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Tech Nation opens applications for UK's first ever Applied AI growth programme

- Tech Nation has opened applications for its first ever Applied AI 1.0 programme
- Applicants for the six-month programme will be selected by a judging panel made up of leading AI experts, with successful entries starting the programme in September
- This free, nationwide programme will primarily serve as a practical network for founders, facilitating peer-to-peer learning across the C-suite (CEO, CTO, COO and more)
- The UK is a leader in AI, and the Applied AI programme is a key deliverable against the Government's AI and Data Sector Deal
- Investment in AI technology grew almost six-fold from 2014 to 2018, with UK AI scaleups raising almost double that of France, Germany and the rest of Europe combined in 2018

Tech Nation, the leading scaleup-network for UK entrepreneurs, has today opened applications for its first ever peer-to-peer growth programme for Applied AI businesses.

Applied AI 1.0, working alongside the UK Government's Office for Artificial Intelligence, will start this September and is inspired by Tech Nation's successful [Future Fifty](#), [Upscale](#) and [Fintech](#) programmes. The programme is supported by [Faculty](#), one of the UK's leading AI businesses.

Tech Nation is looking for founders who have a clear vision for how their products solve real problems, and who are applying artificial intelligence in practical areas to create real-world impact.

This free nationwide programme will predominantly serve as a practical network for founders leading Applied AI companies, facilitating peer-to-peer learning across the C-suite (CEO, CTO, COO and more).

Interactions will be structured around sessions that focus on key scaling challenges, identified through conversations with founders and venture capital investors. These sessions will be delivered by later-stage or exited entrepreneurs who have a proven track record of success. The programme will host a series of curated dinners and networking events to help facilitate tailored connections to industry experts, journalists, government and investors. There will also be an opportunity to join an international trip.

This news comes as government announces that up to 2,500 people from underrepresented groups will have the opportunity to retrain and become experts in data science and AI, thanks to a £13.5 million investment to fund new degree and Masters conversion courses and scholarships at UK academic institutions over the next three years.

Applications will be judged by a panel of leading industry experts, including: Dame Wendy Hall, Regius Professor of Computer Science at the University of Southampton; Tabitha Goldstaub, Co-Founder of CognitionX and Chair of UK Government AI Council; Dr Mike Short CBE, Chief Scientific Advisor, DIT; Angie Ma, Co-Founder and COO, Faculty; David Kelnar, Partner and Head of Research, MMC Ventures; Nathan Benaich, Partner, Air Street Capital and others.

The Applied AI programme is being launched in the context of the AI sector in the UK going from strength to strength. From mid 2015 onwards, AI deals started to outpace the wider tech economy.

Some 70% of all AI deals completed globally in the last decade were completed in the last three years. One of the biggest AI fundraises of 2018 was Graphcore, the Bristol startup, which raised \$200m from a consortium of investors. Other UK AI companies which raised funds in 2018 include Renalytix AI, a developer of AI for kidney disease diagnosis, which raised \$29m through an AIM flotation, healthtech company Medopad (\$26m) and Upscale alumni company building HR software, Beamery (\$28m).

Investments in AI have been across all sectors, but fintech and healthtech have seen particularly strong growth. The UK counts at least five AI unicorns amongst the total number of private tech companies with a valuation of \$1bn: these are Darktrace (\$1.7bn valuation), Benevolent AI (\$2.1bn); Improbable (\$2bn); Graphcore (\$1.7bn) and Blue Prism (\$1.3bn).

Minister for Digital and Creative Industries, Margot James MP, commented: “Britain has a long history as a global leader in computing technologies which led to the birth of artificial intelligence. Through our modern Industrial Strategy we are delivering a Britain that works for everyone and one that is a world leader in data-driven technologies. Tech Nation’s new Applied AI programme will help nurture some of our most talented entrepreneurs who use AI to improve people’s lives. I encourage anyone with the talent, ideas and aptitude to apply.”

Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation and Interim Minister of State for Energy and Clean Growth, Chris Skidmore MP, commented: “Artificial Intelligence technologies are transforming the world we live in - we are determined to ensure the UK economy pioneers the use of these, and benefits from the opportunities that they bring. The AI Growth Programme will help businesses to scale up their latest innovations in this area, so that AI can have even more positive impacts on how we live, work and learn. The government is investing £110 million in our AI skills programme, alongside industry investment. This includes new scholarships, masters and post doctorate courses to arm tomorrow’s workforce with the tools they need to do the high-skill, high-paid jobs of the future through our modern Industrial Strategy.”

Gerard Grech, CEO, Tech Nation, commented: “Investment in AI technology has grown almost 6 fold in the last four years, and many AI unicorns are headquartered in the UK, including Darktrace and Graphcore. This significant growth means that the need for access to industry knowledge, connections and insights has never been greater, which is why we’re delighted to announce this latest scaling programme for Applied AI companies.

David Richards, CEO and co-founder of WANdisco, commented: “Britain has long stood as a pioneering force in the adoption and development of technology, dating back to the days of Alan Turing. But when it comes to AI the UK is a genuine world leader – the opportunity to grow extraordinary companies has never been stronger. I’m a firm believer that we should be playing to our strengths. Progress is reliant on research and funding, but finding innovative ways to share experience is a game changer. With the right application, AI offers a £232 billion opportunity for the British economy over the next decade. It’s with programmes like Applied AI that we’ll ensure the momentum continues to be with the UK.”

Harry Davies, Applied AI Lead, Tech Nation, commented: “When you cut through the hype and distant predictions, it can be seen that machine learning is fast becoming a foundational technology that is delivering value today across a wide variety of use cases, as well as creating new ones. It is a layer of automation that will be broadly applicable across everything, similar to ‘mobile’ today. Yet, we heard from founders and investors that scaling a business with AI as the core driver of its value proposition still has unique challenges. It is with this mind that we launch Applied AI 1.0, a supportive network of ‘AI-first’ founders who are looking towards growth. We aim for this community to tackle sector specific scaling challenges, and to bring value to the UK’s AI ecosystem.”

Professor Dame Wendy Hall, Regius Professor of Computer Science at the University of Southampton commented: “The UK has continued to make strides as an international leader in Artificial Intelligence, since the recommendations of the AI Review that I co-authored in 2017. From the launch of the bespoke AI & Data Sector Deal, to the recently announced AI Council, we are seeing impactful initiatives announced to continue this important work. I am therefore thrilled to see that Tech Nation has created a tailored, nationally-focused growth programme for entrepreneurs in the Applied AI space.”

Lopa Patel, MBE, Chair, Diversity UK commented: “I am delighted to join the Tech Nation Applied AI Programme judging panel as the UK is a leader in deep technologies, from new drug discovery methodologies to engineering innovations like autonomous vehicles, in which AI and Machine Learning (ML) are critical tools. It is important to demonstrate strong leadership in supporting startups in this field and as Founder & CEO of Diversity UK, a think tank on equality and inclusion, I am also keen to ensure that ‘bias’ is not advertently built into the business models of this new companies. As I have been involved with the British startup scene for many years, I have witnessed the need to create scale-up pathways for startups; improve access to funding and resources and nurture a wide network of mentors, advisers and partners for high-growth tech companies which Tech Nation has been doing through its successful Upscale and Future Fifty programmes. I hope that the Applied AI programme will be equally as stellar for AI startups.”

Angie Ma's COO & Co-Founder, Faculty, commented: “AI is the transformational technology of our time, but for society to see the benefits we need to apply it in the real-world enhancing products, improving services and saving lives. Tech Nation has been incredible in supporting and nurturing the startup community in the UK. As part of this community, we’ve benefited from a similar programme, Upscale. We’re excited to have the opportunity to give something back to the community. Having delivered over 300 commercial AI projects, we’ve developed a deep understanding of how to apply and operationalise AI successfully across many different sectors of the economy. We’d love to share these learnings as part of the Applied AI Programme to help the next generation of startups to make AI real.”

Michael Dimelow, CCO & Co-founder, ADV, commented: “AI hasn’t really moved on since Turing! The good news is that the UK punches above its weight and produces some of the best computer science talent on the planet. Couple this with an increasing array of AI-specific computer hardware coming to market, means we will soon have the tools and talent to create machines that can think more like a human. If Tech Nation can provide a platform to surface genuine AI entrepreneurs then I’m all in. My experience at Arm may prove useful to founders who are probably embarking on a 10+ year journey, in return perhaps they can beat the test and move beyond Turing! Lets see.”

Volker Hirsch, Partner, Amadeus Capital commented: “AI is a foundational technology bound to have an immense impact on many aspects of our global economy and society at large. Amadeus Capital Partners is one of the most active and long-term investors in the space. The UK is in a leading position on AI and machine learning. I’m keen to support TechNation’s initiative - bringing more attention to the sector and helping to develop UK startups based on this important technology. Applied AI is showing great promise with new and exciting use cases, which I hope to see included in this first cohort.”

The Applied AI 1.0 application deadline is 8th July 2019.

Applicants can apply on the Tech Nation Website, at the following link:

<https://technation.io/applied-ai>

END

Notes to the Editor

Full Tech Nation Applied AI 1.0 Programme judging panel:

- Dr. Angie Ma, COO and Co-founder, Faculty
- David Kelnar, Partner & Head of Research, MMC Ventures
- Gillian Docherty, CEO, The Data Lab
- Jem Davies, GM Machine Learning Group, Arm
- Lopa Patel MBE, Chair, Diversity UK
- Louise Marston, Managing Director, Doteveryone
- Marta Krupinska, Head of Google for Entrepreneurs
- Michael Dimelow, CCO & Co-founder, ADV
- Dr Mike Short CBE, Chief Scientific Officer at Department of International Trade
- Nathan Benaich, Partner Air Street Capital and Venture Partner, Point Nine Capital
- Pratima Aiyagari, AI Lead EMEA, Cisco
- Richard Potter, CEO of Peak
- Sylvain Hanssen, Head of Healthcare Innovation Strategy, Walgreens Boots
- Tabitha Goldstaub, Co-founder, CognitionX and Chair, UK Government AI Council
- Volker Hirsch, Partner, Amadeus Capital
- Professor Dame Wendy Hall, Regius Professor of Computer Science at the University of Southampton