

# PUBLIC SECTOR AI ADOPTION: UK FACTSHEET

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This factsheet draws on findings from the Global AI Adoption Index for Public Services, based on a survey of **3,335 public sector workers** across **ten countries**. This research included a sample of **345** public sector workers in the United Kingdom, comprising **149** from local or regional government entities, **136** from national government or national government entities and **60** from other public sector entities.

The index measures how AI is experienced in practice. What is written in government strategies does not automatically translate into real-world impact. Approaches across countries are varied, the index helps explore these differences and make recommendations to improve AI use.

It brings together five indicators that shape real-world adoption: **enthusiasm** for AI, **education** and skills, **empowerment** through clear permission and governance, **enablement** via access to tools, and **embedding** into everyday workflows. Together, these provide a practical snapshot of AI adoption in the UK, set against international peers. Full results are available on the [main index webpage](#).

## PUBLIC SECTOR AI ADOPTION: UK CONTEXT

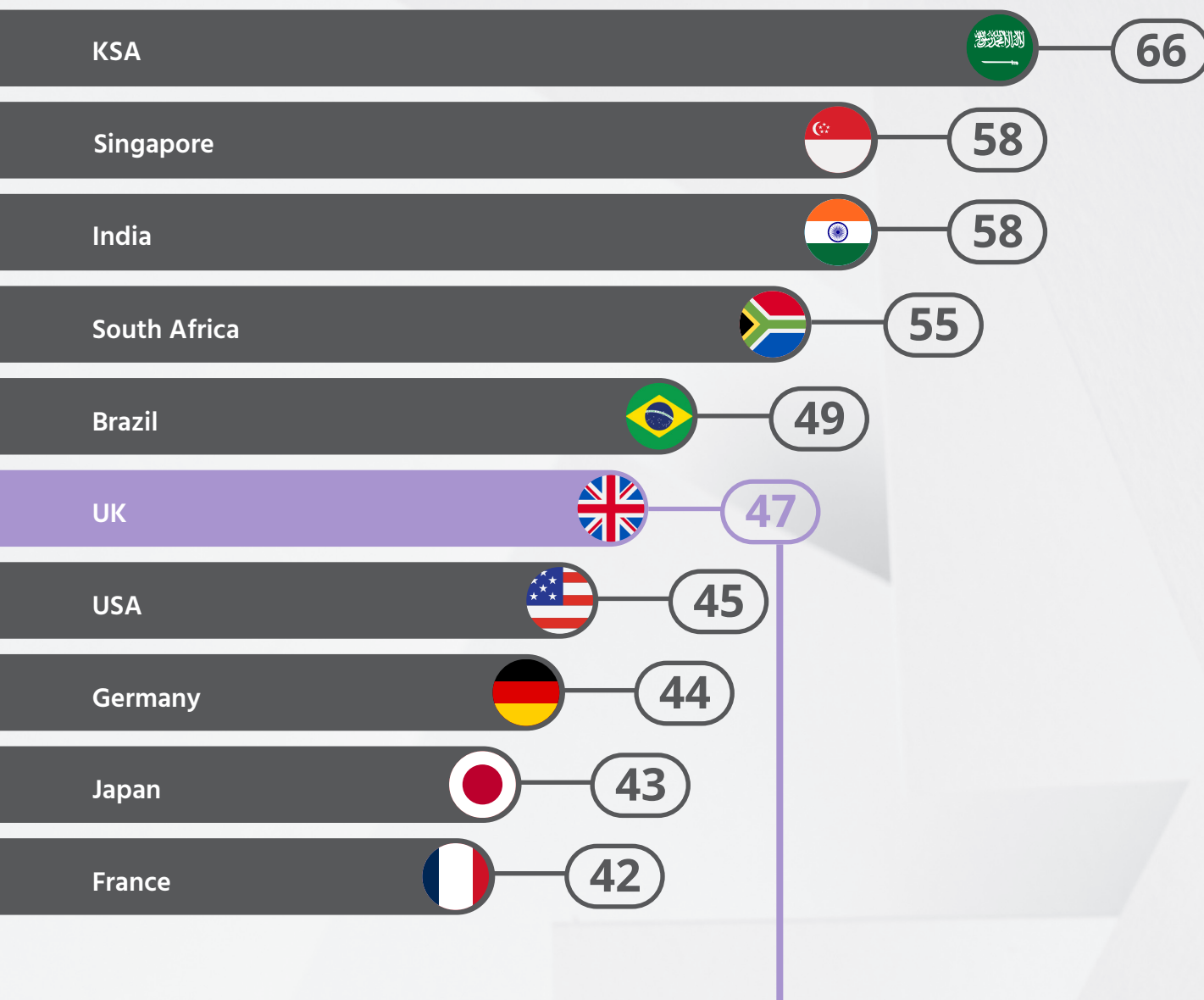
The UK government has set out an **ambitious, centrally driven agenda** to **embed AI across the public sector**, positioning it as a core tool to improve productivity, service quality and long-term resilience. National strategies, leadership from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and the Cabinet Office, and delivery bodies such as the Digital Centre of Government have placed AI firmly at the heart of public service modernisation. There is a clear intent to move beyond pilots and specialist teams towards wider, everyday use by public servants.

However, adoption across the public sector remains uneven. While many departments and local authorities are trialling AI for tasks such as policy analysis, service triage and operational efficiency, uptake often trails the ambition. Our index shows there is a **visible gap between national intent** and the **experience of front-line civil servants**.

There are signs that this gap could begin to narrow. The UK Government's announcement of a national AI skills programme (which happened after the Index survey was complete) proposes to expand free AI training. This mirrors approaches taken in advanced adoption countries and, if effectively implemented and aligned with clear permission and access to tools, this programme could help translate the UK's strong central ambition into more confident, routine use of AI across public services.



## THE UK IN THE GLOBAL INDEX



The UK sits in the middle of the index, reflecting high awareness of AI's potential but weaker embedding of AI tools and lower levels of everyday use among public servants. The UK has set out a strong, centrally driven ambition to embed AI across the public sector, backed by numerous national strategies, but the next phase is about translating this enthusiasm into more even and advanced adoption.

- UK public servants show high awareness of AI's potential but adoption remains uneven and limited to basic tasks. **60%** say AI use has increased over the past year, yet **fewer than one in three** use AI to improve workflows and only **17%** report using these tools for advanced or technical tasks.
- The UK scores highly in our index for education, but training is not as widespread as it should be. **37%** of public servants report receiving some form of AI training, and of those who have been trained **75%** say that they find AI easy to use. However, a training gap remains, with **over half of public servants (54%)** reporting they received **no AI training**. The Government's recent announcement of the new AI Skills Hub, expanding free AI training is a step in the right direction.
- Adoption is currently driven from the bottom up, rather than system or organisationally led. **46%** cited a **lack of clear direction or guidance from leadership**, and around **2 in 5** public servants are unsure what they are **permitted to use AI for** at work, stalling uptake.

The opportunity for the UK is clear. With more consistent access to trusted tools, successful rollout of practical, role-specific training, and clearer permission from leaders, the UK could quickly move from an uneven approach to AI to confident, everyday AI use across public services, supporting productivity gains and improved service delivery across the country.

# WHAT OUR RESEARCH SHOWS

The UK sits in the middle of our AI Adoption Index, with public sector workers reporting high awareness of AI but more limited confidence and depth of use.



**Enthusiasm**  
47/100

AI is approached with scepticism or concern, with limited evidence of benefit and low levels of experimentation or discussion. AI is more often perceived as overwhelming or risky than empowering.



**Education**  
51/100

Training is increasingly available across the public sector, reflecting the UK's growing commitment to building AI capability. However, provision is often introductory and unevenly delivered. As a result, understanding is developing but remains partial, and confidence varies across teams.



**Empowerment**  
49/100

Emerging but not fully formalised governance around AI use, with expectations shaped by informal guidance or team-level practices rather than being codified or consistently applied across the organisation. This limits confidence in appropriate use across contexts and constrains adoption beyond basic tasks.



**Enablement**  
42/100

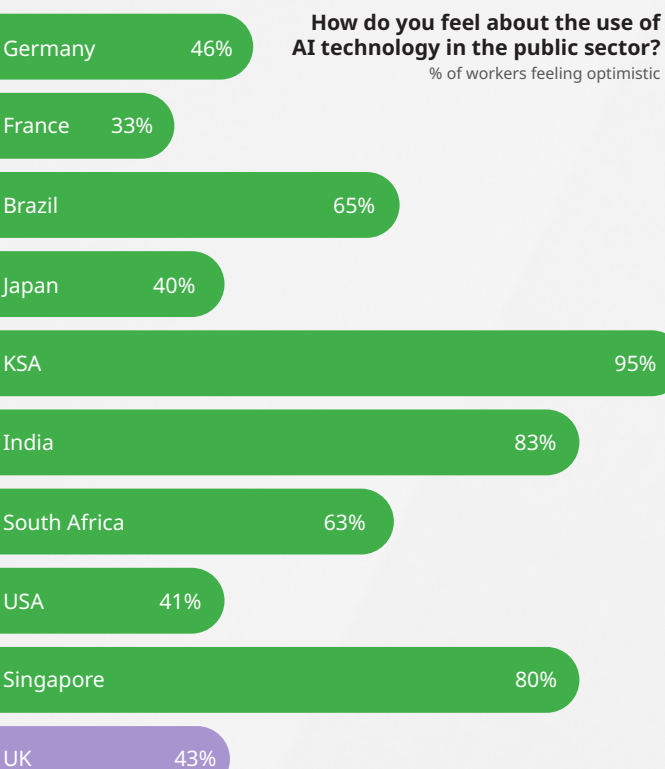
Some AI tools and resources are available, but access is uneven across departments or not well matched to everyday needs. Gaps in coverage, support, or role-specific access prevent consistent and scalable use across the organisation.



**Embedding**  
42/100

Early or uneven institutionalisation, with some structures in place but limited consistency across teams or functions. AI use remains dependent on local initiative rather than systemic support.

While most respondents recognise AI's potential to improve efficiency and decision-making, fewer than two in five describe AI as empowering (39%) or believe it is currently used effectively within their team (38%) or organisation (37%).



Enthusiasm for AI in the UK is lower than in most countries, ranking 8th out of 10 for this index with a score of only 47/100, reflecting a gap between national ambition and frontline experience. While 60% of workers say AI use has increased over the past year, adoption is largely confined to basic tasks such as drafting and analysis. Far fewer report using AI to improve workflows (26%) or to support advanced or technical tasks (17%).

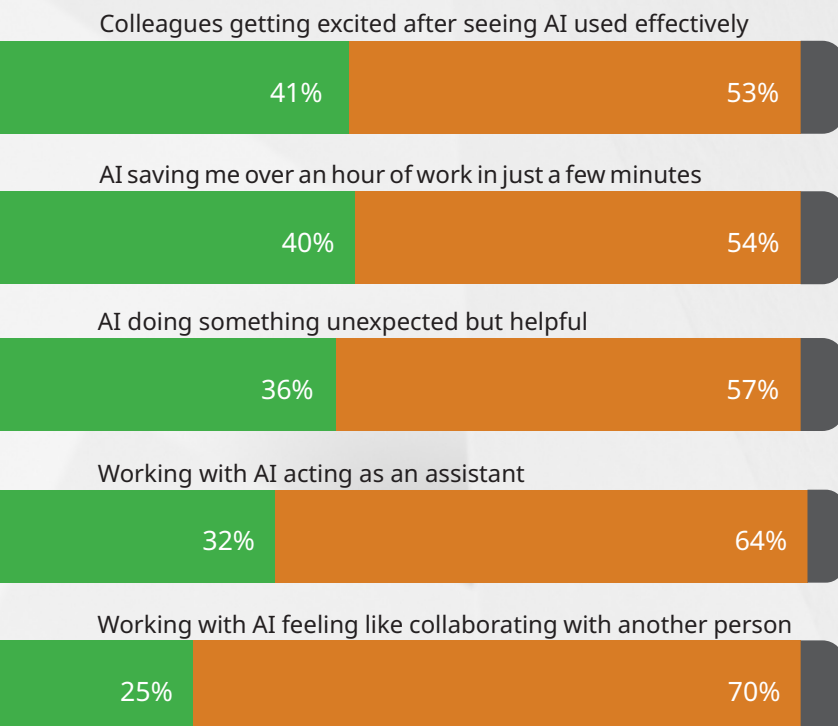
Unclear guidance on permitted use, uneven access to tools and patchy training constrain wider uptake. As a result, AI use remains fragmented and often confined to pilots. The UK's lower scores across the empowerment, education and embedding categories in the index reflect this, positioning the UK as squarely middle-of-the-pack for the 10 countries surveyed.

Overall, the UK's performance reflects strong strategic intent but persistent friction in delivery. Clarity around AI use, expanding access to trusted tools and embedding practical training would help the move from cautious experimentation to more confident, scalable adoption.

## UNIQUE FEATURES OF THE UK

### Have you experienced the following?

● Yes ● No ● Don't know



The UK has a highly developed AI ecosystem, clear national strategies, and strong central institutions focused on digital government. However, unlike more advanced AI adopting countries, it does not consistently translate this into confident, routine use of AI among public sector workers.

UK public servants report some of the **lowest levels of self-assessed AI knowledge**, with **63%** reporting knowing "a little" or "nothing at all" about AI, and **more than 2 in 5** remaining **unconfident** in their ability to use AI tools effectively. The education score for the UK sits at **51/100, 6th place** in the index, showing some definite room for improvement even as it beats out Germany & the US for this measure. While awareness of AI's potential is relatively high- most say AI is easy to use (60%), effective (52%) and believe it can save time (66%) - far fewer have experienced its benefits in daily work.

The UK's challenge is **not infrastructure or access**, but **weak enablement (47/100, or rank 5/10 in the index)**, and limited guidance on how to use AI to improve a public servant's role. Over half of public servants (54%) report receiving no AI training, while 44% say training feels like an afterthought in their organisation. Around 2 in 5 are unsure what they are permitted to use AI for or lack confidence that their current use aligns with workplace policies, and 46% say leaders do not provide clear guidance on how AI should be used.

Yes, training was provided by external experts or organisations 10%

Yes, training was provided internally (e.g. team-led sessions, peer learning) 25%

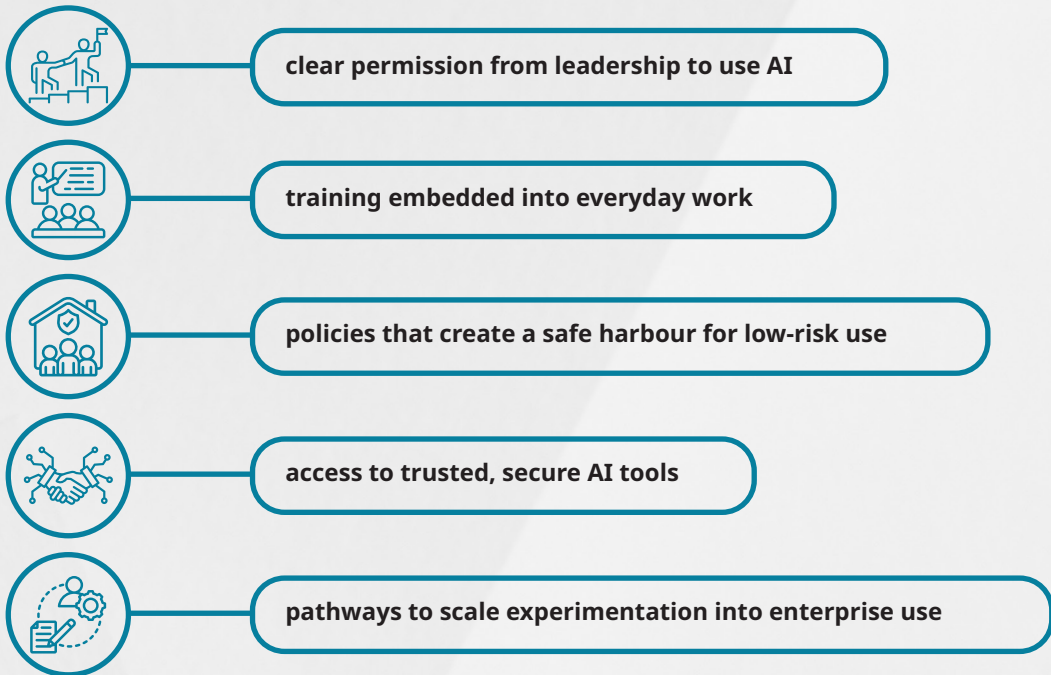
No, we received no training on how to use AI tools 54%

Don't know 9%

As a result, AI adoption in the UK is currently driven less by organisational momentum than by individual curiosity and peer support. Compared with peer countries, colleagues at work are the primary route through which UK public servants learn about AI, ahead of personal experimentation through external sources such as online guides, forums and YouTube. The opportunity for the UK lies in unlocking this latent capability- turning cautious experimentation into normalised use, and enabling public servants to apply AI confidently and creatively within clear guardrails.

# HOW TO ENHANCE AI USE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: STEPS THAT CAN BE TAKEN IN THE UK

Our research points to five actions that consistently support stronger AI adoption across countries:



Together, these create the conditions for public servants to move from basic experimentation to confident use that can prepare the ground for significant public sector transformation.

## WHAT MATTERS MOST FOR THE UK

For the UK, the challenge is **not ambition but execution**. The index shows that public servants are aware of AI's potential, but lack the clarity, confidence and consistency needed to use it routinely. Three priorities stand out:

# 1

### Make permission explicit and operational

Despite strong national signals, many UK public servants remain unclear about what AI use is permitted in practice. Central guidance — including the AI Playbook — now needs to be reinforced through consistent, visible signals from departmental leadership. This should focus on clearly permitted, low-risk uses (such as drafting, summarising and analysis), supported by plain-English rules on data and escalation. Turning permission from a policy document into a shared organisational norm is critical to reducing hesitation and normalising AI as a standard workplace tool.

# 2

### Shift from awareness to confidence through role-specific training

AI awareness in the UK and the potential public servants see for the technology are high, but it is important that training and guidance keeps pace. In many cases, training remains optional, introductory, or not yet fully aligned with day-to-day roles. Embedding short, practical, role-specific AI training into onboarding and professional development would help staff apply AI meaningfully in their work. Training should focus on real tasks public servants already perform, supported by examples, prompts and shared learning drawn from across the public services and government.

# 3

### Create clear pathways from experimentation to scale

AI use among UK public servants remains fragmented and heavily reliant on individual initiative. To move beyond pilots, departments need clearer routes to test, approve and scale AI tools safely. This includes governed sandboxes, streamlined approval processes and incentives that reward teams for sharing and scaling what works. Without these pathways, AI adoption will remain uneven, limiting its impact on productivity and service delivery.