The UK has some catching up to do

New research by Microsoft reveals that the UK has lower AI maturity, adoption levels and workforce skills than its competitors. The findings reveal that:

- 15% of UK companies can be classified as advanced 'AI pros' - compared to 23% of global companies
- 52% of UK employees are using AI to work faster and smarter - compared to 69% of employees globally
- 35% of UK business leaders foresee an AI skills gap in the next two years. 28% say we already have one
- Only 17% of UK employees are being re-skilled for AI, compared to 38% globally

Previous research from Microsoft UK has shown that organisations embracing AI outperform the competition by 11.5%. To close the AI skills gap, organisations need to invest in building the skillsets of their workforce, focussing on four key steps:

- Embrace AI - employers should demonstrate the benefits of AI to their employees, so they understand how new technology makes their jobs quicker and easier, enabling employees to focus on less manual and more strategic tasks
- Create agile workers - as AI changes the way we work, businesses will require people and their skills to change with it. Continuously and in response to changing market need
- Re-skill employees - business leaders need to work proactively to help their teams stay on the cutting edge, minimising talent gaps by building, extending and expanding the skills of their current team
- Dedication to lifelong learning - businesses must invest in digital talent platforms that foster workforce learning and build a culture of continuous learning to develop competencies that can be nurtured over time.

A January 2021 report to government by the AI Council suggests that AI could deliver a 10% increase in UK GDP in 2030 if approached correctly. The report suggests near-term directions for all government departments to get the ball rolling.