CRAC
The Career Development Organisation

AI and data science postgraduate conversion course scholarship programme

Evaluation: Third interim report

Report to the Office for Students by the Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC)

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Contents

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Executive summary

This is the third published interim report of our evaluation of Phase 2 of the postgraduate conversion course (PGCC) programme ("the programme"), which aims to diversify artificial intelligence (AI) and data science workforce pipeline. Phase 1 of the programme (2019-23) provided initial funding to develop and expand postgraduate conversion courses in these subjects at English universities, with a focus on increasing capacity and piloting approaches to increasing diversity, including through scholarships. Phase 2 (2023-25) expanded the programme, with an emphasis on targeting scholarships to students from under-represented groups and scaling up PGCC provision across more providers and courses. The programme is managed by the Office for Students (OfS).

The programme has three core objectives:

- Increase diversity among graduates entering the UK AI and data science workforce;
- Increase the supply of digitally skilled workers by supporting graduates who did not study a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) undergraduate degree (referred to in this report as "conversion students").
- Increase industry support to diversify the sector.

Phase 2 of the programme, which delivered funding from 2023-2025, funded up to 1,635 scholarships for UK-domiciled students eligible for a Postgraduate Master's Loan, prioritising women, Black students, disabled students, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. These scholarships supported study on 70 AI and data science conversion courses in academic years 2023-24 and 2024-25. These courses make up about one-third of all MSc offerings in these subjects in England, so the programme has the potential to have a significant effect upon total entry to the UK AI and data science workforce.

According to higher education providers' monitoring reports submitted to the OfS, 4,460 students enrolled on programme courses starting in 2024-25, contributing to a total of at least 8,710 enrolments[1] on courses funded by the programme to date, and a cumulative total of at least 16,314 across both phases of conversion course funding. Providers report awarding 810 out of a target of 818 scholarships in 2024-25, representing 99% utilisation of available funding, higher than in 2023-24 (768 scholarships, 93% utilisation) and helped by reallocation of 22 scholarships between providers in 2024-25.

Analysis of Designated Data Body data for 2023-24 shows that PGCC courses attracted a more diverse cohort than comparable postgraduate AI and data science courses outside the programme. For example, 41% of PGCC students were women (compared with 33% in the comparison group of master's-level AI and data science courses outside the programme) and 10% reported a disability (compared with 6%). Scholarship recipients were even more diverse across all priority groups.

Findings from programme graduate surveys conducted by CRAC indicate positive early outcomes: over half of UK-national respondents had secured a new job, job offer, or

[1] In practice, numbers will be slightly higher as 2023-24 entrants, counted via Designated Data Body (Jisc) records, exclude three provider returns considered not to be of sufficient quality for inclusion.

doctorate, with only one-third still seeking a position, although this was lower among non-UK nationals (32%). Most new roles were in the AI or data science workforce in the UK.

Providers anticipate that courses introduced through the PGCC programme will continue, as they are increasingly embedded and enrolments remain healthy. Many are introducing new delivery models, such as wholly online and part-time variants, and developing new modules (e.g. introductory programming for non-coders) to support students from non-STEM backgrounds. However, with government-funded scholarships ending in 2024-25, most providers expect very few scholarships to be offered in future, largely due to financial constraints, with only a minority considering offering small-scale institutional funding or fee reductions/bursaries for targeted groups.

Industry support for PGCC courses has been largely in-kind, such as mentoring and placements, with only a small number of industry-funded scholarships pledged, and these have declined further in the most recent year of the programme. A fuller assessment of industry involvement will be provided in the final report.

The evaluation will continue with further surveys and analysis of graduate outcomes, including the longer-term impact on employment and diversity in the AI/data science workforce. The final report, due in 2026, will provide a comprehensive assessment of the programme’s overall impact and legacy, and lessons for future policy and practice.

Introduction

This report is the third published in our evaluation of Phase 2 of the AI and data science postgraduate conversion course scholarship programme ("the programme"). Phase 1 of the programme (2019-23) provided initial funding to develop and expand postgraduate conversion courses in these subjects at English universities, with a focus on increasing capacity and piloting approaches to increasing diversity, including via scholarships. Phase 2 (2023-25) expanded the programme, with an emphasis on targeting scholarships to students from under-represented groups and scaling up PGCC provision across more providers and courses.

The programme aims to diversify the AI and data science workforce pipeline with Phase 2 funding up to 1,635 scholarships targeted for students in certain under-represented groups to study postgraduate conversion courses in these subjects at English universities in academic years 2023-24 and 2024-25. Courses participating in the programme now account for approximately one third of all MSc provision in AI and data science in England, providing significant leverage for sector-wide change.

To support clarity and consistency, this report uses the following terminology throughout:

- **PGCC courses**: postgraduate conversion courses in artificial intelligence and data science that delivered or offered scholarship funding as part of the programme.[2]
- **Scholarship students**: students on PGCC courses who received a programme-funded scholarship.
- **Other PGCC students**: students on PGCC courses who did not receive a programme-funded scholarship.
- **Comparison courses** and **comparison students**: postgraduate AI and data science master's courses, and their students, that were not part of the programme and did not receive programme-funded scholarships, used as a constructed comparison group to provide a reference population for analysis. This reflects the actual sampling approach used in the OfS analysis (Annex A) and is not intended to imply the entire population of non-programme courses.
- **Conversion students:** students on a PGCC course with a first degree in a non-STEM or far STEM subject.

This interim report builds on the two previous published interim reports, each of which have focused on different aspects of the Phase 2 programme or evaluation. As programme funding has now concluded, the evaluation seeks to provide a retrospective analysis of the programme's progress and summary of emerging outcomes, drawing on the latest data about enrolments, scholarships, and student characteristics, as well as evidence from the evaluation's graduate surveys. It reviews the extent to which the programme has met its aims and the strength of evidence available to support those judgements – particularly in

[2] For clarity, "PGCC courses" is retained in this report to ensure continuity with previous published evaluation reports, where it has been used consistently to refer to programme-funded postgraduate conversion courses.

increasing the diversity of AI and data science graduates. It also reflects on the sustainability of provision and scholarships beyond the funded period, as the evaluation moves into its final phase, in preparation for a final report in 2026.

Sources of information for this interim report were:

- Data about scholarship awards and enrolled student numbers submitted by providers to the OfS during September 2025 through monitoring returns;
- An internal analysis conducted by the OfS in October 2025 of the characteristics of entrants to courses in the 2023-24 academic year based on Designated Data Body (DDB, which is Jisc) data;
- Responses to CRAC's graduate surveys to November 2025 inclusive.

Progress to date: courses, enrolments, and scholarships

1.1 Courses and intakes

Funded providers' latest monitoring reports to the OfS confirm that the total programme currently comprises 70 courses delivering scholarship funding, offered by 31 English higher education providers ("providers"). In total, 28 of the courses had more than one intake in 2024-25, of which the majority (24) comprised an autumn and a January intake. Four providers had introduced an additional intake in either November or May for this year, while one provider offered four intakes for its two courses, and one provider six bimonthly intakes to its two online courses.

1.2 Enrolments

A key feature of this evaluation design is the use of data collated by the DDB from providers' Student Record data returns rather than relying solely on numbers submitted to the OfS by providers as part of programme monitoring reports. Providers were asked to flag PGCC courses and scholarship recipients within their Student Record returns for 2023-24 and 2024-25, enabling the OfS to analyse this data and compare programme student numbers and profiles with a comparison group made up of a stratified sample of AI and data science master's courses that did not receive programme funded scholarships (for further details see Annex A).

In our previous interim report, based on figures reported by providers to the OfS in August 2024, we noted 5,350 enrolments in 2023-24. Analysis of Student Record data from the DDB now enables us to report a more reliable figure of 4,250 enrolments for 2023-24 (excluding three providers for data quality reasons[3]). Combining this with 4,460[4] enrolments reported by providers for 2024-25 gives an estimated minimum of 8,710 enrolments in total for Phase 2. These totals will be updated when DDB data for 2024-25 becomes available. Taking a longer-term view, with 7,604 students enrolled in Phase 1, the cumulative minimum enrolment figure across both phases currently stands at 16,314 (Table 1).

[3] Owing to variable data quality for a small number of participating providers, supplementary data collection was undertaken to ensure consistency and reliability. The final analysis drew on data from 28 higher education providers. See Annex A for further details.

[4] All student numbers are rounded to the nearest five in accordance with Higher Education Statistics Agency reporting guidelines.

Table 1. Summary of enrolment data to date (from DDB data and provider reports)

Funding phase	Programme year	Target	Achieved
Phase 2	Year 2 (2024-25)	4,200	4,460*
	Year 1 (2023-24)	4,200	4,250**
	Total	8,400	8,710
Phase 1	Year 3 (2021-22)	1,060	3,656
	Year 2 (2020-21)	835	2,555
	Year 1 (2019-20)	605	1,393
	Total	2,500	7,604
Cumulative	**Total**	**10,900**	**16,314**

Notes:
* Provider-reported data from September 2025
** DDB data derived from OfS analysis in October 2025 – excluding three institutions

Both annual sub-totals for Phase 2 exceeded the 4,200 students targeted annually in providers' proposals, demonstrating robust demand for these courses. However, 2024-25 enrolments are derived from more courses (70 vs 57) and intakes (123 vs 93) than in 2023-24, so average numbers per course or intake were slightly lower. This reflects anecdotal reports from providers that their overall MSc enrolments decreased in this year, driven by lower demand from international students. However, 18 providers enrolled more than 100 students on their courses in 2024-25, indicating that many are highly successful and sustainable in terms of enrolments and income.

1.3 Scholarships

According to providers' September 2025 monitoring returns[5], 810 scholarships were awarded during the 2024-25 academic year. This means providers collectively came close to allocating the overall target for 2024-25 (818). Overall utilisation in 2024-25 was high at around 99% of target, above the 93% utilisation achieved in 2023-24 (768 scholarships). The reallocation of 22 scholarships during the year helped to sustain this high utilisation rate across providers. Achievement of 810 scholarships this year brings the total allocated during Phase 2 to 1,578 and a cumulative total of 2,530 across the two phases (Table 2).

[5] Analysis in this section is based on provider data on scholarship numbers rather than DDB data, until DDB data is available for the entire period.

Table 2. Summary of scholarship allocations to date (from provider reports)

Funding phase	Programme year	Target	Achieved
Phase 2	Year 2 (2024-25)	818	810*
	Year 1 (2023-24)	817	768**
	Total	1,635	1,578
Phase 1	Year 3 (2021-22)	430	441
	Year 2 (2020-21)	350	293
	Year 1 (2019-20)	220	218
	Total	1,000	952
Cumulative	**Total**	**2,635**	**2,530**

Notes:
* Provider-reported data from September 2025
** According to provider returns September 2024

Providers reported receiving 4,083 scholarship applications in total within 2024-25 intakes of which 48% (1,974) were recorded as eligible applications. This means that the overall success rate for eligible applicants was 41% for 2024-25 intakes, while it was 44% for 2023-24 intakes.

In dialogues with us during spring 2025, several providers reported obtaining relatively few scholarship applications from UK students. Monitoring data reveals that in three cases there were only just enough applicants for the provider to allocate its targeted number, and just over half (52%) of all providers allocated scholarships to half or more of their eligible applicants. These findings suggest that, while overall demand exceeded scholarship availability across the programme, some variation in UK-domiciled demand existed across providers. The impact of this on the programme's objective to increase diversity among UK graduates entering the artificial intelligence and data science workforce will be explored further in our final report.

1.4 Profile of participants in 2023-24 intakes

The OfS analysed 2023-24 DDB student data from a sample of 28 providers[6] (*N*=4,245) derived after data quality checks, which provides a robust basis for programme-level analysis. The analysis produced programme-level results for enrolments and key aspects of student profile, for scholarship awardees and other students on Phase 2 programme courses. Results were also produced for a representative sample of entrants to a comparison group of courses identified as being in the fields of AI and data science but not in the programme (*N*=4,760). See Annex A for details on sampling methods and analysis approach.

[6] Three providers omitted, as previously noted.

1.4.1 Headline enrolment data

Investment across both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the postgraduate conversion course programme has contributed to it achieving significant scale, now accounting for around one-third of all postgraduate provision in AI and data science in England – 4,245 out of an estimated 12,550 students overall. That proportion is important context for understanding the programme's potential impact on the diversity of the overall pipeline of graduate talent into the UK AI and data science workforce. Table 3 illustrates the headline postgraduate student enrolment data.

Table 3. Entrants to courses 2023-24, for 28 providers (from DDB data)

Populations	PGCC scholarship students	PGCC other students	Total PGCC students	Comparison group of other data science & AI postgraduate students
Number				
All students	685	3,560	4,245	4,755
Part-time students	165	535	700	380
Proportion				
All students	16%	84%	-	-
Part-time students	24%	15%	16%	8%

Table 3 also shows that the proportion of PGCC students who studied part-time (16%) was twice as high as in the comparison group (and even higher among scholarship students). This pattern is partly driven by a few providers with large part-time intakes but may also reflect appeal of these courses to mature students who may seek career change. Table 4 shows that over half of PGCC students were aged over 25 – the age at which postgraduate students are considered "mature" – compared with just over a third in the comparison group. In the final report we will explore these findings further by cross-referencing them to survey data about student prior employment circumstances and conducting a more granular analysis of the age of students.

Table 4. Entrants to PGCC courses 2023-24, by age, for 28 providers (from DDB data)

Populations	PGCC scholarship students	PGCC other students	Total PGCC students	Comparison group of other data science & AI postgraduate students
Number				
25 or under	305	1,795	2,100	3,105
Over 25	380	1,765	2,145	1,655
Proportion				
25 or under	45%	50%	49%	65%
Over 25	55%	50%	51%	35%

1.4.2 Gender and disability

Table 5 summarises PGCC student profile in relation to two of the priority scholarship eligibility criteria; gender and declared disability. It shows that a higher proportion of PGCC students (41%) were female than of students in the comparison group (33%). Critically, in terms of scholarship distribution, two-thirds of scholarship students were female – twice as high as in the comparison group.

Similarly, 10% of PGCC students (including 31% of scholarship students) were reported as having declared a disability, higher than among students in the comparison group (6%). These results confirm that the scholarship programme was effective in reaching these target groups and increasing their proportion amongst enrolled students.

Table 5. Gender and declared disability of PGCC 2023-24 students, for 28 providers (from DDB data)

Populations	PGCC scholarship students	PGCC other students	Total PGCC students	Comparison group of other data science & AI postgraduate students
Number				
Female	445	1,300	1,745	1,590
Disabled	215	215	430	270
Proportion				
Female	66%	36%	41%	33%
Disabled	31%	6%	10%	6%

1.4.3 Ethnicity of UK-domiciled students

Table 6 shows that a higher proportion (34%) of PGCC students were UK-domiciled than of students in the comparison group (20%). This is partly due to the presence of the scholarships, which were targeted to UK-domiciled students in the priority groups. Whether the proportion of UK-domiciles within non-scholarship students is higher than amongst the comparison group will be revisited in in the final report, as it could indicate, in line with provider reports, that the possibility of obtaining a scholarship engages more UK-domiciled students in total.

Table 6. UK-domiciled PGCC 2023-24 students, for 28 providers (from DDB data)

Populations	PGCC scholarship students	PGCC other students	Total PGCC students on eligible courses	Comparison group of other data science & AI postgraduate students
Number				
UK-domiciled	625	815	1,445	940
Proportion				
UK-domiciled	91%	23%	34%	20%

Table 7 shows that among UK-domiciled students, 25% of all PGCC students and 37% of scholarship awardees had a Black background, higher than the proportion (14%) in the comparison group. This confirms that the scholarship programme had a positive effect in increasing representation of Black students on PGCC courses in 2023-24. The proportion of UK-domiciled students with an ethnic minority background on PGCC courses was also higher (56%) than in the comparison group (46%) but this appears to have been driven almost entirely by the increased proportion of Black students, as intended of the targeted scholarships.

Table 7. Ethnicity of UK-domiciled PGCC 2023-24 students, for 28 providers (from DDB data)

Populations	PGCC scholarship students	PGCC other students	Total PGCC students	Comparison group of other data science & AI postgraduate students
Number				
Black	225	120	345	120
Ethnic minority (total)	415	365	780	400
White	195	425	620	475
Proportion				
Black	37%	15%	25%	14%
Ethnic minority (total)	68%	46%	56%	46%
White	32%	54%	44%	54%

1.4.4 Students' first-degree subjects

An important objective of the PGCC programme was to encourage students without a background in data science or AI to "convert" from an unrelated prior degree discipline and gain the skills needed to enter the data science and AI workforce. However, subject of prior degree is not held directly in the DDB Student Record for postgraduate students. Linking of

administrative data was used to establish information on first-degree subject by finding the most recent undergraduate record for UK-educated students, consistent with the methodology detailed in Annex A. Because prior study can result in multiple records for a student, a clear resolution hierarchy was applied to identify the most likely match[7].

DDB student undergraduate subject data is classified in Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS) subject groups,[8] which were then coded into one of four categories, determined by CRAC for the purposes of this evaluation, based on how directly relevant the first-degree course was to the postgraduate conversion course topic:

- **Cognate:** Prior degree in the same broad subject area as the conversion course (e.g. computer science, AI, data science);
- **Core STEM:** Prior degree in a closely related STEM field such as physics, engineering, mathematics, statistics, or IT;
- **Far STEM:** Degree in another STEM subject but less related, such as biology, geology, psychology, or medicine;
- **Non-STEM:** Degree in a non-STEM subject, e.g. economics, business, arts, humanities, or social sciences.

The outcomes of this analysis, on the basis of these four broad categories, are shown in Table 8. These demonstrate that nearly three-quarters (71%) of PGCC students could be classed as conversion students (i.e. those coming from a non-STEM or far STEM background) compared with just over a third of students in the comparison group (37%). The proportion was higher still (79%) amongst scholarship students. These results show that the majority of students enrolled on PGCC courses were from non-STEM or far STEM backgrounds, suggesting that the courses have been successful in increasing the supply of digitally skilled workers by converting graduates who did not study a cognate or closely related STEM undergraduate degree.

[7] In order to resolve to one historical record, only AI and data science subject areas were taken as a preference followed by cognate, STEM, and non-STEM subjects in that order.

[8] See https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/coding-manual-tools/hecoscahdata/hecos.

Table 8. Coded first-degree subjects for UK-domiciled PGCC 2023-24 students, for 28 providers (from DDB data)

Populations	PGCC scholarship students	PGCC other students	Total PGCC students	Comparison group of other data science & AI postgraduate students
Number				
Cognate	45	145	190	225
Core STEM	100	225	325	240
Far STEM	200	200	400	95
Non-STEM	335	375	710	175
Proportion				
Cognate	6%	14%	11%	31%
Core STEM	15%	22%	19%	33%
Far STEM	30%	22%	26%	13%
Non-STEM	49%	42%	45%	24%

Survey data on student outcomes

CRAC has conducted a programme-wide graduate survey, based on that used in the Phase 1 evaluation, sent to students who started full-time study of courses in the 2023-24 academic year. Students were invited by their provider or by CRAC to share their views this way. To date, 260 responses have been obtained to this survey, of which 239 we considered eligible based on their reported start date. This sample is the first source of quantitative data on post-course outcomes for Phase 2 programme students, results from which are of particular interest as any findings from DDB Graduate Outcomes Survey data will take much longer to emerge.

1.5 Shape of this sample

To give context to these results, Table 9 summarises the composition of the response sample to date. 46% of respondents reported having a scholarship, which means scholarship students were over-represented compared with their proportion in the overall programme (around 16% in 2023-24).

Similarly, 45% of respondents reported UK nationality, which is higher than the overall proportion of UK-domiciled students on programme courses (34%) – noting that the current eligibility criteria mean that these two characteristics intersect strongly. Almost all the other respondents were from countries outside the EU. Responses were received from students at 26 of the 31 providers in the programme, so the sample was not heavily biased towards any particular institution within the programme.

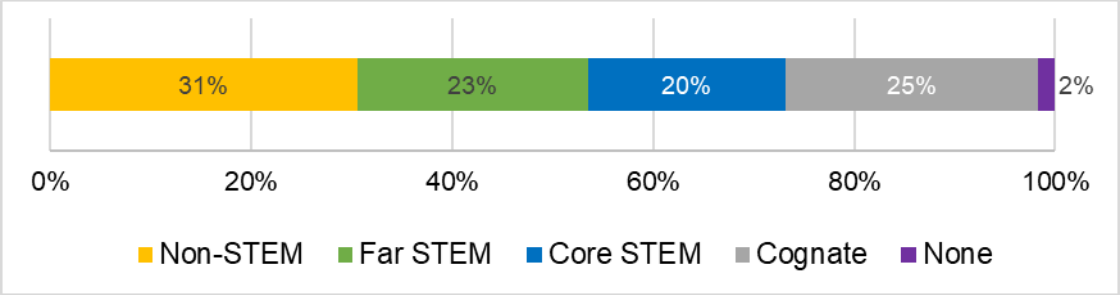
Table 9. Selected characteristics of graduate survey respondents to date (N=239)

Characteristic	Number	Proportion
Scholarship student	110	46%
UK nationality	107	45%
Student returning to study from prior long-term employment	133	56%
Student with non-STEM/far STEM background	128	54%

Note: These characteristics are not mutually exclusive; for example, a student could hold a scholarship, be UK-domiciled, and have a non-STEM first degree.

In terms of pre-course circumstances, most (65%) respondents had been in employment (either part-time or full-time) or self-employed, the majority in a long-term career job (either part-time or full-time, 56%), while a further quarter had progressed immediately from a prior degree course. This is important career context not available in DDB data. Table 9 also shows that over half of respondents (54%) would be regarded as “conversion students”, having a first degree that we classified as non-STEM or far STEM (see also Figure 1). In these respects, the response sample is broadly reflective of the make-up of all PGCC students in 2023-24 from DDB data.

Figure 1. Subject group of respondents' first degree (N = 236)



Note: Proportions may add up to more than 100% due to rounding.

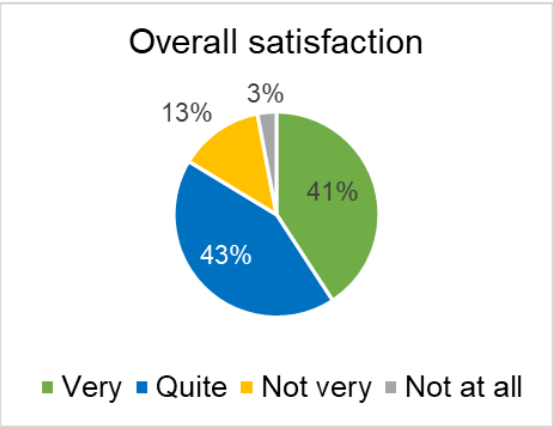
1.6 Course experiences

Based on the graduate survey responses to date, 84% of respondents were satisfied with their overall course experience – either very (41%) or quite (43%) satisfied (Figure 2(a)). Fewer than 3% (N=6) of respondents were not at all satisfied. These perceptions were similar for both non-STEM/far STEM students and core STEM/cognate students.

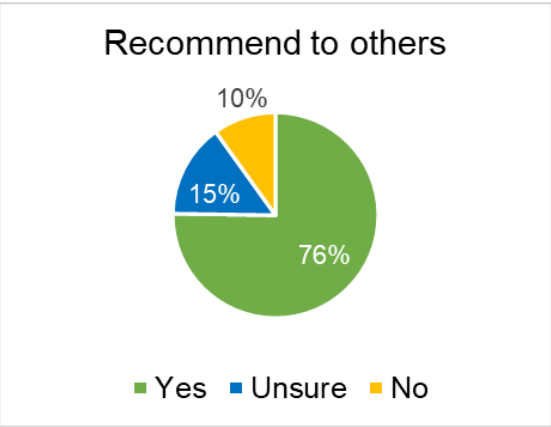
While most aspects of course experience were rated positively, satisfaction with opportunities to engage with industry was notably lower: 53% of respondents were "not very" or "not at all" satisfied with this aspect. This finding is potentially important in the context of programme aims, with industry engagement intended to be a feature of course provision in order to support employability development and applicability of knowledge. Providers have commented on challenges they faced in securing sufficient industry placements for students, particularly for large cohorts and international students. This issue will be explored further in the final report when more data is available.

Figure 2. Graduate survey respondents: (a) Extent of satisfaction with course experience (b) Whether they would recommend their course to a potential conversion student.

(a)



(b)



Note: Proportions may add up to more than 100% due to rounding.

Another insight into perceptions of overall satisfaction is from responses to a question about whether the graduate would recommend their course to other potential conversion students, who have not previously studied AI/data science (Figure 2(b)). Three-quarters of all respondents (76%) reported that they would do so, with 15% unsure, while 10% indicated that they would not. Potentially more important are responses to this question from students with a non-STEM or far STEM background (i.e. "conversion students") who are in a better position to consider such a recommendation; among these students the views were similarly positive; 79% would recommend their course to others, 15% were unsure, and 6% would not. Respondents who would not recommend the course were distributed across 13 different providers, so this did not appear to reflect negative experience at any particular provider. In the final report, it should be possible to analyse open-ended responses graduates were invited to provide, to illustrate what underlay these overall views.

1.7 Post-course outcomes

Early results from the graduate survey indicate positive outcomes for many PGCC students. Overall, 54% of all respondents had started or secured new employment, started a doctorate, or remained in their prior job, while 46% were still seeking a new position. Breaking this down, 29% had started or secured a new job, 12% started a doctorate, and 13% remained in their prior job (Figure 3).

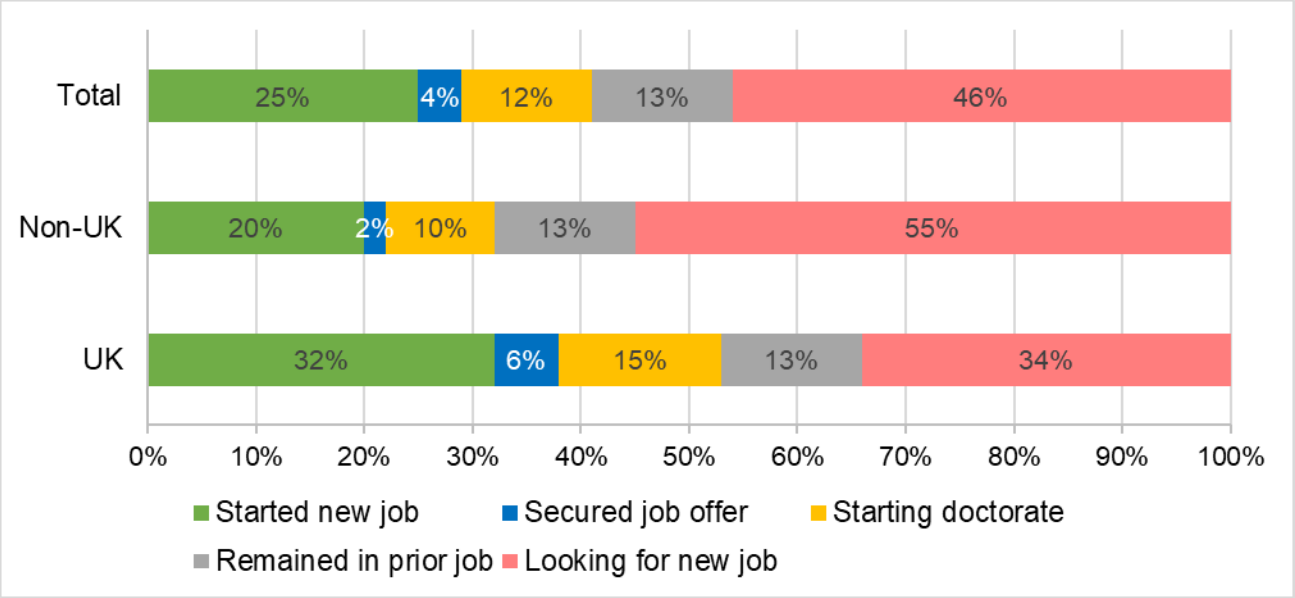
Outcomes were strongest for UK nationals: 53% had secured a new job, offer, or doctorate, compared with 32% among non-UK nationals. While only UK-nationals will have been eligible for scholarships, the majority of PGCC students are international so the latter result is also important in understanding the wider impact of PGCC course provision.

Most new roles were in the AI/data science workforce targeted by the programme and 86% of those employed were working in the UK. Among those who had a new job or offer (*N*=65), three quarters (74%) of the positions were in an organisation either using data or AI (*N*=35) or a specialist data or AI organisation (*N*=13). Most (65%) of those with a new job or offer perceived that their new qualification had been either required (*N*=16) or very important (*N*=26) to gain the new post. Among respondents still seeking work, 93% wanted a role using their new data/AI skills, and 89% hoped to work in the UK. These findings provide an early indication of the programme's contribution to its second aim to increase the supply of digitally skilled workers, by helping graduates without a STEM background develop skills that are in demand in the UK AI and data science labour market.

These findings provide emerging evidence that the programme is supporting the career progression intended, especially for UK students.[9] They should become more robust once further survey responses are received and can be analysed alongside any insights from DDB outcomes data, which will be included in the final report.

[9] While this interim report does not attempt to model a formal counterfactual (that is, whether students would have taken a postgraduate conversion course without a scholarship), our survey responses include self-reported information on factors influencing students' decisions to study. A fuller analysis of this data will be provided in the final report.

Figure 3. Employment circumstances of graduate survey respondents



Emerging issues from provider dialogues and end of project monitoring

1.8 Sustaining and expanding provision

As noted earlier, providers involved in the programme introduced a number of new courses in 2024-25 (i.e. the second year of Phase 2 of the programme), which expanded the total number of PGCC courses to 70. This expansion principally took the form of introduction of further new courses on data science and AI in specific application areas (or bringing such courses into the programme so that scholarships could be deployed on them).

Our final conversations with providers in spring 2025 and analysis of their "end of project" monitoring reports suggest two broad themes regarding future postgraduate conversion course provision. First, providers anticipate that most courses they offer at this point will continue, as they are increasingly embedded and enrolments are healthy. Providers consistently report strong demand for these conversion courses and note that scholarships have been particularly effective in attracting women, Black students, and disabled students. However, several providers cautioned that this diversity may not be sustained without continued scholarship funding. Providers most frequently attributed this risk to two factors: financial pressures limiting their ability to offer institutional scholarships (discussed further below), and continuing financial barriers faced by some priority-group students. We will explore this topic in more detail in our final report.

Second, a handful of the providers expect to introduce further courses in future. These comprise both specific new delivery models (e.g. a new wholly online variant; a variant with integrated industry placement) and new disciplinary specialism courses or pathways. There is at least one intention to introduce an MRes course to prepare students for doctoral study in AI, and degree apprenticeship opportunities are now also emerging[10], which may lead to further innovation in course provision in these areas. Meanwhile, a few others report that their institution now feels the postgraduate conversion course concept has been proven and anticipate developing new postgraduate courses in similar style in different subject areas, to tap new segments of the potential postgraduate market. Additionally, many institutions report planning new delivery models within existing portfolios, such as wholly online and part-time variants, and are developing new modules (e.g. introductory programming for non-coders) specifically to support students from non-STEM backgrounds. Elsewhere, some institutions are leveraging alumni networks for ongoing engagement, career tracking, and recruitment, recognising the value of "aftercare" in sustaining course reputation and outcomes.

1.9 The future of scholarship provision

Government funding for scholarships ceased at the end of the 2024-25 academic year, as planned. Building on the feedback obtained in the last provider workshop (held online in March 2025), we specifically asked providers in our spring conversations about the likelihood of them establishing alternative scholarship models or approaches targeted to under-

[10] These could be impacted by anticipated policy changes on apprenticeship funding in England: Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (2025), AI Opportunities Action Plan, Section 17. Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-opportunities-action-plan/ai-opportunities-action-plan#secure-future.

represented student groups in the future. Universally we heard that there would be very few such scholarships offered beyond the end of the funding. In many cases it will be none at all, while a minority think one or two scholarships might be possible through institutional funding, particularly where the provider strategically wants to enhance participation diversity. Providers commonly attributed the limited scope for ongoing internally funded scholarships to constrained institutional budgets. Alternative support such as fee reductions or bursaries – albeit at a lower level than the programme scholarships – are more likely, as many already offer such schemes to some student groups such as alumni.

Very few providers think there will be any industry-funded scholarships in future. Over the course of the evaluation the total number of industry scholarships awarded or allocated, according to providers' monitoring reports, progressively fell, and was 12 across the final monitoring reports, well below the total of 26 anticipated in spring 2024. This reflects that some of those pledged were not confirmed in practice. That said, one or two providers think that relationships they have established to obtain such scholarship funding might continue, notably where their course is applied in focus and fits a particular industry organisation well (including cases where smaller/partial scholarship increments were being funded, to several students, rather than a single full scholarship). In parallel, some of the projected in-kind and other support from industry did not materialise in practice, resulting in a lower overall reported total – now £5.49 million – than the £6.7 million reported in our September 2024 report. The contribution of industry engagement to the programme will be revisited in the final report.

Conclusions and next steps

This report has highlighted the significant progress and emerging outcomes of the AI and data science scholarship programme, including its substantial contribution to increasing diversity in AI and data science postgraduate education and the first signs of intended impact in diversifying entrants to the UK AI and data science workforce. The programme successfully attracted students from under-represented groups, particularly women, Black and ethnic minority students, disabled students, and those from non-STEM backgrounds. Evidence from graduate surveys indicates positive employment and further study outcomes, especially for UK-domiciled students.

The evaluation will continue with further graduate surveys and further analysis of DDB data on 2024-25 students, on qualifiers, and where possible on graduate outcomes, including longer-term impacts on employment and diversity in the AI and data science workforce. The final report, due in autumn 2026, will provide a comprehensive assessment of the programme's legacy and lessons for future policy and practice.