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LET'S ALL DIGDATA!



**RACHEL KEANE
WRITES ABOUT
HOW TO GET
INVOLVED WITH
FUTURE-PROOF
CAREERS IN DATA**

Our world is changing rapidly and data is at the heart of this transformation. Advances in technology have expanded the types and sheer amount of information we can, and do, collect and this expansion isn't likely to slow down anytime soon. Therefore, knowing how to gather, sort and analyse this data has become a crucial part of almost any industry. The data sector has tripled its demand for data professionals in the last five years and this growth has brought with it a huge amount of career opportunities.

The Government's plan to 'level up' was published in February 2022 and aims to spread employment opportunities more equally across the UK ([gov.uk/government/news/government-unveils-levelling-up-plan-that-will-transform-uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-unveils-levelling-up-plan-that-will-transform-uk)). This, coupled with an overall national skills shortage is also helping to drive demand for data professionals. In fact, an article in The Sun (from 6 May 2022) stated there were 234,000 vacancies up for grabs ([thesun.co.uk/money/18465506/data-scientist-vacancies/](https://www.thesun.co.uk/money/18465506/data-scientist-vacancies/)).

Encouraging young people to Digdata

These opportunities aren't just with traditional high-tech companies; they exist across multiple sectors. From fashion to finance, sport to social media, travel to telecoms, data and information is used in business to make decisions, every day. The variety of roles and career opportunities is huge and growing all the time across numerous sectors.

Some examples of innovative uses of data include:

- Football teams using data pitch side and creating charts showing 'possession' and 'out of possession' of the ball, where data is replayed, discussed and used for defining future player strategy;
- Fashion brands using gaming technology to interact with customers to help set price points for clothes as soon as they have been displayed at a fashion show;
- Pizza makers giving customers access to exclusive offers and deals in return for collecting information about their preferences when they order and pay through an app.

As data teams increase their roles and influence in organisations, the skills employers are looking for go beyond numeracy. Whether you're a creative, a problem solver, a storyteller, an inventor, or a number cruncher – you can combine your natural skills, interests, and passions with your favourite curriculum subjects to find a role that is right for you.

Data teams solve business problems

At the Data Inspiration Group, we believe it is essential to inspire young minds. Our events and activities are designed to encourage fun and creativity while developing students' confidence, often with a flair that may not be ordinarily associated with STEM or core curriculum-based subjects.

The Digdata challenges reflect real life business problems faced by the organisations we work with. Some examples are:

- Is it important who switches on the Christmas lights?
- Where should a major sportswear brand launch their new sustainable range?
- How can you help Alton Towers get more visitors to their theme park in 2023
- How do ITV promote content on their new streaming platform ITVX effectively to their viewers?

One of the participants of the ITV challenge told us how he got to grips with it; 'by analysing data inputs such as age, genres, top programs watched, and viewing habits, I developed three machine learning models to predict who would be most likely to watch the show.'

Busting career myths

We also use our Digdata programme to inspire students to look at starting a career in data by dispelling the myth that the industry is not cool or creative.

We do this by working with brands students are familiar with to broaden their horizons on the breadth of roles available and how data is used to solve business problems every day. These include BT, Facebook, Capital One, CACI, Lloyds Banking Group, ITV, Shell, Omnicom & Rapp and GSK. We create the programme with relatable role models and offer free, live online career challenges and career panels where students, parents, teachers, and careers leaders can listen and learn from their education and career journeys.

Our student cohorts are:

- **First Step** – year groups 7-9, 8-10 (Northern Ireland) and S1-S3 (Scotland)
- **Next Step** – year groups 10-13 + FE, 11-14 + FE (Northern Ireland) and S4-S6 (Scotland)
- **Step Up** – University and HE

Our vision and ambition is to connect education with the data industry, assisting in meeting Gatsby benchmarks which allow for relevance to curriculum-based learning, career advice and student/employer and employee engagement through live forum interaction. Digdata also works in conjunction with the government's National Data Strategy.

We want to promote a career in data as a choice available to students of all backgrounds and academic abilities and show them the breadth of exciting, well-paid career opportunities – both nationwide and globally. The data industry is incredibly focussed on building a diverse and inclusive future talent pipeline with many employers offering industrial placements, graduate schemes and apprenticeships starting from GCSE to Masters level.



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Combining interests, passions, and skills for a great career.

It is so important to talk about how students' extra-curricular talents and interests can also benefit them in their future careers. We find it extraordinary that some students use their creativity to blog, post on Instagram and TikTok or their precision to work on sewing projects without realising that these skills and interests can be valuable and transferable to a career working with data.

We are proud to work with fabulous companies who have data at the heart of what they do and offer amazing opportunities to help students upskill and develop their competencies in an enjoyable, real world way.

Whatever industry students have a passion for, if they are keen to learn and develop data skills this will help open doors for them to fulfilling, future-proof careers.

'I'm over the moon and Digdata is what made it all possible! It gave me the confidence to approach my lecturers and ask for their help, and it gave me something to talk about in my interview.'

Jake Parker - after securing his first proper industry job as a 'summer scholarship student' in the NHS.

'This is an excellent opportunity for our business to play a part in educating young people about the different job opportunities available to them. Data is used in a broad and varied range of careers and can be daunting for young people to look into. This partnership enables us to provide insight and knowledge so students with a wide range of backgrounds and experience can prepare for the future.'

Jean Panagamuwa, Chief Data Risk Office, Capital One

References

The Royal Society (2019). 'Growing demand for data science leaves Britain vulnerable to skills shortages.' royalsociety.org/news/2019/05/data-science-skills-shortages/

'I find myself coming back to Digdata's career challenges because it is a safe space for me to explore and to further develop my personal qualities. The staff team is inspiring, helpful and the student live chat is full of energy and enthusiasm. Through this experience, I have improved self-motivation, flexibility, independence and confidence.'

Nia, a year 13 student from Bloomfield Collegiate School, Belfast who completed several career challenges.

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