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Record funding boost enhances Northumbria's global reputation for AI research and teaching

Northumbria University has been named as one of 12 Centres for Doctoral Training in Artificial Intelligence as part of a major £117m funding announcement by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

The centres, based at 16 universities, will train the next generation of AI researchers and innovators, benefitting the UK's economy and society. Doctoral students will specialise in areas such as AI for robotics, digital healthcare, decision making and sustainability.

The UKRI funding includes up to £9 million for Northumbria, making it one of the largest single awards the University has ever received.

The centre at Northumbria will be known as the UKRI AI Centre for Doctoral Training in Citizen-Centred Artificial Intelligence, and will recruit its first cohort of students to start in September 2024. It will involve academics from across the University and will focus on the inclusion of citizens in the design and evaluation of AI – helping to ensure the rapidly advancing technology works for everyone.

Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology Michelle Donelan said: “The UK is at the very front of the global race to turn AI’s awesome potential into a giant leap forward for people’s quality of life and productivity at work, all while ensuring this technology works safely, ethically and responsibly.

“The plans we are announcing today will future-proof our nation’s skills base, meaning we can reap the benefits of AI as it continues to develop. At the same time, we are taking the first steps to put the power of this technology to work, for good, across Government and society.”

Professor Shaun Lawson, who will be the Director of the UKRI AI Centre for Doctoral Training in Citizen-Centred Artificial Intelligence at Northumbria, said: “To be selected for this UKRI funding is a clear recognition of Northumbria’s growing research reputation, and represents a superb opportunity for prospective doctoral students looking to progress in this globally significant field.

“Our main goal with the Centre will be to make AI work for all citizens as well as government and businesses, by embedding citizen engagement in the design, evaluation and governance of AI systems.

“We will teach our students to design AI products, systems and services that connect citizens and their data to government, industry and other organisations in ways that prioritise peoples’ thoughts, needs, rights, and aspirations. The Centre will take the fundamental position that only through inclusion of citizens in the design and evaluation of AI can the UK’s ambitions for a society - and economy - that fully embraces AI be achieved.”

Professor Andy Long, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of Northumbria, added: “The significance of this announcement cannot be overstated. It further enhances the University’s international reputation for excellence and reflects the depth of cross-disciplinary collaboration and expertise we have in key areas where the UK is seeking to lead the world. The Centre’s focus on citizen-centred AI also aligns closely with our mission to promote social mobility and inclusivity, unlocking potential for all through our research and teaching.”

“Having such an important Centre for Doctoral Training on our campus right here in the heart of Newcastle will help attract new talent and investment into the region, reinforcing Northumbria’s place and role as an anchor institution in the North East.”

Cllr Nick Kemp, Leader of Newcastle City Council, said: “It is fantastic recognition of the leading research undertaken at Northumbria University that they have been named as one of 12 Centres for Doctoral Training in Artificial Intelligence. This further cements our city as a leading player in this ever-growing area.

“The historic devolution deal the North East has agreed with Government is set to have AI, and the ethics of its use, as an early priority when the new combined authority comes into effect, and this funding for Northumbria University will enhance Newcastle’s position as a city working to ensure AI works for everyone.

“AI has the power to be truly transformative and I’m incredibly proud to see our city playing such an important role in its development.”

UKRI Chief Executive, Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser, said: “The UK is in a strong position to harness the power of AI to transform many aspects of our lives for the better. Crucial to this endeavour is nurturing the talented people and teams we need to apply AI to a broad spectrum of challenges, from healthy aging to sustainable agriculture, ensuring its responsible and trustworthy adoption. UKRI is investing £117 million in Centres for Doctoral Training to develop the talented researchers and innovators we need for success.”

Dr Kedar Pandya, Executive Director, Cross-Council Programmes at UKRI, said: “This £118 million investment, will involve multiple business and

institutional partners for the Centres of Doctoral Training. These include well-known brands such as IBM, Astra Zeneca, and Google, as well as small to medium sized enterprises that are innovating in the AI field. A further £110 million has been leveraged from all partners in the form of cash or in-kind contributions such as use of facilities, resources or expertise.”

For more information on research at Northumbria please visit:

www.northumbria.ac.uk/research

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