



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

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£5m gift supports bid to ensure digital benefits work for all

Global investment firm Baillie Gifford has pledged £5m to support research into the ethical challenges posed by the growing use of data and artificial intelligence.

A research programme based at the University of Edinburgh will address some of the world's most pressing concerns around emerging technologies, including machine learning, accelerated automation, and financial innovation.

It will also reflect Baillie Gifford support for the University's belief that data and AI can make a positive impact on people's lives in the UK and globally.

Areas of investigation, for example, could include the use and regulation of personal data by industry and government, understanding and mitigating the impact of increased automation on the job market, and the challenge of building an ethical framework for introducing driverless cars onto public roads.

Research from the programme will be independent from government but will help to inform policy, laws, and industry standards.

The gift will create the Baillie Gifford Chair and Research Programme into Data and AI Ethics at the University of Edinburgh.

Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh, Professor Peter Mathieson said: "Technology has advanced at a speed that our existing legal and regulatory systems have struggled to match. Societies are only now coming to terms with big data and AI's revolutionary effect.

"This technology is not going away. We need new ways of thinking about how we integrate and manage it, to ensure that it benefits everyone. This generous gift from Baillie Gifford is a visionary step towards helping us achieve this goal."

The new programme will be based at the University's Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI). Upon opening in the city's former Royal Infirmary in 2021, EFI will be one of the largest centres for interdisciplinary learning and research in Europe.

The Director of EFI, Professor Lesley McAra said: "EFI is extremely grateful for the very generous donation made by Baillie Gifford. At EFI we aim to harness the fast-moving developments in data and artificial intelligence for social benefit. In doing so our research

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and education will address important questions about the conditions needed to support human flourishing.

“Public trust and confidence is fundamental to building solutions for the myriad ethical and regulatory challenges posed by new technologies. The Baillie Gifford donation supports our strong commitment to meeting such challenges and harnesses the University’s centuries-long expertise in ethics.”

The Chair will be based in EFI but will work with data scientists and technologists across the University – including in the new Bayes Centre – and with external partners. They will be charged with engaging the public in the challenges and opportunities posed by data and AI.

Baillie Gifford’s support extends to a new senior research fellowship and up to 18 PhD students over the next decade. There will also be an annual flagship lecture.

The programme will also help to develop the University’s research, policy and taught curriculum on data and will play an important role in the recently announced City Region Deal’s ambition to make Edinburgh the data capital of Europe.

Nick Thomas, partner at Baillie Gifford, said: “The University of Edinburgh is a global leader in artificial intelligence and data science, and Baillie Gifford is glad to support its research into the ethics of AI.

“We hope that our close collaboration with academics at the cutting edge of transformative technologies will accelerate the pace of research and bring tangible benefits to society.”

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