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Building pathways to digital careers

Companies need digital skills. And they need them right now. 2/3 of TechUK members say they need people with big data skills, data engineers, or systems architects.

By the end of the year there will be 750,000 unfilled digital jobs in the UK.
The digital skills gap is already estimated to cost the UK economy £63 billion...a year!
£63 billion!

These are figures for the UK alone, but this is a continent-wide problem. The European Digital Progress Report says almost half of the people in the EU do not have basic digital skills.

We can argue the causes of the skills shortfall all week; but no-one can deny that the fundamental problem is that too few people are acquiring the skills needed in businesses today.
Education needs to evolve to become closer aligned to the world of work.

Education. What about education today? There are 3 main problems with the status quo when it comes to equipping people with the digital skills that industry is crying out for.

First of all, it's a problem of scale. We need to train 3 quarters of a million people for digital jobs. Right now. The current system cannot produce enough people with the right qualifications and skills. And where the curriculum exists, it isn't quick enough to produce them. It's a matter of scale and... speed.

Secondly, it's too expensive. Therefore access is limited. You won't be surprised when I'll say that England has the highest average undergraduate tuition fees in the industrialised world, the parents in the room probably know.

And last but not least, there needs to be a much stronger link between learning and employment. Today, recent graduates are struggling to find work that matches their skills. One in three are now employed in low-skilled jobs. One in three! Is that worth the investment in time and money? I don't think so.

So what do we need to close the digital skills gap? We need to widen access to education.
We need to provide the best education to millions of people. We need to do it at a fraction of the cost.

But not only that: we need to combine great, highly-relevant educational content with a new form of pedagogy. We need a model that enables people to gain mastery of often-difficult, technical subjects.

Because we will not only target undergraduates but also workers and jobseekers, this education has to be flexible and highly-personalized, so people can get learn the specific skills *they need in the way that suits them best*.
Finally, we have to ensure that the qualifications they achieve have *real* meaning and wide acceptance. We need widely recognised certifications. We need widely recognised degrees.

These are the lessons we learned by founding and growing OpenClassrooms, since 2013. It's still a young journey but our experience goes back to 1999. And as you can see, I'm pretty young...

I was a sixth-grader back then. My cofounder and I create and publish free online courses for 17 years now.

We set up the business because we wanted to teach ourselves in another way and we wanted others to have the opportunity to learn in this way. Our experience has shaped the way that OpenClassrooms has developed, and it goes to the heart of our vision.

Our vision for OpenClassrooms is simple: to make the *best* education in digital skills accessible for *everyone*.

What we want to achieve is nothing less than a *revolution* in the way that *anyone, anywhere* can access the digital skills needed in today's industry, workplace and the wider global economy.

How are we doing this? Well, yesterday we launched in the UK and announced the first-ever fully online international bachelor's degree, which is already available to learners in English, French and soon Spanish. We have millions of people every month on our courses from every country on the planet...except only one: North Korea.

We work with universities, governments, educators and businesses like Google or Microsoft to design curricula that teach real, *in-demand skills* that companies are crying out for.

Where are we going? I guess the same way education as a whole is travelling.

Towards education that anyone can access and afford: fully online and with no prerequisites.

We move towards a better pedagogical model. We do not seek to throw out everything that's great about traditional education. For example, we recognise that success depends not just on great content but more on the educator that helps you, mentors you. Individual mentorship is one of the most efficient pedagogy, and we all know that since the 80s, thanks to Benjamin Bloom's research.

Our mentoring programme is *central to our approach*: from the *very first day*, students are assigned an online mentor - via videolink - who takes the time to understand *your* history and what specific objectives *you* want to achieve from the course.

We believe very strongly in the importance of individual mentoring.

But we must not talk exclusively about models, important as they are. As educators, we deal with people.

People like Debora from Brazil. She used to work in illustration but wanted to change careers. She trained in coding and is now working successfully as a developer.

People like Patrick from Canada. He didn't pass his A-levels but that didn't stop him. He decided to upgrade his skills with certificates and paths from OpenClassrooms. This led directly to an internal promotion at his company, where he now works as an analyst.

People like Aurélie from France, who is our first graduate. She used to be - and this is so typical France - she used to be a pastry chef. Now she has founded her own web development company, and has landed her first client.

And not everyone has to launch straight into a degree. Rolly from Gabon is one example. He decided to take one of



our basic courses in web development, but found it so useful he decided to undertake full certification. He's now just a few weeks away from completing. He will be awarded a European bachelor's degree without leaving Gabon! Unique! And he already got a job.

They are our students, and they are the pioneers of the future of education. They are showing businesses, governments, universities, educators and job seekers how we can all solve the digital skills crisis - and bring about a new model of education that is much cheaper and far more accessible for everyone. And when I say cheaper, I don't mean 20% cheaper. I mean 8 times cheaper. Our bachelor's degree costs £3,600, compared to roughly £30,000 for a traditional bachelor's.

It's important that I take a minute to explain what OpenClassrooms is **not**.

OpenClassrooms is not a replacement for traditional educational institutions. We partner with schools and colleges, we help them to digitalize their curricula. We merely reflect students' - and life learners' appetite for education to be delivered in new and diverse ways – with the same academic rigour that you'll find in schools and colleges.

Secondly, we are not just a comprehensive bank of educational content: we are a community of students and educators - we call them classmates and mentors - who work together in the same way that you find in schools and colleges. We aim to provide a whole learning experience, a fully online university experience.

To do so, we all need to work together, not as competitors but as partners. To solve the skills crisis, all of us must work together and forge partnerships.

We must be ambitious, and together we must create the "university of the future", where real education, qualifications, degrees are delivered in a wide range of new ways, in settings as diverse as schools and universities, in the workplace or at home.

When people talk about a digital skills crisis, I don't see that. I see an opportunity for all of us in this room. Digital skills also offer a unique opportunity for everyone, for the ordinary people I mentioned earlier.

I'd like to finish by reiterating my most important point.

This is about so much more than just skills and qualifications - it's about *opportunities*; it is about dreams. That is the real challenge we face: how we together can help people to achieve the career, the life that until now has been out of reach.

Thank you.