



Scotland's AI Roadmap

Forging the Intelligent Nation: A Blueprint and Action Plan for Scotland as a World Leading AI Nation

Executive Summary

As outlined in Scotland's evolving digital and AI frameworks—including the foundational Scotland's AI Strategy: Trustworthy, Ethical and Inclusive and the recently refreshed 2025 Digital Strategy—the goal is clear. Scotland aims to be a global standard-bearer for AI that is not only technologically advanced but morally sound, economically potent, and socially inclusive.

Scotland is small enough to be agile but large enough to be significant. By "Forging the Intelligent Nation," Scotland is not just adopting technology; it is crafting a society where technology serves the common good.

Success depends on an inclusive process, robust evidence, diverse voices and lasting consensus. This book is a practical guide for building that roadmap.

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Introduction

Scotland stands at a crossroads. Artificial intelligence is no longer a distant prospect debated in Silicon Valley or Beijing; it is reshaping economies, public services, labour markets and the very fabric of daily life.

Nations that move with clarity, ambition and inclusive governance will capture disproportionate advantage in the decades ahead. Those that hesitate, or allow the technology to develop in an uncoordinated or extractive way, risk becoming passive consumers of systems designed elsewhere.

This book is about ensuring Scotland becomes the former.

In 2024, the Scottish Government committed to producing a National AI Strategy and Roadmap – a recognition that artificial intelligence demands a deliberate, whole-of-nation response. Yet a strategy document alone is insufficient. What matters is the process by which it is created, the breadth of voices it reflects, the rigour of the evidence that underpins it, and the political and societal consensus that sustains it over time.

This is not another generic treatise on “why AI matters.” It is a practical, candid account of how a small, inventive nation with devolved powers, world-class universities, a proud civic tradition and a distinctive set of values can design and deliver an AI roadmap that is ambitious, ethical and unmistakably Scottish.

We explore the hard questions that every nation must confront, but which Scotland is unusually well-placed to answer:

- How do we harness AI to accelerate net-zero transition and strengthen rural communities rather than widen urban-rural divides?
- How can a nation of five-and-a-half million people build sovereign capability in foundational models and critical infrastructure without naive attempts at autarky?
- What does “ethical AI” actually mean when trade-offs between fairness, accuracy and innovation are inevitable?
- How do we govern data as a public asset while respecting privacy and encouraging entrepreneurship?
- And, perhaps most importantly, how do we bring citizens – not just experts or ministers – into the heart of these decisions?

Drawing on comparative lessons from Singapore to Estonia, Denmark to Canada, and on Scotland's own experience with strategies on cyber resilience, data and renewable energy, this book sets out a replicable framework for developing a national AI roadmap.

It is written for civil servants and ministers, yes, but also for academics, start-up founders, trade unionists, community councils, teachers and students – anyone who believes that Scotland's future with artificial intelligence should be shaped here, by us, for the common good.

The age of AI will not pause while we perfect our institutions or reconcile every difference of opinion.

But if we act with urgency, imagination and a quintessentially Scottish blend of pragmatism and principle, we can build an intelligent nation that leads rather than follows – one that proves small countries can still punch far above their weight in the defining technological contest of the twenty-first century.