Critical AI literacy for all (June 2025)
Open letter

Responding to the launch by the Prime Minister of a national skills drive on AI focussed technical/functional skills for students and workers, but without addressing wider issues of living with AI, we are inviting support for the below open letter that calls for complementary investment and action to deliver independent and inclusive critical AI literacy building for all.

- ***The letter has now been sent*** *and formal signatures are closed.*

- *You can still sign-up to get updates on this work.*

Who are we?

The initial draft was put forward by Tim Davies of Connected by Data (tim@connectedbydata.org), the non-profit campaign for community voice in the governance of data and AI, and circulated through the Data and AI Civil Society Network, an open network that brings together diverse civil society organisations and campaigners to share and collaborate on policy, campaigns and advocacy on data and AI.

The draft has been improved with inputs from Susan M Oman (University of Sheffield), Tania Duarte (We and AI), Louis Coiffait-Gunn (CILIP), Jen Persson (Defend Digital Me), Elinor Carmi (University of London), Denis R Newman-Griffis (University of Sheffield), Andrew M Cox (University of Sheffield), Kari Gerstheimer (Access Social Care) & Kevin Keith (Chair, UK Open Government Network) contributing in personal capacities. The text was finalised by Tim Davies. Signatories on the final letter text will be updated at the bottom of the document periodically.

Open Letter to the UK Government: Prioritising AI Literacy for All Citizens

To *Prime Minister Keir Starmer; the Rt Hon Peter Kyle MP, Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology; the Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, Secretary of State for Education*

While the recent £187 million government investment in digital skills and AI education is welcome, we urge the government to recognise that true AI readiness requires investing in *critical AI literacy for all* citizens[1]. This includes providing opportunities for parents, older people, the voluntary sector, people from underserved and marginalised communities, and individuals from every walk of life to develop their own understanding of, and perspectives on, AI.

Currently, less than 25% of the population feels their views and values are represented in decisions being made about AI[2]. This significant gap in public engagement highlights the necessity of broader AI literacy. As a recent article by members of the public advising the Public Voices in AI programme stated, "the lived experience and expertise of members of the public must be at the heart of guiding how AI is built and used"[3]. Without comprehensive public understanding and sustained engagement, developing trustworthy AI and maintaining public trust in it will be a significant challenge.

Building critical AI literacy for all requires accessible and independent materials, beyond a focus on individual companies and tools, alongside a range of opportunities for different communities to engage critically with learning about AI in context: not just how to adopt and use AI[4]. We must move beyond the perception that AI is primarily about the technology: it affects all of our lives. The Scottish AI Alliance's "Living with AI" course is an excellent example of accessible, free online learning designed for anybody to become informed

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[1] We define critical AI literacy as incorporating AI skills that exceed technical training to incorporate broader understanding and awareness of social and environmental impacts of specific technologies and contexts, and the structural forces that shape them.
[2] https://attitudestoai.uk/
[3] https://connectedbydata.org/blog/2025/06/05/public-voices-ai-citizens-should-shape-our-ai-future
[4] As outlined in the explanatory notes to Article 20 of the **Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law** signed by the UK in September 2024. See https://rm.coe.int/1680afae67

about AI, regardless of their prior knowledge or experience. AHRC projects through BRAID[5], and EPSRC work through Responsible AI UK's skills projects also demonstrate the development of AI learning contextualised to the needs of different groups[6]. Such initiatives, developed by research and civil society groups independent of industry, show that effective and independent learning models are already available to build upon. Government leadership and support is urgently needed to scale up this work in collaboration with civil society and academia not just tech companies.

Indeed, other countries around the world already have open access national education programmes on AI, with notable AI literacy work ongoing across Europe in countries like Finland (Elements of AI), Germany, and France, which are actively fostering public understanding of this technology. In Canada, the government recently backed the RAISE programme to support ethical use of AI by non-profits[7]. The UK should learn from these examples and support the efforts of existing trusted institutions like libraries and community groups to develop AI literacy at scale and with modest investments.

We urge the government to recognise that true AI readiness means fostering an informed and engaged citizenry. To that end, we specifically call for a **dedicated focus on scaling and sustaining comprehensive critical AI literacy programmes for all citizens**. Furthermore, we respectfully request **a meeting with relevant government officials to explore how this vital public education can be co-created and delivered with civil society and academic partners.** By investing in independent AI literacy initiatives that are accessible to all, the UK can help to ensure that its AI future is shaped by public voices, building trust and unlocking the full potential of AI for the benefit of everyone.

Sincerely,

>> **To sign (or express interest in signing once a final text) please fill in this form**

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[5] https://braiduk.org/
[6] https://rai.ac.uk/research-1/skills-project/
[7]

https://betakit.com/government-backed-program-aims-to-help-canadian-non-profits-adopt-responsible-ai/

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38. Janet Wiegold , People's Panel on AI
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40. Judy Robertson, University of Edinburgh
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Signatures now closed and letter sent.