

How can we use AI and Digital to improve how Government and our public services work?

techUK is the trade association for the technology sector in the UK. Our over-1000 members, the majority of which are UK-based SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises), are based around the United Kingdom. They employ 1.1 million people across the UK, with a turnover of £329bn in 2023 and an estimated annual growth rate of 10%.

We have prepared this briefing to help Prospective Parliamentary Candidates understand key tech issues in the UK, what can be done to tackle these issues, and the benefits of doing so.

This briefing draws upon:

- Our [*UK Tech Plan: How the next Government can use technology to build a better Britain*](#)
- The [*Seven Tech Priorities for the next Government and polling of 250 tech industry leaders in February 2023*](#).

More briefings, both from ourselves and techUK's members, can be found on our [online briefing hub](#).

This paper was produced by techUK's Public Services Board. As our senior forum for public sector tech suppliers, the PSB creates the environment for the UK tech industry to collaborate across the whole of Government to enable the delivery of world class, affordable public services.

What problems exist in our public service that AI and Digitisation can help solve?

It is important to acknowledge the challenge of harnessing the potential of AI adoption and deployment at a time when public demand for convenient and efficient services is high, while trust in government IT systems is low. Despite the potential for AI's rapid growth across the public sector, there are both practical and cultural matters that public service leaders, at ministerial and official levels, will need to address if implementation pace and success is to be secured.

The prevalence of siloed working across government departments and the slow removal of legacy tech frustrates the pace at which AI is adopted. Currently, most if not

all, central government authorities are looking to incorporate AI into their ways of working. However, in spite of these ambitions, the difference in the pace of this adoption can create disjointed working and hinder the overall success of entrenching AI into government processes. This challenge in conjunction with the need to address the removal of legacy tech from government departments creates a key blocker to the adoption of AI in government.

The lack of access to data has contributed to and perpetuates siloed working across government. Many government departments are plagued with legacy tech challenges and siloed data that makes access to necessary data more challenging.

As the use of AI increases across both government departments and technology suppliers, its use and impact within procurement processes will need to be better understood. This need for skill and expertise comes at the same time as a digital skills shortage across the Civil Service. This shortage is best quantified by the [National Audit Office's report](#) looking at the digital transformation in government. The report found a 7% increase in government digital, data, and technology vacancies from 3,900 in April 2022 to 4,100 in October 2022.

Given the government's responsibility to support the public in an equitable manner, public services organisations face high standards when responding to and navigating fundamental AI issues such as trust, safety, morality, and fairness. In the face of these challenges, many government agencies are making a strong effort to harness the power of AI while cautiously navigating through this maze of legal and ethical considerations. Furthermore, this is linked to anxiety around AI replacing jobs in the Civil Service.

The digital transformation of government will need to keep up with developments in the AI arena. Unduly bureaucratic procurement processes in government risk impeding the uptake of AI across the public sector. Officials will need to identify suitable procurement arrangements to ensure industry and government can collaboratively harness the opportunities presented by AI.

What steps can the next Government take to overcome these problems?

The next Government must go further to increase the ethical and responsible adoption of AI, and this requires planning where and how AI can make the greatest possible positive impacts. Early adopters of AI in the private sector have been able to capitalise on its benefits and are therefore uniquely placed to guide and support the next Government to successfully deploy AI across public sector organisations.

- **Departments and major agencies should identify and prioritise where AI has most ready potential to transform services and deliver savings.** This review should be transparent and serve as way of notifying the supplier market who can assist with the development of business cases, concept viability and assessment of risks ahead of any procurement.
- **The next Government should review and update existing standards or guidance in consultation with industry to account for AI's use in delivery of public services.** For example, by updating the [Digital, Data and Technology Playbook](#) to include guidance on the use of AI to better support civil servants.
- **The next Government must make it clear how AI could be used in procurement and how buyers might use AI to evaluate bids.** The Government's recently published [PPN 02/24](#) is a first attempt at providing answers to the way in which AI can be used in procurements. However, guidance is needed to standardise the way individual departments incorporate AI into their procurement processes to ensure there is transparency and clarity for suppliers.
- **HM Treasury and CDDO should publish a new and ambitious timetable for the remediation of all legacy systems across government** to further ensure that existing digital infrastructure is ready for AI. Access to high-quality sector-specific data is vital for the successful deployment of AI research. It is vital that this legacy tech is removed from use as it has been identified as a clear barrier to digital transformation and adoption of AI as outlined in the CDDO roadmap and National Audit Office's report.
- **A new Technology Procurement Delivery Body** should be established in Cabinet Office by the next Government, consisting of senior civil servants and external appointees, to meaningfully improve procurement processes and tackle the known existing barriers to procurement for small businesses. Progress should be measured against a range of metrics such as SME contracts won, value for money, better outcomes for citizens and positive industry feedback.

The next Government must also anticipate, prepare and promote the **reskilling and upskilling of Civil Servants** so they can effectively utilise AI, in turn changing this perceived threat into an opportunity to further enhance their skills and create economic opportunities for the UK. Early steps that could be taken include:

- **Government should build on the CDDO's [Generative AI framework](#) which recommends the use of meaningful human control and supervision of generative AI in Government.** These assurance controls, as outlined in the framework, include trained and qualified persons to review generative AI tools and outputs.

- As outlined in techUK's "[AI Adoption in the UK](#)" report, **the next Government should design an education pipeline that is flexible and agile**. The next Government should also consider the development of a National Reskilling Framework, as well as an online Digital Skills Toolkit to collect digital training courses and make digital opportunities and pathways more transparent and accessible to more people. The next Government should also look to create initiatives which actively encourage diversity in the digital workforce.

AI's unique potential to enhance existing workflows through effective adoption in the public sector must fully consider and factored in individual requirements in how AI is deployed and ensure that algorithms used in handling data are made transparent.

The next Government also needs to provide more certainty around the **legal considerations of AI**, particularly generative AI. Currently, UK law already addresses a range of risks associated with AI, however it is important for the government to be aware of the threats which will arise outside the current scope of legislation and regulatory limits. The next Government should ensure that adequate guardrails are in place to address the potential risks from AI models, that could adversely affect the provision of vital public services.

What are the opportunities of deploying AI and digital technology across Government and public services?

The rapid developments in artificial intelligence (AI) present numerous and unprecedented opportunities for the public sector. From improving the experience for citizens when accessing services to maximising efficiencies and fostering innovation practices.

AI has the potential to transform all facets of the public sector, from education, to healthcare, impacting the sector by unlocking more effective public services to citizens to meet their needs.

AI's integration in the public sector can significantly enhance efficiency and streamline processes, by relieving the considerable human resources currently devoted to administrative and repetitive tasks. **Automation can free up time to redirect efforts towards more strategically important tasks** or those which deliver tangible improvements to support citizens, with [the US Department of Veterans Affairs](#) cutting data input time by 90% through integration of AI tools and freeing up 200 workers to work instead in more important areas.

AI aided decision-making can increase accuracy, accelerate understanding, save valuable time and improve outcomes across critical public sector services, such as hospitals. Adoption of AI in decision-making processes could lead to improved efficiencies across services and ultimately improve the public's experience of using these services.

How can I learn more?

If you would like to know more about the importance of getting our incentives for innovation right, you can read our [UK Tech Plan](#) and [Seven Tech Priorities](#).

techUK can also arrange a call with yourself and our policy managers so we can brief you on this topic in more detail. If this would be of benefit to you, please contact archie.breare@techuk.org and alice.campbell@techuk.org.

techUK is also able to arrange a meeting between yourself and a member company of ours who has premises in your constituency if possible. This would provide you with a photo opportunity and allow you to discuss the importance of this issue further with a company operating in your constituency.