

James Alexander

Strategic leader with a proven ability to deliver complex organisational transformation, with experience in policy development and digital innovation across government and higher education.

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Strategic leader with a proven ability to deliver complex organisational transformation, with experience in policy development and digital innovation across government and higher education. Recently recognised by 10 Downing Street for analytical excellence and artificial intelligence (AI)/data science capabilities.

Experience

Senior Policy Advisor in AI — Department for Business, Innovation, Science, and Trade · AI Adoption and Preparedness

Jun 2026 – Present · London, United Kingdom

Policy and programme lead for the UK's AI talent and skills portfolio.

PROGRAMME LEADERSHIP AND DELIVERY

- Serve as policy and programme lead for four major government AI talent and skills programmes with a combined value of ~£80M, acting as day-to-day programme owner on behalf of SROs across delivery agencies and partners including UKRI, Innovate UK, and The Alan Turing Institute.
- Lead the £21.6M Sparck AI Scholarships programme, expanded from £17.6M to incorporate industry placements; recruited and onboarded the first cohort of 79 scholars across nine leading UK universities, and designed and let contracts supporting recruitment and management of ~300 scholars by programme end.
- Lead the £25M Turing Global and £25M Turing Pioneer Fellowships, overseeing fellowship recruitment and allocation against changing strategic priorities and academic competitiveness; reallocated £5M from Global to create five additional Pioneer fellowships.
- Lead the £7.8M TechLocal AI Professional Degree and Traineeship Accelerator, overseeing the onboarding of 28 projects across universities, colleges and employers to develop local routes into AI employment, with an estimated lifetime reach of ~3,700 learners.
- Lead a portfolio of major government AI talent and skills programmes, acting as day-to-day programme owner across delivery agencies and partners including UKRI, Innovate UK, and The Alan Turing Institute.
- Re-established programme governance across inherited portfolios with fragmented communications, poor data, and weak financial visibility; designed authoritative, dynamically linked programme and financial datasets, rebuilding relationships with delivery partners, and resolving uncertainty over programme funding.

AI TALENT STRATEGY AND POLICY

- Developed a comprehensive evidence base on the UK's AI talent pipeline, synthesising open-source research into a 20-page strategic assessment identifying structural barriers and friction driving attrition through the talent pipeline.
- Developed and advocated a fundamental pivot in the UK's AI talent strategy: from managing a disconnected portfolio of programmes towards identifying and removing specific barriers that only government can resolve, enabling the wider UK ecosystem to develop and retain AI capability.
- Developed policy propositions to address structural constraints on emerging AI capability, including potential legislative interventions to enable new forms of AI and robotics skills provision; secured SCS1 support for the emerging approach and is progressing it through No.10 devolution work and preparations for the Budget.
- Worked across government with DfE, DWP and Skills England to shape approaches to AI skills and talent provision, alongside engagement with universities, frontier and frontier-adjacent AI organisations, and highly technical early adopters of AI.

MINISTERIAL, INDUSTRY AND COMMERCIAL LEADERSHIP

- Supported the Minister for AI through drafting speeches and communications, contributing to Parliamentary Questions and ministerial business, and taking delegated meetings with

external stakeholders.

- Built and managed relationships with major AI and technology organisations; recruited LSEG to the Sparck programme and led onboarding and initial engagement with all industry partners, including Quantexa, Faculty, Darktrace, HSBC and Octopus Energy.
- Built and managed relationships with major AI and technology organisations, leading onboarding and initial engagement across the Sparck programme's industry partners.
- Designed and delivered the launch of the Sparck AI Scholarships programme, bringing together ~110 government, academic, industry and scholar participants from all nine participating universities and around half of programme industry partners; personally shaped the agenda, participant arrangements and key policy decisions underpinning the event.
- Defined and assessed major commercial requirements across AI talent programmes, including a £1.2M website build, ~£1M monitoring and evaluation contract, and multi-million-pound recruitment, cohort-management and finance contracts; directly managed the ~£150K Sparck launch event contract.
- Maintained delivery of an ~£80M programme portfolio through a major Machinery of Government change, keeping programmes operational through six weeks of organisational uncertainty while supporting senior leaders to determine appropriate future homes for policies, programmes and people.
- Maintained delivery of a large programme portfolio through a major Machinery of Government change, keeping programmes operational through six weeks of organisational uncertainty while supporting senior leaders to determine appropriate future homes for policies, programmes and people.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- Lead a team of two—an SEO and first-year Fast Streamer—with responsibility for recruitment, performance management, task allocation, line management and professional development.

AI policy · Programme delivery

Assistant Head, Infrastructure Function — The Ministry of Defence · FMC Infrastructure

Jan 2024 – Jun 2026 · London, United Kingdom

Led Defence's implementation of the cross-government Property Function, impacting over 1,000 infrastructure professionals.

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Provided day-to-day management and leadership of the Infrastructure Function (Defence's implementation of the cross-government Property Function), including continued development of the Infrastructure Operating Model—impacting over 1,000 infrastructure professionals. Led the Infrastructure Function's engagement with the pan-department Defence Reform programme, aligning the programme's intent with the realities of the infrastructure system.
- Designed and implemented new second-line assurance strategies and processes, improving organisational maturity across the Defence infrastructure system.
- Provided advice, guidance, and arbitration over conflicts in responsibility and authority within the complex multi-billion-pound Defence infrastructure system.
- Co-authored significant portions of the department's infrastructure submission to the Strategic Defence Review, significant elements of which (including some recommendations) are included in the final published document.

STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT AND CROSS-GOVERNMENT WORKING

- Built strategic partnerships with the Infrastructure Projects Authority and Government Property Profession, to ensure alignment of Function development initiatives.
- Managed complex relationships with senior leaders resistant to assurance processes, maintaining stakeholder buy-in through transparent communication.
- Provided expert advice to ministers and senior officials on infrastructure matters with parliamentary and media attention.
- Led a team of SEO (C1) staff through a period of significant organisational change.

Infrastructure policy · Organisational leadership · Defence

Desk Officer, Finance and Capability — The Ministry of Defence · FMC Infrastructure

Jan 2023 – Jan 2024 · London, United Kingdom

Head Office oversight of major Defence infrastructure programmes and NATO-facing capability work.

PROGRAMME OVERSIGHT AND CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT

- Provided Head Office oversight of the infrastructure programmes of UK Strategic Command (with a value of around £1Bn per annum) and the United States Visiting Forces, monitoring delivery of required capabilities within budget and timeline.
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- Contributed to Defence's annual financial planning processes and cycles, identifying financial opportunities, risks, and mitigations.
- Delivered scrutiny and analysis of high-value infrastructure business cases for the Investment Approvals Committee.
- Rapidly developed subject matter expertise across multiple domains to provide independent ministerial advice. Supported key departmental priorities in high-pressure, politically-sensitive environments—such as Operation Interflex (the UK's training of Ukrainian Armed Forces).

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

- Built an extensive network of contacts across Defence, including Head Office, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, and private offices. Mediated and resolved disagreements between stakeholders and organisational factions.
- Authored a diverse range of materials including ministerial submissions, parliamentary responses, and operational guidance.

INTERNATIONAL AND CROSS-GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION

- Worked with Allied Command Transformation and NATO member nations on the development of the military infrastructure component of the NATO resilience concept, feeding the headmark Warfighting Capstone Concept.
- Collaborated with the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office to improve access to and further exploit NATO Security Investment Programme funding.
- Provided both in-person and remote military infrastructure expertise to international partners, including the United States.

Infrastructure policy · Defence · NATO

Head of Education Projects — The Institute of Cancer Research · Academic Services

Jan 2022 – Jan 2023 · London, United Kingdom

Led digital transformation and process automation across the organisation's academic and research operations.

TECHNOLOGICAL LEADERSHIP, DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, AND PROCESS IMPROVEMENT

- Led automation of key organisational processes, achieving significant reductions in administrative burden and processing time (such as the supervisor approval process—shortened from an average of three months to one week).
- Pioneered workflow automation tools and subsequently managed their rollout and organisation-wide adoption.
- Served as product owner for multiple IT systems, identifying optimal solutions from competing organisational requirements. Project managed two development cycles of a bespoke PhD recruitment system, reducing applicant technical queries from 25% to <5% through user experience improvements.

MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP, AND ORGANISATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

- Transformed the organisation's flagship annual conference by expanding attendance from around 200 to over 600 participants, through end-to-end implementation and management of digital and hybrid delivery models.
- Managed a team of four, and annual budget of approximately £250,000—achieved significant efficiency and financial savings through a continuous improvement approach.
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Digital transformation · Product ownership · Line management

Academic Resources Manager — The Institute of Cancer Research · Academic Services

Jan 2019 – Jan 2022 · London, United Kingdom

Technological support to education and research through the COVID-19 pandemic.

TECHNOLOGICAL SUPPORT TO EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

- Delivered emergency remote collaboration and teaching capabilities within three weeks of the onset of the COVID pandemic, compared to a typical 12-month software procurement timeline.
- Developed pedagogically-informed teaching enhancement programmes to support part-time teaching staff.
- Contributed to organisational strategy, including post-COVID return-to-office planning.

STRATEGIC ACADEMIC WRITING

- Edited impact case studies for the organisation's Research Excellence Framework submission, which ultimately ranked 2nd in the UK.

Digital transformation · Academic writing

Education

MA, Natural Sciences — Robinson College, The University of Cambridge

Jan 2015 – Jan 2019 · Cambridge, United Kingdom

Awarded Upper Second Class Honours. Specialised in chemistry, biochemistry, pharmacology, and the history and philosophy of science.

Natural Sciences

Course and service

Advanced Command and Staff Course (Reserves) — Joint Services Command and Staff College

Feb 2026 – Aug 2026 · Shrivenham, United Kingdom

The UK's Advanced Command and Staff Course for Reservists, completed as a civilian civil service participant.

- Completed the UK's Advanced Command and Staff Course for Reservists, as a civil service participant.
- Awarded the prize for 'Best Civil Servant' on the course, with the Directing Staff's report recommending an invitation to return as Directing Staff in future years.

Defence and security

Certifications

Managing Successful Programmes (Practitioner)

Jan 2023 – Jan 2023

Lumina Practitioner

Jan 2023 – Jan 2023

Foundation Certificate in User Experience — Chartered Institute of IT

Jan 2020 – Jan 2020