The AI Skills That Will Define Business Success in 2026

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As businesses prepare for a decisive shift from AI experimentation to scaled adoption, tech training specialist QA has outlined the AI skills it believes will define business success in 2026, based on insights from Dr Vicky Crockett, Portfolio Director for Artificial Intelligence.

Why skills will define the next stage of AI adoption

As AI becomes increasingly embedded across everyday business tools, QA's insights highlight the AI skills that business leaders will need to invest in most. This includes a shift from broad AI experimentation, towards deeper technical adoption and practical, human-centric capability.

Dr Vicky Crockett, QA's Portfolio Director for Artificial Intelligence, said: "AI transformation isn't optional in 2026, it's the new competitive edge. As we head into 2026, we can increasingly see AI becoming the interface that we use to work with all other software.

As this develops further and AI pilot programmes move to scale, more people will need basic AI literacy and prompting proficiency training, and technical teams will need to train and manage AI systems at scale."

QA's insight suggests that the next phase of AI maturity will be defined less by technology and more by how effectively people work with it across every role, from frontline employees to senior leaders and technical teams.

Essential skills for employees, leaders and tech teams

QA's insights break down the most in-demand skills across different teams. Here are some of the most important skills highlighted:

AI for all employees

- **Prompt engineering** – Learning how to prompt effectively will become an essential skill
- **Critical and creative thinking with AI** –
  AI may save us time, but learning to quality check and edit outputs will be key
- **Data awareness** – It will be everyone's role to understand how to use AI safely and securely.

AI for leaders

- **Strategic AI adoption** – Leaders will need to understand how to scale AI in the most effective way.
- **Change management –** AI transformation means change at every level and teams will need to balance resistance to change and adoption at scale.
- **AI ROI analysis** – Change will happen at pace and it will be crucial to understand the investment and return data.

AI for tech teams

- **Building complex agentic AI systems** – Tech teams will be required to build increasingly complex agentic AI systems.
- **Integration of apps within LLMs** – 2026 will see apps arrive within LLMs and tech teams will need to capitalise.
- **Advanced prompting** – Businesses will need to take prompting further, with sophisticated workflows and multi-step prompts.

The role of data and governance

As well as these key technical skills, it will be vital for businesses to pay attention to AI governance and compliance in 2026. Compliance frameworks will continue to evolve, and businesses must be ready to

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face this challenge.

“Most organisations will be creating AI governance structures if they haven’t already. This is likely to mean detailed AI training for leadership, governance and security teams, as well as mandatory AI literacy training for all staff so that they understand how to work with AI within their organisation’s policies.”

QA’s central message is clear: AI will not replace jobs, but it will fundamentally change how work is done. Organisations that invest early in the right AI skills will be better placed to improve productivity, manage risk, and build trust in AI-powered decision-making.

Get skills ready for 2026 by exploring QA’s Most In-Demand AI Skills of 2026 and Dr Vicky Crockett's AI Predictions for the Year Ahead.

About QA

QA is Europe’s leading AI technology and digital training partner and the fastest-growing in the US.

We teach the critical AI, technology, digital and human skills needed to transform and succeed in a changing world.

Over 4000 organisations lean on us for tailored programmes across apprenticeships, instructor-led, and self-paced learning. Boasting deep expertise, industry leading learning modalities, bespoke tailoring to suit individual journeys and business priorities, and a legacy as a trusted and best-in-class provider, we are your go-to partner for technology upskilling and reskilling.

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