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AI Apprenticeships and the Future of UK Insurance

AI has long been a topic of conversation within the insurance sector, but in practice, the approach adopted by many firms has been one of cautious experimentation rather than genuine transformation. AI tools, including ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot, have been integrated into desktops and daily routines, but largely for surface-level tasks such as drafting emails, summarising documents, and managing correspondence. However, more commercially valuable applications of AI, ones where it is embedded across underwriting, claims, compliance, broking, and risk management, have remained beyond the reach of many organisations.

The gap between aspiration and capability is now being addressed through structured AI apprenticeship programmes introduced in the UK insurance market that offer the sector a credible, organised internal pathway to building AI competence.

The Current Skills Gap

The scale of the challenge is well documented in published research, including work commissioned with the support of Skills England, which highlighted significant difficulties among firms in translating interest in AI into meaningful adoption. In 2025, a survey by Davies found that 11% of insurance firms did not know how to establish an apprenticeship scheme, and 19% saw no value in running one.

At the same time, the economic incentive to act is considerable, with the Government suggesting that AI adoption could add up to £400 billion to the UK economy by 2030, while jobs directly involving AI are projected to rise from 158,000 in 2024 to 3.9 million by 2035. In a global context, McKinsey & Company estimated that AI and advanced analytics could add up to $1.1 trillion in annual value to the insurance industry, freeing underwriters and claims professionals from routine processing to enable a focus on judgment, relationships, and complex decision-making.

Within the industry, it has consistently been acknowledged that the challenge rests with knowing which tools to trust, how to apply them responsibly, how to interpret their outputs, and how to embed them into business processes. To overcome these requires a depth of skill that has not yet been developed at scale across the sector.

Skills Offered by the New Programmes

At a national level, Skills England collaborated closely with employers across sectors before launching a Level 4 AI and Automation Practitioner apprenticeship in March 2026, with the first cohort of apprentices beginning their studies that same month. The 18-month programme is designed to equip workers with the practical skills needed to deploy AI and automation in day-to-day operations, with a particular focus on solving real-world inefficiencies such as duplicated data entry, disconnected digital systems, and repetitive manual processes. Apprentices are also trained to use AI in accordance with data protection obligations, bias mitigation requirements, and broader regulatory standards, an important consideration for firms regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

Wiser Academy, one of the insurance sector’s most established training providers, has launched what it describes as an industry-first AI Academy programme built on the government's new Level 4 apprenticeship standard. The programme is designed to help firms establish structured capability across their workforce through ‘AI Champions’ and covers nine units, including AI fundamentals, prompt engineering, ethical practice, digital and data risk, governance, automation concepts, process improvement, and managing human impact.

The academy offers learners a Flexi-Track option over 15 months, with weekly two-hour live virtual sessions, and a Fast-Track route covering the same areas in nine months through a blend of virtual and monthly face-to-face interaction. Both routes avoid conventional examinations, instead assessing learners through portfolio building, professional discussion, or projects presented as written reports, an approach that mirrors real-world professional practice rather than academic testing. The cost is fully funded through the apprenticeship levy for eligible learners, making the programme accessible even to firms without large learning and development budgets.

In addition to Wiser Academy's programme, Zurich UK has committed nearly £1.3 million of its apprenticeship levy to a new AI Academy, developed with professional development partner Corndel and Imperial College London, and supported by Microsoft. The 17-month

programme is designed to provide employees with the practical skills and ethical frameworks needed to adopt AI and apply emerging technologies responsibly. Zurich's programme sits within a broader AI strategy that includes an activation taskforce, champions, and peer-to-peer learning networks, suggesting an intent to use AI literacy as an ongoing cultural shift rather than just one-off training.

In its 2026 Manifesto, the British Insurance Brokers' Association (BIBA) also announced plans to establish an AI school for its members, developed in partnership with Markel. Building on the joint AI guide the organisations produced in 2025, the school is an online course that aims to increase brokers' understanding of the opportunities and risks of AI to enhance client service and promote innovation across the sector.

The Challenges to Overcome

Despite the momentum, those behind these programmes are aware of the obstacles they face, particularly those related to culture. Some insurance professionals remain sceptical of AI and uncertain about where it fits within their role, creating concerns that adopting AI tools means working differently, and potentially recognising that some established ways of working are no longer ideal. In addition to teaching technology, apprenticeship programmes must therefore also build confidence and shift mindsets.

The highly regulated environment also raises questions of ethical and regulatory responsibility, as decisions about risk pricing, claims settlement, or legal advice carry real consequences for real people. AI tools that are poorly understood and governed or applied without appropriate human oversight can therefore introduce unnecessary risks that could undermine customer confidence. The new programmes have ethics and governance at their core, but embedding those principles consistently across a diverse workforce will require sustained focus.

The sheer breadth of the sector also presents a challenge, as programmes must be relevant to large, well-resourced insurers with dedicated technology functions, as well as to the many smaller brokers and MGAs that make up the market. Levy-funded apprenticeship routes have the flexibility to help address the cost barrier, but smaller firms may struggle with the capacity to release staff for structured learning alongside their day-to-day responsibilities.

Finally, the speed of technological change means that any AI training programme will struggle to keep pace. Wiser Academy has committed to maintaining an advisory group of industry and technology specialists to keep its curriculum current as technology evolves, acknowledging that today's training must prepare learners to adapt, not just operate tools that may not stay the same for very long.

Long-Term Implications

If the programmes succeed at scale, the insurance market in 2030 will look significantly different, and AI literacy will be a fundamental professional skill rather than a specialist expertise. The boundary between technical and non-technical roles will continue to blur,

with professionals across organisations all expected to understand how AI tools work, when to trust them, and when to exercise independent judgement.

Firms that invest now in structured AI capabilities will gain a competitive advantage in operational efficiency and in their ability to attract ambitious professionals who want to work with modern tools. Organisations slow to react risk finding themselves at a disadvantage as talent increasingly migrates towards firms making AI investments.

The legal profession intersects with insurance at many critical points, and the AI competencies being developed across the insurance sector will increasingly shape the conversations lawyers have with their clients. Moving forward, legal professionals advising insurance cl need to understand AI's operational role within client businesses if they are to provide meaningful counsel.

The government's AI Skills Boost initiative aims to provide ten million individuals with key AI skills by 2030, and the insurance sector has the opportunity to be an important part of this drive as an active participant in helping shape what responsible, human-centred AI adoption looks like. The launch of structured AI apprenticeship programmes in the UK insurance market represents a meaningful and welcome step towards achieving this.