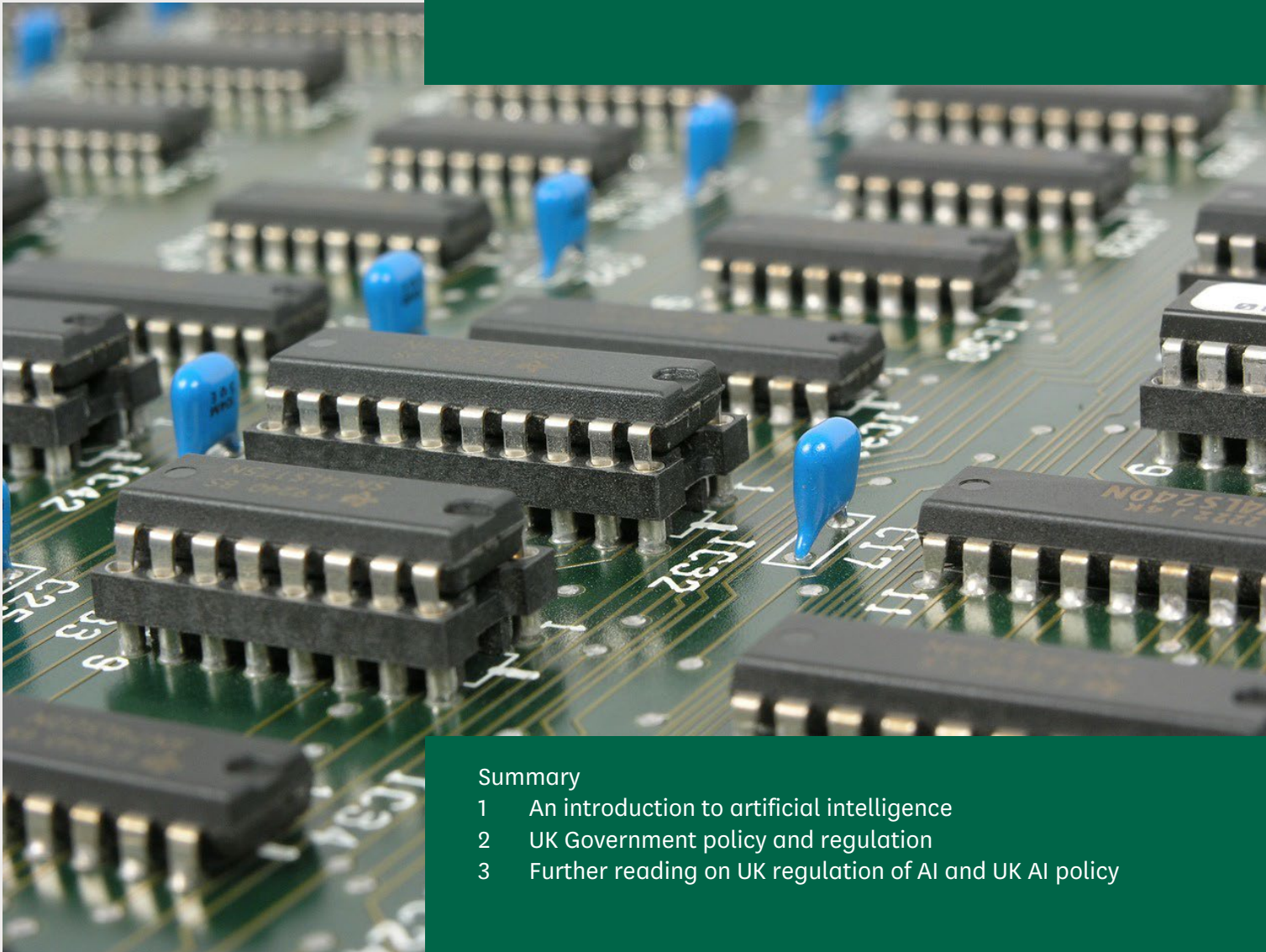


Research Briefing

31 March 2026

By Elizabeth Rough

# AI regulation in the UK



## Summary

- 1 An introduction to artificial intelligence
- 2 UK Government policy and regulation
- 3 Further reading on UK regulation of AI and UK AI policy

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## Summary

This briefing provides an introduction to artificial intelligence (AI) and how it is regulated in the UK.

Information on AI safety, and making sure that AI systems operate in ways that benefit humans, rather than causing harm, can be found in a separate Commons Library briefing on [AI safety](#).

## What is artificial intelligence?

Artificial intelligence (AI) can take many different forms and there is no single, universally agreed definition. The term is frequently used as a shorthand to refer to technologies that perform the types of cognitive functions typically associated with humans, including reasoning, learning and problem solving.

To perform these types of functions, AI systems generally rely on vast quantities of data. This data may be ‘structured’ (such as financial records stored in a fixed format) or ‘unstructured’ (including images, videos and text files that are not organised according to a predefined structure).

Both structured and unstructured data can be used to ‘train’ AI so that it can recognise patterns and correlations. This is achieved by the AI system applying rules (algorithms), based on the training dataset, to interpret new data and perform a specific task.

‘Machine learning’ describes the process by which AI systems improve their performance without being explicitly programmed. Deep learning is a form of machine learning inspired by the structure of the human brain. It underpins technologies such as voice and image recognition and supports ‘foundation models’, including large language models (LLMs). LLMs are trained on very large datasets, mainly comprising text, and can generate or interpret language and other content. They can also apply knowledge learned in one context to another, although fine-tuning by a human is often required.

AI can be categorised in several ways. Narrow AI performs specific tasks, such as speech recognition, and cannot adapt to undertake different tasks. Generative AI has more sophisticated capabilities than narrow AI: it can create new content, such as text and images, by learning statistical patterns in data. Agentic AI goes further by making autonomous decisions and taking actions without prompts. Artificial general intelligence, which does not yet exist, would match human-level reasoning and understanding.

# UK Government legislation and policy on AI

## Sector-specific AI regulation

The UK does not have any AI-specific regulation or legislation covering AI as a technology. Instead, AI is regulated in the context in which it is used, through existing legal frameworks, such as financial services legislation.

Some regulators, however, have oversight of the development, implementation and use of AI more broadly. For example, the Information Commissioner's Office (the UK's independent body established to uphold information rights) has guidance on its website covering [AI and data protection](#) and [explaining decisions made with AI](#). The UK also uses non-statutory principles for AI governance and targeted legislation. This includes the [Online Safety Act 2023](#), which empowers Ofcom to regulate online services, including AI chatbots.

## 2023 AI white paper

The Johnson and Sunak Conservative governments started developing a more comprehensive regulatory framework for AI. This included publishing strategy documents and a white paper on AI, [A pro-innovation approach to AI regulation](#), in March 2023.

In the AI white paper, the government proposed that AI would continue to be overseen by existing regulators covering specific sectors, such as Ofcom (the UK's communications regulator) and Ofgem (Great Britain's energy regulator). This context-based approach to regulation was favoured by the government, and preferred to a single regulatory function, and uniform rules, for governing AI.

## 2024 Labour government

To date, this approach to AI regulation has been continued by the Labour government. In February 2025, the government said that "[most AI systems should be regulated at the point of use](#)" and that "existing expert regulators are best placed to do this". The [Labour government signalled in its 2024 election manifesto](#), and in the [2024 King's Speech](#), that it would introduce "binding regulation on the handful of companies developing the most powerful AI models" to ensure their safe development. Legislation, however, has not yet been forthcoming.

The government has published several AI-related policies, including the [AI Opportunities Action Plan](#). AI policies have mainly focused on boosting the AI sector, and promoting innovation in and adoption of AI, to help drive growth and productivity across the UK economy.

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# 1 An introduction to artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a broad term referring to a range of technologies that can perform cognitive tasks in a human-like way. In recent years, advancements in machine learning, a subset of AI, have enabled the development of AI systems that are capable of ‘learning’, making inferences and taking decisions without being explicitly programmed.

## 1.1 What is artificial intelligence?

AI can take many different forms and there is no single, universally agreed definition. The term is frequently used as a shorthand to refer to technologies that perform the types of cognitive functions typically associated with humans, including reasoning, learning and solving problems.

To perform these types of functions, AI systems generally rely on vast amounts of data. This data may be ‘structured’ or ‘unstructured’. Structured data includes financial transactions that have a date, time and amount; it is typically stored in a fixed format and can be more easily analysed and processed. Unstructured data includes images, videos and text files; it is not organised according to a predefined structure, it is generally unformatted and is much harder to analyse.

Both types of data can be used to ‘train’ AI so that it can recognise patterns and correlations. This is achieved by the AI system applying rules (algorithms), based on the training dataset, to interpret new data and perform a specific task. In some instances, the AI is supervised and trained with datasets labelled by humans, as explained by IBM in an article on AI models:

A data scientist training an image recognition model to recognize dogs and cats must label sample images as “dog” or “cat”, as well as key features—like size, shape or fur—that inform those primary labels. The model can then, during training, use these labels to infer the visual characteristics typical of “dog” and “cat.”<sup>1</sup>

This is useful for AI systems designed to look for specific things, such as spam emails.

In other instances, the system is unsupervised and the data is left unlabelled. Under these conditions, the system autonomously identifies patterns in the

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<sup>1</sup> IBM, [What Is an AI Model?](#), not dated

data. This is useful where the AI is designed to find something that is not known in advance, such as online shopping recommendations.

## Machine learning and deep learning

The process of an AI system developing and improving over time, without all its instructions being explicitly programmed by humans, is called ‘machine learning’.

‘Deep learning’ is a type of machine learning where the design of algorithms is informed by the structure and function of the human brain and the way it transmits information. Deep learning can be seen in numerous applications, such as voice and image recognition, as well as in [‘foundation models’](#), of which ‘large language models’ (LLMs) like ChatGPT are one example.

LLMs refers to those models that can recognise, interpret and generate human language, as well as other types of content, such as images. They are typically (though not always) trained on very large, unlabelled datasets, predominately comprising text. LLMs can be adapted to do many tasks, despite not having been trained explicitly to do those tasks; this is a defining characteristic of foundation models. In other words, the model can take information it has learnt about in one situation and apply it to a different situation without human intervention, though some “fine-tuning” by humans is typically required.<sup>2</sup>

## Different types of AI

### Narrow AI

Distinctions have also been drawn between ‘narrow’ and ‘general’ AI. Narrow AI is designed to perform a specific task, such as speech recognition, using information from specific datasets. It cannot adapt to perform another task. These are often tools that aim to assist, rather than replace, the work of humans.

### Generative AI

Generative AI has more sophisticated capabilities than narrow AI. [Generative AI relies on deep learning models](#) that can use unstructured data to “‘learn’ to generate statistically probable outputs when prompted”, generating new content, such as images.<sup>3</sup>

### Agentic AI

‘Agentic AI’ goes further than generative AI; it is able to make autonomous decisions and assess what is needed to accomplish a task independently, without human intervention.

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<sup>2</sup> Cloudflare, [What is an LLM \(large language model\)?](#), not dated

<sup>3</sup> IBM Research, [What is generative AI?](#), not dated

Whereas generative AI would wait for a prompt before creating a response (new content), agentic AI can take that generated content, search the internet, query databases and apply all that information autonomously to make decisions and complete a task.<sup>4</sup> The MIT Sloan School of Management gives the following example of how agentic AI can seek out the information it needs to achieve the goal of organising a holiday:

an AI agent could plan a vacation using input from a consumer along with API [Application Programming Interface]<sup>5</sup> access to specific web sites, emails, and communications platforms like Slack to decide what hotels or flights work best. With credit card permissions, the agent could book and pay for the entire transaction without human involvement.<sup>6</sup>

Agentic AI, in other words, can anticipate needs and take proactive steps to meet those needs “based on learned and defined preferences or behaviours, along with knowledge of upcoming plans, rather than needing specific prompts”.<sup>7</sup>

### Frontier AI

‘[Frontier AI](#)’, or the term ‘frontier model’, is also being increasingly used to describe AI systems that are “[cutting-edge](#)” foundation models. However, the [Ada Lovelace Institute](#), a data and AI research organisation, notes that ‘frontier’ is a contested term and that “there is no agreed way of measuring whether a model is ‘frontier’ or not”.<sup>8</sup>

### Artificial general intelligence

Artificial general intelligence (AGI) is an AI system that can reason, analyse and achieve a level of understanding that is on a par with humans. AGI has yet to be achieved.

## 1.2

## Further Reading

### What is artificial intelligence?

- Alan Turing Institute, [Data science and AI glossary](#), not dated
- Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, [A guide to using artificial intelligence in the public sector](#), June 2019

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<sup>4</sup> Oracle UK, [What is Agentic AI?](#), June 2025

<sup>5</sup> An API is a set of rules and protocols that allows two or more software programmes (applications) to share information with one another; namely to exchange data, perform actions, and interact in a standardised way (see Oracle UK, [What is an API \(Application Programming Interface\)?](#) February 2025).

<sup>6</sup> MIT Sloan, [Agentic AI explained](#), February 2026

<sup>7</sup> Information Commissioner’s Office, [AI’ll get that! Agentic commerce could signal the dawn of personal shopping ‘AI-gents’](#), January 2026

<sup>8</sup> Ada Lovelace Institute, [What is a foundation model?](#), July 2023, updated July 2024

- Google Cloud, [What Is Artificial Intelligence \(AI\)?](#), not dated
- IBM, [Artificial Intelligence](#), December 2022
- IBM, [What Is an AI Model?](#), not dated
- McKinsey, [What is AI \(Artificial Intelligence\)?](#), April 2024
- Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) [Artificial Intelligence: An explainer](#), January 2024
- Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), [Artificial intelligence \(AI\) glossary](#), January 2024
- Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), [Policy implications of artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#), January 2024
- S. Kanimozhi Suguna, M. Dhivya, and Sara Paiva (eds), [Artificial intelligence \(AI\): recent trends and applications](#), 2021

## Machine learning and deep learning

- IBM, [What is a machine learning algorithm?](#), not dated
- NVIDIA, [The Difference Between AI, Machine Learning, and Deep Learning?](#), July 2016
- Ross Gruetzemacher, [The Power of Natural Language Processing](#), Harvard Business Review, April 2022
- Sara Brown, [Machine learning, explained](#), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Sloan School of Management, April 2021
- University of California, Berkeley, [What Is Machine Learning \(ML\)?](#), June 2020

## Different types of AI

- Cloud Academy, [Types of AI explained](#), October 2023
- IBM, [Understanding the different types of artificial intelligence](#), October 2023

## Foundation models

- Amazon Web Services, [What are Foundation Models? - Foundation Models in Generative AI Explained](#), not dated
- Elliot Jones, [Explainer: What is a foundation model?, Ada Lovelace Institute](#), July 2023

- Rishi Bommasani and Percy Liang, [Reflections on Foundation Models](#), Stanford University, October 2021
- Stanford University Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, [What is a Foundation Model? An Explainer for Non-Experts](#), May 2023

### **Generative AI**

- Accenture, [What is Generative AI & Why is It Important?](#), not dated
- McKinsey, [What is ChatGPT, DALL-E, and generative AI?](#), April 2024
- Yoon Kim, Jacob Andreas and Dylan Hadfield-Menell, [Large Language Models](#) (PDF), November 2023

### **Agentic AI**

- Beth Stackpole, MIT Sloan School of Management, [Agentic AI, explained](#), February 2026
- IBM, [What is Agentic AI?](#), not dated
- Information Commissioner's Office, [ICO tech futures: Agentic AI](#), January 2026

## 2 UK Government policy and regulation

The UK does not have any AI-specific regulations or legislation covering AI as a technology. Instead, AI is regulated in the context in which it is used, through existing legal frameworks, such as financial services legislation. There is no single ‘AI regulator’ in the UK.

Some regulators, however, have oversight of the development, implementation and use of AI more broadly. For example, the Information Commissioner’s Office (the UK’s independent body established to uphold information rights) has guidance on its website covering [AI and data protection](#) and [explaining decisions made with AI](#).

The UK also relies on:

- Non-statutory principles for AI governance (see, for example, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, [Implementing the UK’s AI Regulatory Principles](#), February 2024).
- Targeted legislation like the [Online Safety Act 2023](#). The 2023 act was introduced to regulate online platforms and combat illegal and harmful content. Under the act, Ofcom is empowered to [enforce compliance for online services, including AI chatbots](#). The government has published an [Online Safety Act: explainer](#) (April 2025).

The Johnson and Sunak Conservative governments started developing a more comprehensive regulatory framework for AI. This included publishing strategy documents and a white paper on AI.

### 2.1 Conservative governments, 2021 to 2024

#### National AI Strategy, November 2021

The [UK’s National AI Strategy](#) was published by the government in 2021. It is a 10-year plan to make the UK a “global AI superpower” by focusing on the following aims:

1. Invest and plan for the long-term needs of the AI ecosystem to continue our leadership as a science and AI superpower;
2. Support the transition to an AI-enabled economy, capturing the benefits of innovation in the UK, and ensuring AI benefits all sectors and regions;

3. Ensure the UK gets the national and international governance of AI technologies right to encourage innovation, investment, and protect the public and our fundamental values.<sup>9</sup>

The government also placed a strong emphasis on developing “technical standards” to regulate AI technologies. It committed to piloting an AI Standards Hub to “expand the UK’s international engagement and thought leadership”.<sup>10</sup> In January 2022, the government announced that the Alan Turing Institute had been selected to lead the pilot, supported by the British Standards Institution and National Physical Laboratory.<sup>11</sup> According to the AI Standards Hub webpage, its purpose is to “advance trustworthy and responsible AI with a focus on the role that standards can play as governance tools and innovation mechanisms”.<sup>12</sup>

## A pro-innovation approach to AI regulation white paper, March 2023

The government ran a [public consultation on regulating AI in 2022](#). A white paper, [A pro-innovation approach to AI regulation](#), followed in March 2023.

In the white paper, the government proposed that AI would continue to be overseen by existing regulators covering specific sectors, such as Ofcom (the UK’s communications regulator), Ofgem (Great Britain’s energy regulator), and the Financial Conduct Authority (the UK’s conduct regulator for financial services). This context-based approach to regulation was favoured by the government, rather than creating a single regulatory function, and uniform rules, to govern AI.

The government explained that AI regulation would be informed by five cross-sector principles which regulators would “interpret and apply within their remits in order to drive safe, responsible AI innovation”. The principles were:

- safety, security and robustness
- appropriate transparency and explainability
- fairness
- accountability and governance
- contestability and redress

While the Sunak government decided against creating a single regulatory function to govern AI, it proposed that existing regulators would be aided by “central support functions”, established by the government, such as horizon scanning for emerging risks and trends, and monitoring the overall regulatory

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<sup>9</sup> HM Government, [National AI Strategy](#), November 2021

<sup>10</sup> HM Government, [National AI Strategy](#), November 2021

<sup>11</sup> [New UK initiative to shape global standards for Artificial Intelligence - GOV.UK](#), January 2022

<sup>12</sup> [The AI Standards Hub](#), accessed 20 January 2026

framework. The government also proposed that the five principles would not, at least initially, be incorporated into legislation. Instead, it said they would be implemented by existing regulators.

A further [consultation on the government's approach to AI regulation](#) accompanied the publication of the white paper. The [government's response](#) was published in February 2024 and confirmed that it remained committed to its cross-sector principles and a “context-specific” approach to regulation. It said that it would aim to build on this in the future, only legislating when it was “confident that it is the right thing to do”.<sup>13</sup>

## Implementing the UK's AI Regulatory Principles, February 2024

In February 2024, the government also published guidance for regulators on [Implementing the UK's AI Regulatory Principles](#). The guidance sets out the “considerations that regulators may wish to have when developing tools and guidance to implement the UK's approach to AI regulation”.<sup>14</sup> Alongside the guidance, the [government asked regulators to explain their approach to AI](#). The [Regulators' strategic approaches to AI](#) were published in May 2024.

## 2.2

## Labour government: AI regulation

The Labour government has said it aims to regulate the “[most powerful AI models](#)” so they can be developed and used safely. However, at the time of writing, it has not introduced any new AI-specific legislation.

### 2024 manifesto and 2024 King's Speech

Both the Labour Party's 2024 election manifesto and the 2024 King's Speech initially indicated that the Labour government was looking to take a different approach to regulating AI compared with the previous government.

In its 2024 election manifesto, the Labour Party said it would “ensure the safe development and use of AI models by introducing binding regulation on the handful of companies developing the most powerful AI models”.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in the [King's Speech](#), the Labour government said that it would “harness the power of artificial intelligence as we look to strengthen safety frameworks”.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, [A pro-innovation approach to AI regulation: government response](#), February 2024

<sup>14</sup> Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, [Implementing the UK's AI regulatory principles: initial guidance for regulators](#), February 2024

<sup>15</sup> Labour Party, [Change](#) (PDF), election manifesto 2024, p35

<sup>16</sup> Prime Minister's Office, [The King's Speech](#) (PDF), July 2024, p4 and p7

The government also signalled that it would “place requirements on those working to develop the most powerful artificial intelligence models”.<sup>17</sup>

## Continued use of existing regulators

To date, the Labour government has continued with the approach to AI regulation outlined by the previous Conservative government (namely, that AI will continue to be overseen by existing regulators that cover specific sectors).

The government said that most AI systems should be regulated by “existing expert regulators” in its response to the Lords Communications and Digital Committee’s report on AI and creative technology scaleups in February 2025:

[...] most AI systems should be regulated at the point of use, and [...] our existing expert regulators are best placed to do this.<sup>18</sup>

### Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency

Some regulators have already held consultations on regulating AI within the sectors they oversee. For example, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA; the UK’s medicines regulator) consulted between December 2025 and February 2026 on the [Regulation of AI in Healthcare](#).

## Legislative proposals

In March 2025, the government said that it would be bringing forward legislation and that it was currently refining its legislative proposals:

The government is clear in its ambition to bring forward legislation which allows us to safely realise the enormous benefits and opportunities of the most powerful AI systems for years to come. The government is continuing to refine its proposals and will launch a public consultation in due course.<sup>19</sup>

At the time of writing, the government has not launched a consultation on regulating AI. The Guardian newspaper reported in June 2025 that proposals to regulate AI had been delayed “by at least a year”.<sup>20</sup>

When asked about the prospect of an “AI bill” at a Science, Innovation and Technology Committee meeting on 3 December 2025, the Science Secretary, Liz Kendall, said she was thinking about the bill “more in terms of specific areas where we may need to act rather than a big all-encompassing Bill”.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Prime Minister's Office, [The King's Speech](#), July 2024, p4 & p7, PDF

<sup>18</sup> [Government response to the Lords Communications and Digital Committee's report on AI and creative technology scaleups](#), April 2025

<sup>19</sup> [PQ 41098](#) [on Artificial Intelligence: Regulation], 31 March 2025

<sup>20</sup> The Guardian, [UK ministers delay AI regulation amid plans for more 'comprehensive' bill](#), 7 June 2025

<sup>21</sup> Q81, Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, [Oral evidence: Work of the Secretary of State for the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology](#), HC 1543, 3 December 2025

### Government consultation on AI and copyright

The government ran a [consultation on the UK's legal framework for AI and copyright](#) between December 2024 and February 2025. It received 11,500 submissions. A government response had not been published at the time of writing, though the government has established “[expert working groups on AI and copyright](#)”, as well as publishing a [progress update](#).

The government also published a [report and impact assessment on copyright and artificial intelligence](#) in March 2026. The report says that the government no longer has a “preferred way forward” regarding the use of copyrighted works in the development and training of AI models; it proposes to “gather further evidence” and “engage stakeholders”:

We propose to gather further evidence on how copyright laws are impacting the development and deployment of AI across the economy [...] consider and engage stakeholders on other potential policy approaches [and] continue to monitor developments in technology, litigation, international approaches, and the licensing market.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.3

### Labour government: AI policy

While the Labour government’s legislative plans for AI have yet to be confirmed, it has published several AI-related policies. These have predominantly focused on promoting innovation in, and the uptake of, AI to drive growth and productivity across the economy.

#### AI Opportunities Action Plan, January 2025

The government’s flagship AI policy has been the AI Opportunities Action Plan.

On 26 July 2024, the then Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Peter Kyle, announced the [government’s intention to develop an AI opportunities action plan](#), and [appointed tech entrepreneur Matt Clifford CBE](#) to lead on its development.

The plan’s terms of reference said it would “set out a roadmap for government to capture the opportunities of AI to enhance growth and productivity and create tangible benefits for UK citizens”.<sup>23</sup> The process for developing the plan included considering research, alongside interviews with experts from industry, academia, government, regulators and civil society.

The [AI Opportunities Action Plan](#) was published on 13 January 2025. It features 50 recommendations aimed at boosting the AI sector and ensuring that the

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<sup>22</sup> HM Government, [Report on Copyright and Artificial Intelligence](#), March 2026, p11

<sup>23</sup> Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, [AI Opportunities Action Plan: terms of reference](#), July 2024

UK is a global leader in advancing AI, as well as influencing AI safety and governance.

## Government response to the AI Opportunities Action Plan

The [government response to the AI Opportunities Action plan](#) was published at the same time as the plan. The Prime Minister also gave a speech in which he confirmed that the [government accepted all the recommendations made in the plan](#).

The 50 recommendations made in the action plan were grouped into eight categories. The government's response to the plan outlines each recommendation, how it will respond and provides [estimated timelines for delivery of each recommendation](#) (PDF; see summary on pages 8 to 19). Significant government commitments are outlined below, together with information on their implementation.

### AI Infrastructure

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) committed to publishing a long-term plan for AI infrastructure needs by spring 2025. This was subsequently published, in July 2025, as the [UK Compute Roadmap](#). The government said that, by financial year 2030/31, it would increase the computational capacity (known as 'compute') of the UK's [AI Research Resource](#) cluster of supercomputers twenty-fold, including by establishing a new supercomputing facility.

The government committed to creating 'AI growth zones' with improved access to energy, and support for planning approvals, to speed up building new data centres. Culham in Oxfordshire was selected as the first AI growth zone and the [government set out a process to select new growth zones](#) in summer 2025. Additional AI growth zones have since been announced (see below for further details).

The government agreed to set up an AI Energy Council to consider the energy needs of AI infrastructure and how these might be met by renewable energy options. The council is co-chaired by the Secretary of State for Science and Technology and the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero.

### Data assets

The action plan recommended creating a National Data Library to provide access to public sector datasets that could be used to support AI research and innovation. The government said it would publish further details by summer 2025, though in a response to a parliamentary question in July 2025 it said that [the "National Data Library remains under policy development"](#).

## Training and skills

Accurately assessing the size of the AI/digital skills gap was a significant recommendation in the action plan. The government tasked Skills England with addressing this recommendation and it published its [AI skills for the UK workforce](#) report in October 2025. DSIT said it would work with other departments to increase AI training and education in higher education settings, workplaces and schools. DSIT and the Department for Education also committed to publishing a plan to address the gender imbalance in digital education, training and employment by autumn 2026. This includes DSIT working with UK Research and Innovation to expand the existing [Turing AI Fellowships programme](#) and to establish a new AI scholarship scheme by autumn 2026.

In addition, DSIT and the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) agreed to investigate setting up an international headhunting scheme by spring 2026. Both departments also set out [a plan to attract highly skilled AI workers to the UK](#) via existing visa routes.

## Safety

The action plan said the government should continue to support and grow the AI Safety Institute (AISI), which was set up by the previous government. In its response to the action plan, the government said that it intended to establish the AISI as a statutory body and that its funding would be confirmed in the 2025 Spending Review (see the section below on the 2025 Spending Review). To date, the AISI has not been given statutory powers.

## Regulation

The action plan supported the government's "pro-innovation approach to regulation" and DSIT said it would consult on its "proposed legislation" to regulate AI. As noted above, a government consultation on AI is yet to take place (excluding the relatively narrowly defined public [consultation on copyright and AI](#), which ran between December 2024 and February 2025). The government also said that departments would be asked to assess the funding needs for regulators in different sectors, to increase their AI capabilities, and regulators would be required to publish an annual report on how they have enabled AI innovation in their sector. In January 2026, DSIT and DBT wrote to regulators also asking them to publish "[a plan on how they intend to enable safe AI-powered innovation](#)".

The action plan encouraged the government to take a "scan, pilot, scale" approach to enable AI to be used in public services. To facilitate this, DSIT said it would appoint an AI lead for each of the [government's key missions](#), as well as establish a horizon-scanning function and partnerships with AI companies. DSIT also said it would establish a framework for sourcing AI for use in public services (see the AI Exemplars programme highlighted below).

The government published its [Modern Industrial Strategy](#) in June 2025. While it does reference AI (it is identified as a 'frontier technology' that will be prioritised), it is much wider-ranging document. The Modern Industrial

Strategy is covered in a separate Commons Library briefing on [Industrial strategy in the UK](#).

## Implementing the AI Opportunities Action Plan

Since the action plan was published, the government has started to implement its recommendations. In January 2026, it also [reported on the progress it had made](#) against the 50 commitments in the action plan and created a [public dashboard](#) tracking its progress. At the time of writing, the dashboard says that the government has met 38 (76%) of the recommendations, while the remaining 12 (24%) are “in progress”.

### AI commitments in the Spending Review, June 2025

As part of the 2025 Spending Review, on 11 June 2025 the government announced over £2 billion for AI and implementing the AI Opportunities Action Plan. This included:

- Funding to enable a twentyfold expansion of the UK’s AI Research Resource capacity compared with the existing programmes. This new compute capacity will enable UK researchers and start-ups to lead in AI discoveries and advancements;
- Up to £500 million for the creation of a new UK Sovereign AI Unit working with the British Business Bank to support the emergence of national AI champions;
- £48 million for the Tech Expert programme to drive collaboration with universities to expand AI course provision, develop new AI educational pathways, and support AI talent scholarships which will attract the brightest minds to UK universities; and
- £240 million for the AI Security Institute to remain at the forefront of frontier AI research.<sup>24</sup>

The Spending Review period runs from 2026/27 until 2029/30.

Additional commitments on funding AI infrastructure were also made in the [November 2025 Budget](#):

- [up to £250 million will be spent on ‘compute’](#) (high-performance computing infrastructure)
- [up to £100 million will be made available to support an “advanced market commitment”](#), with the government acting as a “first customer” for UK start-ups developing “high-quality AI hardware products” to give them a guaranteed market

New AI sector champions to “[spearhead the rollout of AI](#)” across multiple sectors were also announced.

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<sup>24</sup> [Spending Review 2025 \(HTML\) - GOV.UK](#), 11 June 2025

## Delivering AI Growth Zones white paper, November 2025

As noted above, the AI Opportunities Action Plan recommended that the government establish ‘AI growth zones’. These are areas in the UK that have been identified as suitable for housing AI-enabled data centres and their supporting infrastructure.

The US technology firm IBM explains that data centres are essential for housing the digital infrastructure needed to train and deploy AI:

[An AI data centre] houses the specific [IT infrastructure](#) needed to train, deploy and deliver AI applications and services. It has advanced compute, network and storage architectures and energy and cooling capabilities to handle AI workloads.<sup>25</sup>

Regional and local authorities, as well as industry (such as data centre developers), have been able to [apply to be a growth zone](#) since June 2025. Five growth zones have been announced so far:

- [Culham, Oxfordshire](#) (announced in January 2025 as a growth zone pilot)
- [Blyth and North Tyneside](#) (announced in September 2025)
- [North Wales](#) (announced November 2025)
- [South Wales](#) (announced November 2025)
- [Lanarkshire](#) (announced January 2026)

According to the government, two of the main barriers to building data centres are “slow and inconsistent planning processes and delays getting access to power”.<sup>26</sup> The locations listed above have been chosen as places where the government believes these barriers can be best addressed.

In its [Delivering AI Growth Zones](#) white paper, the government explained what support would be available to growth zones to overcome energy and planning barriers:

- new powers in the [Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025](#) aim to prioritise national grid connections for projects identified by the government as strategically important (such as those in AI Growth Zones)
- potential mechanisms by which developers would be able to construct and connect to their own high-voltage lines and substations, rather than waiting for network operators to construct and connect substations
- growth zones across Great Britain will be given priority access to existing available capacity on the energy grid

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<sup>25</sup> IBM, [What is an AI Data Center?](#), accessed 20 January 2026

<sup>26</sup> Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, [Delivering AI Growth Zones](#), November 2025

- an AI planning team (with £4.5 million of funding) will support local councils across the UK with expert advice and funding when considering AI data centre applications
- proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework which would add explicit references that give significant weight to AI Growth Zones and recognise the specific locational requirements of data centres
- streamlined consenting for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, with efforts to cut approval timelines from 18 to 12 months

Each growth zone will be awarded £5 million of government funding to help invest in skills in the local workforce.<sup>27</sup>

More information on data centres can be found in the Commons Library briefing on [Data centres: planning policy, sustainability, and resilience](#).

## Other announcements

- The government has said it will establish a [Sovereign AI Unit](#), supported by almost £500 million, to “help build and scale AI capabilities on British shores. The unit will bring together government, industry and investors, to become the go-to fund for high potential start-ups and scale-ups in the UK”.<sup>28</sup> The unit will be chaired by James Wise, a venture capitalist.
- The [government has appointed AI ambassadors](#) to encourage public-sector uptake of AI and to champion British AI start-ups.
- The government announced an [AI for Science Strategy](#) in November 2025. It aims to develop “frontier capability in AI-driven science” (‘frontier’ refers to general-purpose AI, like Chat GPT) and ensure the “UK retains its position of global scientific leadership”.<sup>29</sup>
- The [AI Playbook for the UK Government](#) was launched in February 2025 to provide government departments and public sector organisations with technical guidance on how to use AI safely and effectively. For more information, see the Commons Library briefing on [AI in UK government departments](#).
- Through the [AI Exemplars programme](#), the government is highlighting initiatives where AI is being used to improve public services and make them more efficient.
- The [roadmap for modern digital government](#) explains what progress the government has made toward digitising government and public services since it published its [blueprint for modern digital government](#) in 2025.

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<sup>27</sup> [AI to power national renewal as government announces billions of additional investment and new plans to boost UK businesses, jobs and innovation - GOV.UK](#), November 2025

<sup>28</sup> Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, [Sovereign AI Unit](#), July 2025

<sup>29</sup> Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, [AI for Science Strategy](#), November 2025

The document is not solely focused on AI, but chapter 2 covers “[Harnessing AI for public good](#)”. It says that the government is “promoting responsible AI adoption and strengthening skills across government to create more inclusive, accessible and productive public services that work for everyone”.<sup>30</sup>

## 2.4 Stakeholder commentary on AI regulation in the UK

### A “sensible” start

There has been a mixed response to the government’s “pro-innovation” approach to regulating AI. The Commons Science, Innovation and Technology Committee said that relying on the UK’s existing regulators, and regulatory system, was a “sensible starting point”, though it stressed that a more “well-developed central coordinating function” may be required.<sup>31</sup> Some have compared the UK’s system favourably with the EU’s AI Act, and have said that it is more flexible and less prescriptive than the EU’s approach, making it better able to adapt to technological shifts (see below for further information on the EU AI Act).<sup>32</sup>

### Criticism of “fragmented” regulation

Others have said the UK’s regulation of AI is “complex”, “fragmented” and lacking coordination with international regulators, increasing the risk of “uneven” coverage and inconsistent rules.<sup>33</sup> The Ada Lovelace Institute has called for “clearer rights and new institutions [...] to ensure that [AI] safeguards extend across the economy”.<sup>34</sup> [Polling by the Ada Lovelace Institute on the UK public’s expectations for AI governance](#) found that the public supports independent regulation, which the institute says is out of step with delays on AI legislation.

### Criticism of “timid” regulation

Campaign groups such as Control AI have argued that the UK has taken a “timid” approach to regulation.<sup>35</sup> Control AI has highlighted lobbying from UK

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<sup>30</sup> [Harness the power of AI for the public good - A roadmap for modern digital government](#), A gov.uk campaign, not dated

<sup>31</sup> Science, Innovation & Technology Committee, [The governance of artificial intelligence: interim report](#), Ninth Report of Session 2022–23, August 2023, para 11

<sup>32</sup> Cambridge Management Consulting, [Legislating AI: A Comparison Between the EU and the UK](#), not dated; TechPolicy Press, [UK Versus EU: Who Has A Better Policy Approach To AI?](#), February 2024

<sup>33</sup> Osborne Clarke, [How AI is regulated in UK financial services today](#), January 2024; Matt Davies & Michael Birtwistle, Ada Lovelace Institute, [Regulating AI in the UK](#), July 2023

<sup>34</sup> Matt Davies & Michael Birtwistle, Ada Lovelace Institute, [Regulating AI in the UK](#), July 2023

<sup>35</sup> The Guardian, [Scores of UK parliamentarians join call to regulate most powerful AI systems](#), December 2025

and US companies which, it says, aims to stall government regulation on the grounds that it is “premature and would crush innovation”.<sup>36</sup>

## Further commentary

Further stakeholder commentary can be found in the Science Media Centre’s round-up of [expert reaction to the government’s AI Opportunities Action Plan](#) (January 2025).

## 2.5

# European legislation and treaties

## EU AI Act 2024

The approach taken to AI regulation in the EU is different to the approach taken in the UK. Through the [EU AI Act 2024](#), the EU has adopted a centralised, risk-based and legally binding approach that aims to set standards for safe and ethical AI use. The act entered into force on 1 August 2024, with many of the provisions due to apply two years later, on 2 August 2026. It is described by the European Parliament as “[the world’s first comprehensive AI law](#)”.<sup>37</sup>

The EU AI Act is a ‘horizontal’ EU legislative instrument. This means the act applies to all AI systems placed on the market or used in the EU, regardless of where the provider, or the AI system, is based. It also covers AI systems outside the EU (such as those in the UK) where the output produced by an AI system is used in the EU.

The act takes a risk-based approach to regulating AI, so that the requirements placed on providers, deployers and distributors vary depending on the type of AI and the purposes for which it will be used. Certain AI systems and practices are deemed harmful in the act and are banned. These include untargeted scraping of facial images from the internet or CCTV footage to create facial recognition databases. The ban on AI systems posing unacceptable risks started to apply on 2 February 2025.

In November 2025, the European Commission proposed delaying the implementation of the parts of the AI Act that govern “high risk” AI systems until 2027, so that the rules start to apply once the commission confirms the necessary technical guidance, standards and tools are available.<sup>38</sup> By March

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<sup>36</sup> The Guardian, [Scores of UK parliamentarians join call to regulate most powerful AI systems](#), December 2025

<sup>37</sup> European Parliament, [EU AI Act: first regulation on artificial intelligence](#), last updated February 2025

<sup>38</sup> European Commission, [Digital Omnibus on AI Regulation Proposal](#), November 2025; European Commission, [Simpler EU digital rules and new digital wallets to save billions for businesses](#), November 2025

2026, the Council of the EU had agreed its position on streamlining AI rules and “broadly maintained the thrust of the Commission’s proposal”.<sup>39</sup>

Further information can be found in:

- [Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence](#)
- European Parliamentary Research Service, [Artificial intelligence act](#) (PDF), March 2024
- European Parliament, [EU AI Act: first regulation on artificial intelligence](#), June 2024
- [Regulation on the simplification of the implementation of harmonized rules on artificial intelligence \(Digital omnibus on AI\), Commission proposal](#) (PDF), 17 November 2025

## Council of Europe: First international treaty on artificial intelligence, 2024

In May 2024, the [Council of Europe adopted](#) the “first-ever international legally binding treaty aimed at ensuring the respect of human rights, the rule of law and democracy legal standards in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) systems”.<sup>40</sup> It covers the use of AI by both the public and private sectors and is technology-neutral: it does not seek to regulate the technology, but rather sets out eight “fundamental principles” that the lifecycle of an AI system must comply with, including “human dignity and individual autonomy” and “transparency and oversight”. It opened for signatures on 5 September 2024. The UK is a member state of the Council of Europe and was one of the first countries to [sign the treaty in September 2024](#).

Further information from the Council of Europe on the treaty is available at:

- [Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law](#)
- [The Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence](#)
- [Artificial Intelligence: Ensuring respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law](#)

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<sup>39</sup> Council of the EU, [Council agrees position to streamline rules on Artificial Intelligence](#), March 2026

<sup>40</sup> Council of Europe, [Council of Europe adopts first international treaty on artificial intelligence](#), 17 May 2024

## 3 Further reading on UK regulation of AI and UK AI policy

A large number of UK Government policy documents, third-party analyses and parliamentary select committee reports have considered the potential benefits and risks of AI, as well as ways to regulate the technology. Some of these are highlighted below.

### 3.1 UK Government documents

#### Strategies, plans and roadmaps

- [Report and impact assessment on copyright and artificial intelligence](#), March 2026
- [Roadmap for modern digital government](#), January 2026
- [AI for science strategy](#), November 2025
- [Digital and Technologies Sector Plan](#), June 2025
- [AI Opportunities Action Plan: government response](#), January 2025
- [AI Opportunities Action Plan](#), January 2025
- [A blueprint for modern digital government](#), January 2025
- [Regulators' strategic approaches to AI](#), May 2024
- [National AI Strategy - AI Action Plan](#), July 2022
- [National AI Strategy](#), September 2021
- [AI Roadmap](#), January 2021

#### White papers

- [Delivering AI Growth Zones](#), November 2025
- [Modern Industrial Strategy](#), November 2025
- [A pro-innovation approach to AI regulation Government response to consultation](#) (PDF), February 2024

- [A pro-innovation approach to AI regulation \(white paper\)](#), March 2023 (updated August 2023)
- [Establishing a pro-innovation approach to regulating AI](#) (consultation paper), July 2022

### AI Standards Hub

- An explanation of its work on AI standards is available at: [What are standards? - AI Standards Hub](#)
- The AI Standards database can be searched at: [AI Standards Search](#)
- Separately, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology has published an [Introduction to AI assurance](#), February 2024 and [Assuring a responsible future for AI](#), November 2024

## 3.2 Government Office for Science (GO-Science) publications

- [Future Risks of Frontier AI](#) (PDF), October 2023
- [Rapid Technology Assessment: Artificial Intelligence](#), March 2023

## 3.3 Information Commissioner's Office publications

- [Guidance on AI and data protection](#), March 2023
- [The Information Commissioner's response to the Government's AI White Paper](#) (PDF), 2023
- [Explaining decisions made with AI](#), October 2022
- See also a range of AI publications from the Information Commissioner's Office at: [Artificial intelligence](#)

## 3.4 Digital Regulation Cooperation Forum

The [Digital Regulation Cooperation Forum](#) brings together the major UK regulators tasked with regulating digital services:

- the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)

- the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)
- the Information Commissioners Office (ICO)
- the Office of Communications (Ofcom)
- [The benefits and harms of algorithms: a shared perspective from the four digital regulators](#), September 2022
- [Digital Regulation Cooperation Forum Papers](#)
- Competition and Markets Authority, [Agentic AI and consumers](#), March 2026
- Competition and Markets Authority, [AI strategic update](#), April 2024
- Competition and Markets Authority, [AI Foundation Models: Update paper](#), 11 April 2024
- Competition and Markets Authority, [AI Foundation Models: Initial report](#), September 2023
- Financial Conduct Authority, [Review into the long-term impact of AI on retail financial services \(The Mills Review\)](#), January 2026
- Financial Conduct Authority, [Our emerging regulatory approach to Big Tech and Artificial Intelligence](#), July 2023
- Ofcom, [Ofcom’s strategic approach to AI](#), June 2025
- Ofcom, [What generative AI means for the communications sector](#), June 2023

## 3.5

### Commentary on UK government’s AI policy and regulation

- Ayesha Bhatti, [The UK’s Agile, Sector-Specific Approach to AI Regulation Is Promising](#), Center for Data Innovation, February 2024
- Bird & Bird, [AI regulation in the UK The role of the regulators](#), January 2026
- Burges Salmon, [AI regulation in the UK: Government response to White Paper](#), February 2024
- DAC Beachcroft, [The approach to the regulation of AI in the UK](#), March 2025 (PDF)
- Elliot Jones, [Keeping an eye on AI](#), Ada Lovelace Institute, July 2023

- [Expert comment: Oxford AI experts comment on the outcomes of the UK AI Safety Summit](#), University of Oxford, November 2023
- Kir Nuthi, [An Overview of the UK's New Approach to AI](#), Center for Data Innovation, April 2023
- Matt Davies, Michael Birtwistle, [Policy briefing: Regulating AI in the UK](#), Ada Lovelace Institute, July 2023
- Mile End Institute, Queen Mary, University of London, [The UK in the AI regulation debate: In hoc with Trump's America or going their own way?](#), March 2025
- Osborne Clarke, [How AI is regulated in UK financial services today](#), January 2024
- Paul Shepley, Matthew Gill, [Artificial intelligence: how is the government approaching regulation?](#), Institute for Government, October 2023
- RAND, [UK Government's AI Plan Gives a Glimpse of How It Plans to Regulate the Technology](#), January 2025
- techUK, [The UK's AI moment: An ambitious new plan for innovation and growth](#), January 2025

## 3.6

## UK Parliament select committee reports

### House of Commons

- Treasury Committee, [Artificial intelligence in financial services](#), Fifteenth Report of Session 2024–26, 20 January 2026
- Public Accounts Committee, [Use of AI in Government](#), Eighteenth Report of Session 2024–25, 26 March 2025
- Defence Committee, [Developing AI capacity and expertise in UK defence](#), Second Report of Session 2024–25, 10 January 2025
- Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, [Governance of artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#), Third Report of Session 2023–24, 28 May 2024
- Culture, Media and Sport Committee, [Connected tech: AI and creative technology](#), Eleventh Report of Session 2022–23, 30 August 2023
- Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, [The governance of artificial intelligence: interim report](#), Ninth Report of Session 2022–23, 31 August 2023
- Science and Technology Committee, [Algorithms in decision-making](#), Fourth Report of Session 2017–19, May 2018

## House of Lords

- Communications and Digital Committee, [AI, copyright and the creative industries](#), HL Paper 267, March 2026
- Communications and Digital Select Committee, [Large language models and generative AI](#), HL Paper 54, February 2024
- Select Committee on AI in Weapon Systems, [Proceed with Caution: Artificial Intelligence in Weapon Systems](#), HL Paper 16, December 2023
- Liaison Committee, [AI in the UK: No Room for Complacency](#) (PDF), HL Paper 196, December 2020
- Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence, [AI in the UK: ready, willing and able?](#), HL Paper 100, April 2018

## 3.7

## Government responses to select committees

- Treasury Minutes, [Government response to the Committee of Public Accounts Session 2024-25, Eighteenth report: Use of AI in Government](#), June 2025, CP 1341
- Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, [Government Response to the Lords Communications and Digital Select Committee, Large language models and generative AI report](#), May 2024, PDF
- Ministry of Defence, [The Government Response to the Report by the House of Lords AI in Weapon Systems Committee: 'Proceed with Caution: Artificial Intelligence in Weapon Systems'](#) (PDF) (Session 2023-24 HL Paper 16), CP 1023, February 2024
- Culture, Media and Sport Committee, [Connected tech: AI and creative technology: Government Response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2022-23](#), Third Special Report of Session 2023-24, January 2024
- Science, Innovation and Technology Committee, [The governance of artificial intelligence: interim report: Government response to the Committee's Ninth report](#) (PDF), First Special Report of Session 2023-24, HC 248, November 2023
- Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Government Response to the House of Lords Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence](#) (PDF), CP 390, February 2021
- Science and Technology Committee, [Algorithms in decision-making: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report](#), July 2018

- Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, [AI in the UK: ready, willing and able? - government response to the select committee report](#), June 2018

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