The Future of Work in a **Digital Devon**

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What We're Covering Today

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Regulation, energy & governance — AI is here to stay

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Five Key Trends Reshaping Work

From AI acceptance to quantum computing to human wellbeing

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Devon's Digital Position

Infrastructure, adoption, gaps & strengths

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Our Regional Opportunity

Positioning Devon as a UK leader in responsible AI

Why Now?

The AI transformation window is open — and closing fast

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Regulation is real & phased

The EU AI Act entered force August 2024. Staged obligations from February 2025, with AI governance frameworks due August 2025.

Energy & capacity are strategic constraints

The IEA projects global data-centre electricity demand more than doubling by 2030 to ~945 TWh — driven predominantly by AI.

Governance toolkits are here

ISO/IEC 42001 and others offer pragmatic AI governance for all organisations — enabling safe, transparent, and managed AI adoption.

For Devon's 56,000 businesses: by end of 2026, at least 50% should have adopted and be actively using AI.

FIVE GLOBAL TRENDS

Reshaping the Future of Work

1 Acceptance of AI & Reinvention of Work

2 Agentic AI & the Age of the Thinking Economy

3 Quantum Computing & the Data Revolution

4 Powering Data Without an Energy Crisis

5 Redefining the Role of Humans at Work

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TREND 1

The Acceptance of AI & the Reinvention of Work

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WHAT THIS MEANS

AI disruption is shifting from reaction to reinvention. AI is now embedded across workplaces — saving time, eliminating mundane tasks, and enabling smarter work.

Work reclassified by cognitive depth:

- Busy Work — repetitive, rules-based = AI-Led
- Co-Work — drafting, analysis, triage = Human-AI Partnership
- Deep Work — creative, strategic = Human-Led
- Delegated Decisions goes to AI (with oversight)

OUR OPPORTUNITY

Rethink Work: From Busy Work to Deep Work

As AI embeds in workplaces, organisations must redesign workflows and upskilling strategies that are human-first and AI-augmented.

This reframing distinguishes what to automate, what to collaborate on, and what must remain uniquely human.

TREND 1 · IMPLICATIONS

The Acceptance of AI & the Reinvention of Work

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Shift 1 — AI as Co-Worker, Not Just a Tool

Moving beyond automation to augmentation. AI supports human decision-making and creativity as a semi-autonomous collaborator — with defined roles and ethical boundaries.

Shift 2 — Absorption Capacity & Human-Centric Design

Adaptive onboarding with modular training and feedback loops that respect cognitive load. Embedding technical literacy so people can understand and co-shape AI integration.

Shift 3 — Cultural & Governance Transformation

AI adoption is a cultural shift, not just a technical upgrade. Organisations need policy frameworks for AI accountability and a narrative moving from fear to co-creation.

TREND 2

Agentic AI & the Age of the Thinking Economy

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WHAT THIS MEANS

AI agents actively perform tasks on our behalf — well beyond simple chatbots.

They handle the busy work: scheduling, data processing, routine decisions — freeing humans for strategic and meaningful work.

The future is "the thinking economy": human value defined by curiosity, judgment, creativity, and relationships.

OUR OPPORTUNITY

Build a Culture of Lifelong Learning: Reskilling & Upskilling

The future of work demands a shift from static roles to dynamic capabilities. As AI reshapes industries, lifelong learning becomes the cornerstone of career resilience and organisational agility.

TREND 2 · IMPLICATIONS

Agentic AI & the Age of the Thinking Economy

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The End of 'Jobs for Life'

Up to 80% of current roles may evolve or disappear over the next decade. A career that adapts and reinvents is not only possible but essential. Proactive reskilling must be embedded in culture.

Acceleration of the Work Cycle

Experts predict a 1:7 ratio — every year of work may require a skill refresh equivalent to 7 years of traditional evolution. Pearson's 2025 Skills Outlook highlights demand for creativity, EQ, and ethical reasoning.

Lifelong Learning as Strategic Infrastructure

Learning is now a national, organisational, and individual imperative. Embed it into job design and career pathways. Cross-sector collaboration between employers, educators, and policymakers is essential.

TREND 3

Quantum Computing & Communications Powers a Data Revolution

WHAT THIS MEANS

Quantum computing is transitioning from lab hype to real-world adoption — enabling computations millions of times faster than classical systems.

Impact spans financial modelling, drug discovery, and logistics. It will also make AI's LLM backbone faster and more effective.

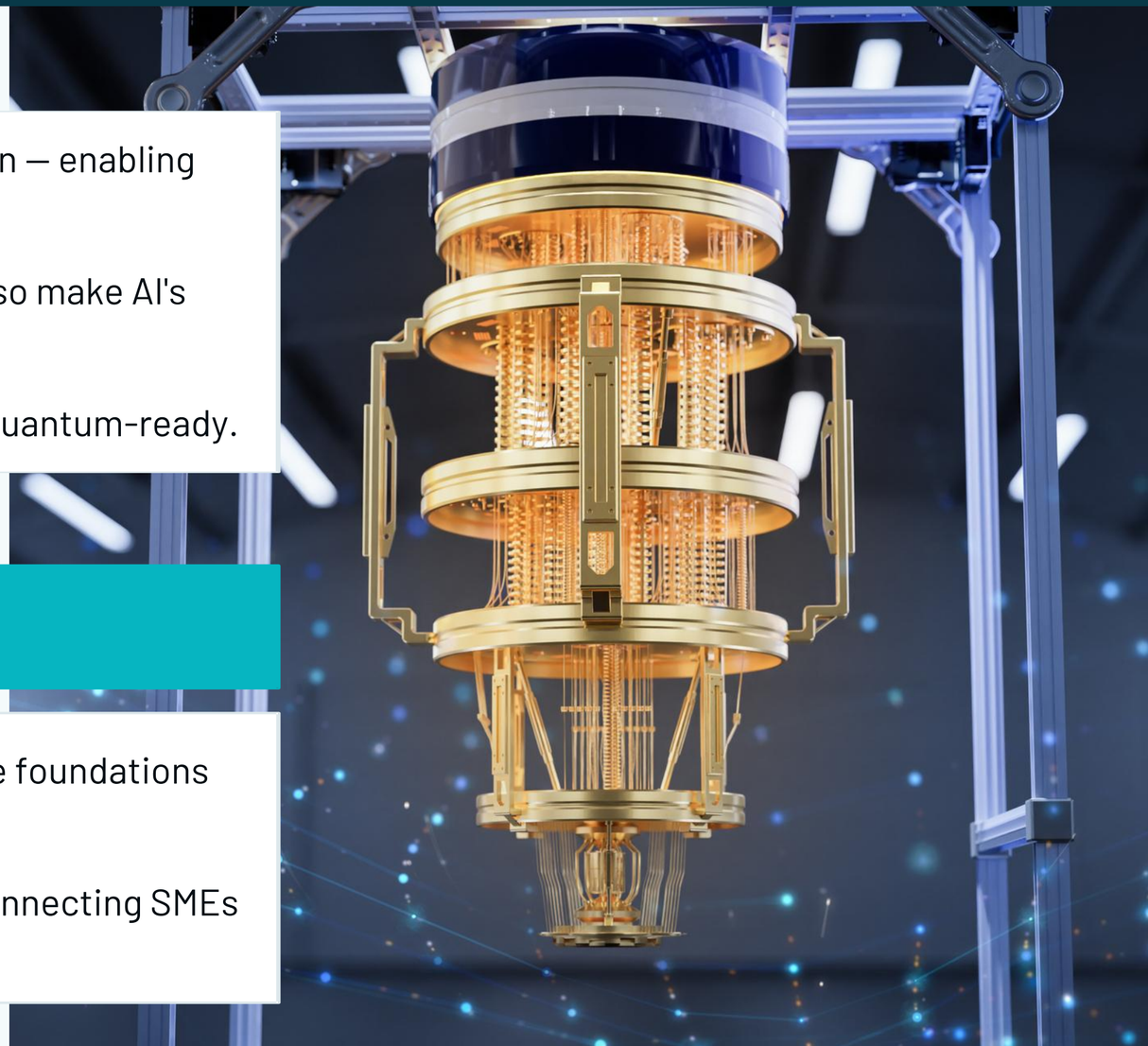
Devon's opportunity: not to use quantum immediately, but to become quantum-ready.

OUR OPPORTUNITY

Position Devon to Benefit Early from Quantum-Enabled AI

Forward-thinking regions that build their digital, skills, and governance foundations now will gain significant advantage.

Regional response: awareness, partnerships, and pilot readiness — connecting SMEs with universities and national programmes.



TREND 3 · IMPLICATIONS

Quantum Computing & Communications Powers a Data Revolution

AI and Quantum Convergence Will Redefine Competitiveness

Quantum will accelerate AI performance — amplifying competitive disparities. Devon sectors to benefit: marine engineering, environmental modelling, agritech, and biomedical innovation.

From Experimentation to Strategic Preparedness

Quantum is entering pilot-stage. Evaluate where it could shift performance: optimisation, simulation, risk modelling, secure communications. Build internal literacy now, before tools go mainstream.

Quantum-Ready Infrastructure as Strategic Advantage

Regions with strong connectivity and modern data governance benefit first. Quantum reshapes cybersecurity — firms must begin transitioning to quantum-resilient encryption ahead of regulatory shifts.

TREND 4

Powering Data Without an Energy Crisis

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WHAT THIS MEANS

Addressing the energy demands of technology is critical. Data centres consume a growing share of global electricity — driven by AI.

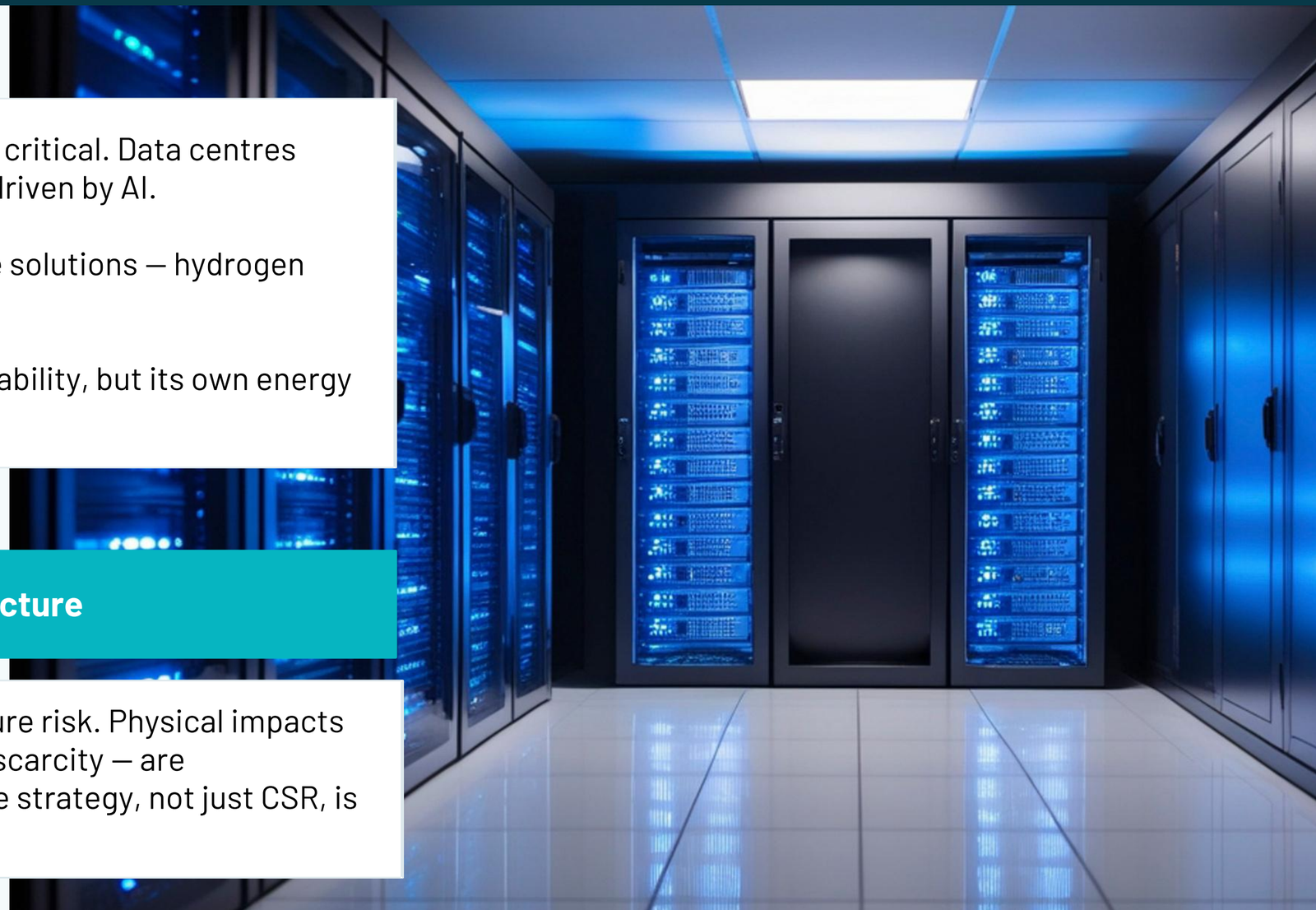
Focus: renewable energy sources and innovative solutions — hydrogen fuel cells, biofuels, modular nuclear reactors.

AI and the Climate Paradox: AI can drive sustainability, but its own energy footprint must be managed.

OUR OPPORTUNITY

Build Sustainable, Resilient Digital Infrastructure

Climate change is a present disruptor, not a future risk. Physical impacts — extreme weather, biodiversity loss, resource scarcity — are accelerating. Embedding sustainability into core strategy, not just CSR, is now essential to organisational resilience.



TREND 4 · IMPLICATIONS

Powering Data Without an Energy Crisis

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Ethical Leadership as Strategic Infrastructure

The UN Global Compact 2025 CEO Study: 99% of CEOs plan to maintain or increase sustainability commitments. Ethical leadership is emerging as a genuine competitive differentiator.

From Compliance to Culture

Sustainability is a cultural transformation — integrating climate risk into financial planning, upskilling workforces for green jobs, and collaborating across sectors to drive systemic change.

AI and the Consolidation of Ethical Business

AI reshapes how businesses engage with sustainability — not just through operational efficiency, but redefining accountability, transparency, and ethical leadership across the organisation.

TREND 5

Redefining, Protecting & Enhancing the Role of Humans at Work

WHAT THIS MEANS

As AI capabilities grow, emphasis on uniquely human qualities intensifies: empathy, ethics, critical thinking, creativity.

Challenges: managing psychological impacts of AI interaction, combating synthetic content, preventing redundancy through active reskilling.

Human traits — authenticity, teamwork, leadership, judgment — remain irreplaceable.

OUR OPPORTUNITY

Make Wellbeing Central to Organisational Strategy

Workplace wellbeing is expanding beyond health and safety to encompass social, emotional, and ethical dimensions of work.

Wellbeing is now central to strategy, talent retention, and ethical leadership — driven by demographic shifts, AI integration, and rising employee expectations.

TREND 5 · IMPLICATIONS

Redefining, Protecting & Enhancing the Role of Humans at Work

Shift 1 — From Perk to Imperative

By 2026, wellbeing has evolved from 'nice-to-have' into a core business function. The WHO estimates mental health costs the global economy $1 trillion annually in lost productivity.

Shift 2 — Personalisation & Proactivity

AI and data analytics are making wellbeing hyper-personalised. 89% of employees say they'll only consider employers who prioritise it. One-size-fits-all is over.

Shift 3 — Strategic Integration

Wellbeing is woven into governance, risk, and innovation. Embed wellbeing metrics into board reporting. Use it as a lens for AI deployment — ensuring technology enhances rather than erodes human connection.

THE STRATEGIC REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Devon's Digital Infrastructure, Economy & AI Readiness

Devon's Digital Infrastructure

Do we need gigabit for AI and quantum?

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AI Today

→ Most AI runs in the cloud — gigabit not required for basic use

→ Gigabit becomes a major advantage for agentic AI workflows, real-time data tools, and cloud-based business intelligence

→ 93.5% of Devon & Somerset premises now access superfast broadband via CDS and commercial rollouts

Quantum Tomorrow

→ Businesses will access quantum computing via the cloud, not on-site

→ Quantum-enabled services require high-bandwidth fibre and ultra-low latency

→ Participating in quantum pilot programmes will require gigabit-capable networks

Conclusion: AI adoption doesn't require gigabit — but scaling AI and preparing for quantum absolutely does. Regions that invest early will lead the next wave of productivity.

Powering Devon for Digital Growth

Energy, grid resilience & the quantum challenge

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326K+

Premises connected via CDS

England's largest rural broadband programme

93.5%

Premises with superfast broadband

Across Devon & Somerset

£800M

Projected regional economic boost

From CDS connectivity investment

DEVON'S FOUR STRATEGIC CONSTRAINTS

- Rural grid architecture makes reinforcement slower and more costly
- No major AI hyperscale data centres located in Devon today
- Commercial providers prioritise urban areas for upgrades
- SMEs depend on cloud AI — energy burden shifts elsewhere, but resilience risks remain local

Devon's Business Landscape & AI Adoption

Where we are — and how far we need to go

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< 1 in 5

UK SMEs have adopted AI

Yet AI adoption by SMEs could add
£78 billion to the UK economy by 2035

Devon's Position

Ahead of many rural regions in readiness and skills — but behind digitally advanced regions where AI adoption rates exceed 40–60% of the working population (UAE, Singapore, Norway).

Key Strengths

Active AI skills programmes, growing digital maturity, regional collaboration, and early commitment to responsible AI adoption.

The Gap to Close

From <20% SME adoption today to 50% by end of 2026 — requiring systematic action across business, education, local government, and infrastructure.

IN CONCLUSION

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Positioning Devon as a UK Leader in Responsible AI

1

Lead with Responsible AI Standards

Align with EU AI Act obligations. Co-create a Devon Responsible AI Framework to help SMEs meet global governance expectations.

2

Build a Skills-First Digital Region

Redefine HRD as CPO. Make AI central to board strategy. Leverage LSIP frameworks and educational partners.

3

Accelerate AI Adoption Through Local Support

Connect SMEs to national programmes. Use Chamber-led clusters in marine, CleanTech, HealthTech, and broadband infrastructure.

4

Create a Devon Identity Around 'Safe, Ethical, Human-Centred AI'

Position Devon as the UK's exemplar for trusted AI. Develop the Devon Business Pledge.

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Digital Devon

9 June - Riviera Centre
10am - 4pm

Learn how to make Digital and AI work for your business – in a day

A roadmap for your business covering:

Connectivity | Systems & hardware | Cyber security | Data readiness | AI Governance & risk | Trust & ethics | Skills | Culture & HR | Business structure for future capability

Expert speakers, workshops and exhibitors from organisations including: **Microsoft, PwC and Cosmic**

Thank **you**

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