

CASE STUDY

Loughborough College AI+ Programme

Loughborough College's AI+ programme is designed to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) adopt AI and other digital tools to drive business growth and innovation. Supported by the Further Education Innovation Fund, the project fills a critical gap left by the withdrawal of EU funding and positions itself as a cornerstone of the college's broader innovation strategy for the East Midlands.

The AI+ programme aims to equip businesses across all sectors and levels of digital capability with the knowledge and skills to harness AI effectively. Spread across 12 weeks, businesses progress through stages of understanding, applying and integrating AI into their operations. The initial stage focuses on foundational concepts, such as AI ethics, technology and business application. Later, businesses are guided through the process of applying AI to their specific contexts and developing action plans to implement these technologies. Businesses are encouraged to think strategically about how AI can transform their processes and drive innovation.

A key component of the programme is the creation of cohorts and support networks. Each group of businesses that completes the programme forms a cohort, and the college organises networking events at the end of each cohort, with future cohorts joining the network as they complete the programme. This fosters ongoing collaboration and support among SMEs in the East Midlands, enabling them to share experiences and insights related to AI and digital innovation.

The success of Loughborough-based microbusiness 1284 Communications underscores the programme's impact. As a result of its participation in Cohort 1 during Summer 2024, the company has developed a digital automation project which is expected to save 60% of time previously expended on manual data entry. The project - which codifies campaign strategy and outcome metrics into a single cloud-based handbook - went to market before Christmas 2024 and has also been accepted by the IPO for publication of a trademark application. It is expected that the project will both enhance transparency around 1284's client reporting and evolve into a standalone marketable product to support further business growth.

By addressing the challenges of AI adoption and fostering a collaborative ecosystem, Loughborough College's AI+ Programme is not only transforming the digital capabilities of individual SMEs but also contributing to the broader economic and innovation landscape of the East Midlands.

