

**babington** × M&S

# Building a digital, data-driven culture

## A defining moment

Despite being a challenging time for individuals, businesses, and society the world over, the pandemic taught us some valuable lessons: None more so than that our limitations are our own.

Having embraced rapid change out of necessity, Marks & Spencer made a pledge in Spring 2020 to 'never be the same again': to harness the innovation, momentum, and agility of the pandemic and drive a company-wide transformation.



# 01. Bringing data to the fore

With accelerated changes in everything from consumer habits to our own working environment, M&S pledged to become a true **digital-first retailer**; personalising the entire customer experience, and underpinning this not just with market-leading technology, but with the **skills** to enable genuine change.



In order to thrive in a digital future, we need colleagues who can act on insight and put **data at the heart of everything we do**.

We are building the foundations to deliver a **step-change in customer experience**, and we're already seeing the **benefits** a more data literate workforce can bring.



**Jeremy Pee**

Chief Digital & Data Officer, M&S





## 02. Skills for success



The BEAM Academy was set up in 2020 to shine a light on what a **data driven, digital-first** mindset can do for M&S – and to help empower colleagues through data literacy training and awareness.



We've used **apprenticeships and funded learning** as a primary vehicle to improve data skills right across the workforce, from colleagues in-store through to those in support centres and distribution channels. And from day one, we've been **blown away** by the appetite amongst all of our colleagues to learn new skills and commit to these programmes. We started out with a Level 4 data apprenticeship, and we've now added Level 3 and Level 7 to really target specific outcomes for colleagues.



**Conor Rose**

Principal Strategist, M&S

Babington joined forces with the Marks and Spencer team to support the delivery of the 'Data Fellowship' programme through the **Level 3 Data Technician apprenticeship** standard.

This was aimed at individuals in all areas of the business – from colleagues in stores, to back-office and distribution centre roles – who either needed to gain exposure and experience in data to support their current departments, or who were actively interested in progressing their own career into a data-centric role.



## 03. Delivering meaningful outcomes

The Data Technician programme centres around twelve virtual classrooms, plus self-directed and tutor-guided study across a twelve month duration (with three-month end point assessment.) This has been tailored and condensed from the original eighteen-month duration in order to more rapidly develop skills and competencies that can be immediately applied into colleagues' 'on the job' daily tasks.

To date, we have enrolled **five cohorts** of learners, with a sixth planned for early 2023, and the results speak for themselves:





## 04. In their own words

**We're building learner confidence:**

SS

I never thought [a data career] was achievable before starting my apprenticeship

**Liz**, L3 Learner

Since starting her study, Liz has successfully moved into a new role as a Product Manager at the M&S Support Centre in Paddington, where she uses her new data skills every day.

“I recently gained a promotion – I’ve been trying to get into a new role for 4-5 years, but since taking on the apprenticeship it’s helped secure a position finally!”

**Tony**, Data Analyst

“Dhvani was able to present the project he completed as part of his Apprenticeship as a key part of a job interview where he was successful in securing a promotion.”

**Line Manager**, M&S



## And the organisation is seeing the benefit of upskilling:



The Data Technician programme is successful in addressing the upskilling needs of a key population within our business; colleagues without much formal experience in data that are enthusiastic and champion 'being digital'.

Certainly, we can already see the benefits gained to the individuals who've completed the programme. Graduating fellows have spoken of their **increased confidence in handling data**, and conversing with others who do. They've **directly accredited changes in their job role to having undertaken the Fellowship and developing new skills** – often landing them in a position they wouldn't have believed possible before completing the Data Technician Fellowship.

**The Level 3 has exceeded expectations** and we've yet to see a decline in demand of individuals wishing to enrol. We hope the positive trend continues as we continually iterate and evolve the programme through our partnership with Babington.

### Hollie McIntosh

BEAM Academy Project Manager, Digital & Data, M&S





## 05. A unique partnership

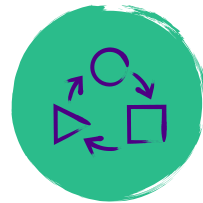
Besides a shared vision for positive organisational and individual outcomes as a result of the Data Fellowship programme, Marks and Spencer and Babington have already seen the benefits of a partnership way of working. This has allowed for an agile and flexible approach to programme delivery, and the ability to reap the rewards of learning into immediate 'on the job' application, and onwards into customer outcomes.



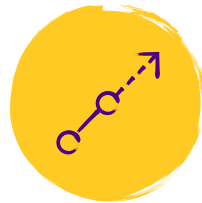
**Partnership approach**



**Learner-centricity**



**Contextualised learning**



**Performance & progression**



**Learning culture**



Babington's dedication to providing an outstanding learner experience for all of our colleagues is evident.

They have shown an open approach to genuine collaboration with M&S, and in turn we're creating a more 'M&S-centred' experience for fellows – tackling withdrawals and are ensuring colleagues' projects are delivering real value to their teams.



**Hollie McIntosh**

BEAM Academy Project Manager, Digital & Data, M&S

### **Example: Tailoring classroom sessions to maximise understanding**

Learners asked how they could best consolidate the knowledge they acquired through the classroom sessions as they didn't always immediately get the opportunity to apply the skills naturally in the workplace. We split the classroom sessions to allow for learning, reflection, and practise: Learners start with a two-hour taught session in the morning, followed by a prolonged break where they are given tasks to undertake to apply their learning.

Upon completion, learners then return for a second two-hour slot where this can be discussed, further questions can be asked, or areas can be revisited. This has deepened learning, tested immediate understanding and recall, and enabled learners to practically apply theoretical learning whilst it is still fresh.







For some, the motivation is about enablement in the new demands of their existing role, whereas for others it's about pivoting their career path into key growth areas such as analytics. All of this benefits our business if we manage to reskill, retain, and apply this value.



**Conor Rose**

Principal Strategist, M&S



This new apprenticeship programme will give us a new platform to go even bigger and engage even more colleagues through the power of data and we're really excited about the difference it will make.



**Jeremy Pee**

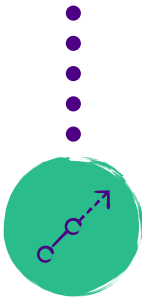
Chief Digital & Data Officer, M&S



## 06. The sky's the limit

### What's next?

- ✓ **More cohorts!**
- ✓ **Increasingly tailored and contextualised learning** – making learning hyper-relevant to M&S, and embedding it in a seamless and branded employee experience
- ✓ **Introduction of an app** to further enhance learner experience and embed learning in the flow of work to bring learning together with practical application
- ✓ **Greater visibility and sophistication** of reporting to monitor impact and continually improve
- ✓ **Greater awareness and engagement** across the business



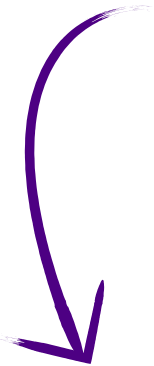
“We’re extremely proud of the partnership with Marks and Spencer – and what’s particularly powerful is the alignment of thinking around the criticality of learning and skills in driving lasting and meaningful change, as well as the necessity of truly contextualised and personalised learning experiences. This initiative demonstrates the potential of funded learning to support meaningful positive change: for individuals, the organisation, and its customers.”



**Rachel Kay**  
CLO, Babington



“M&S is undergoing a full-scale digital transformation that benefits from encouraging and creating data literate individuals across the business. We have more to do in this space and look forward to strengthening the programme even further and continuing to launch more cohorts, as well as working together to capture the success stories of Level 3 graduates. We hope to get the rest of the business excited about what we’re doing!”



**Hollie McIntosh**  
BEAM Academy Project Manager, Digital & Data, M&S

## CONTACT US

[babington.co.uk](http://babington.co.uk)  
[info@babington.co.uk](mailto:info@babington.co.uk)  
0333 323 4050

**Jonathan Boyden**  
M&S Account Director  
[jonathan.boyden@babington.co.uk](mailto:jonathan.boyden@babington.co.uk)

**babington**