real world.

“It's always a good idea to be open to new possibilities and areas with the field of data science and everyone I've met today has been so interesting and passionate about this area, it's been really inspirational.”

More than 40 organisations have signed up as NUdata industrial partners, including Marks and Spencer, Northumbrian Water, Ordnance Survey, Procter & Gamble, Tesco and the World Food Programme – all of which rely heavily on big data to deliver their services.

The Government has stated that it is keen to make the UK a leader in artificial intelligence and data science and there is an urgent need for data scientists qualified at PhD level across all sectors.

The Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (oversight of which has now passed to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology) asked research councils to support the development of these crucial roles through doctoral training centres, with NUdata one of five set up in response to this need.

[Professor James McLaughlin](#), head of Northumbria University's [Solar and Space Physics](#) research group, led the bid to create the [NUdata](#) Centre For Doctoral Training In Data Intensive Science.

Speaking about the first industry event, he said: "Data intensive science is a rapidly growing area of research and importance, with big data now essential to so many elements of our daily lives and used by a wide variety of organisations.

"Our NUdata industry partners include household names, large multinationals, government-type organisations and local SMEs, and they all use data intensive science in different ways, highlighting the breadth and scope of this field.

"This was the first industry event held as part of the NUdata project and there was a real feeling of excitement about the future possibilities this partnership represents.

"Together with our talented PhD students and industry partners we are right at the forefront of new innovations in this area of research."

Also attending the event was Dr Caroline Chibelushi of the [Knowledge Transfer Network](#), part of [UK Research and Innovation](#). Speaking about the value of partnerships between academia and industry, she said: "NUdata demonstrates an exceptional approach to fostering the development of future data science talent. Their methodology is rooted in scientific principles and leverages state-of-the-art computer science techniques to address intricate problems.

"What particularly impressed me was their strong partnership with diverse industries, showcasing a proactive commitment to bridging the gap between academia and the professional sphere.

"By providing students with invaluable opportunities to interact with potential employers and explore different sectors, NUdata ensures that graduates are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the workforce upon graduation. I express my sincere appreciation to NUdata for implementing such a highly effective strategy for cultivating talent."

Find out more about the [NUdata STFC Centre For Doctoral Training In Data Intensive Science](#).

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