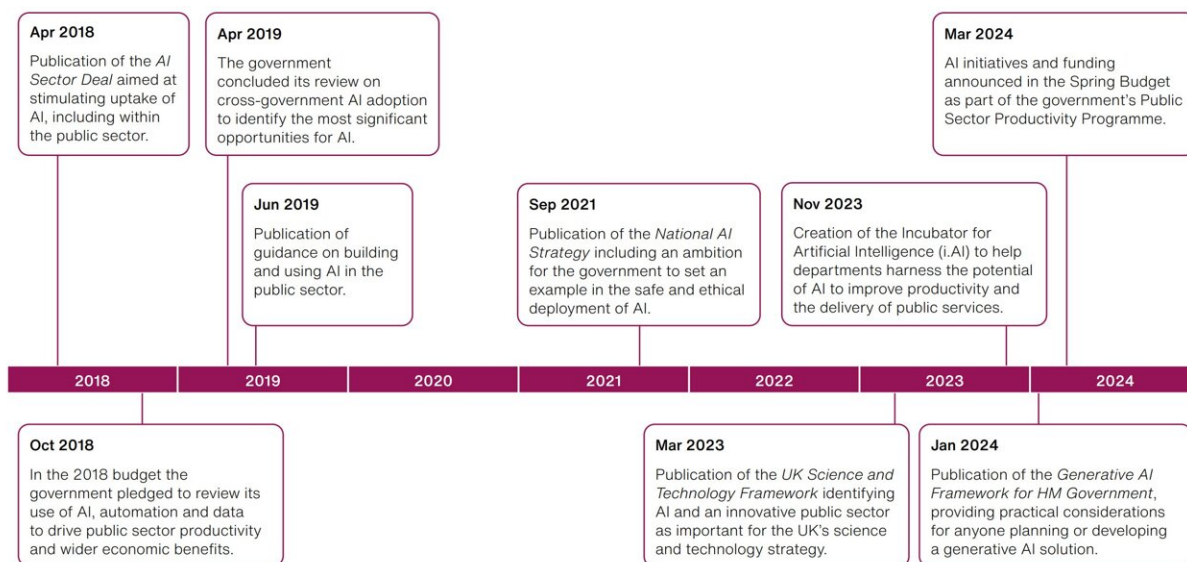# UK government's approach to realizing benefits of AI assessed in new report

March 22 2024, by Russell Parton

Timeline of policy developments for public sector artifi cial intelligence (AI) adoption, April 2018 to March 2024. Credit: *Use of artificial intelligence in government* (2024)

A new report on the UK government's use of AI offers insight into accelerating its adoption and overcoming the barriers to transforming public services, saving the taxpayer billions of pounds.

The "Use of Artificial Intelligence in Government" report considers how effectively the government has set itself up to maximize AI

opportunities.

The National Audit Office report, co-authored by the University of Exeter Business School's Professor Alan W. Brown, finds that AI is in its early stages and deployment remains limited—though interest and investment in AI are growing.

However, the report warns that the wide-scale benefits of AI will require not just the adoption of new technology but also significant changes in business processes and the workforce.

Gains will only be realized if the UK government ensures that its overall program for AI adoption is supported by a "realistic plan" to tackle its aging IT systems, which addresses skills gaps and improves overall data quality, the report says.

Among the many details included in the study, a survey of UK government bodies found that AI was not yet widely used across government, with just over a third of respondents (37%) having already deployed AI, with typically one or two use cases.

However, the survey suggests that the UK Government is rapidly increasing its AI activity. Nearly three-quarters (70%) of government bodies responding to the survey are piloting or planning AI, with typically four use cases being explored per body.

Examples include departments using AI to analyze digital images, automate routine checks as part of application processes, and draft or summarize text.

Alan W. Brown, Professor of Digital Economy at the University of Exeter Business School, said, "The National Audit Office 'value for money' study is an important review of the opportunities and challenges

of applying AI at scale. It highlights priority areas for AI deployment and identifies the tensions between government teams focused on driving AI innovation and the range of compliance, reporting, assessment, and governance obligations typical of all public sector activities."

"This study into AI in the UK Government confirms what we're seeing across much of our research into digital transformation at the Initiative for the Digital Economy at Exeter (INDEX)—achieving AI-at-scale requires finding ways to balance a wide range of competing concerns and requiring consistent cross-organization communication, extensive knowledge and asset sharing, and alignment of key roles and responsibilities."

"By effectively addressing these considerations, digital transformation in large, complex organizations can be brought more sharply into focus to achieve the potential offered by advances such as AI."

Professor Brown's comments are echoed by Gareth Davies, head of the NAO: "AI offers government opportunities to transform public services and deliver better outcomes for the taxpayer."

"To deliver these improved outcomes, the government needs to make sure its overall program for AI adoption tackles longstanding issues, including data quality and aging IT, as well as builds in effective governance of the risks."

"Without prompt action to address barriers to making effective use of AI within public services, government will not secure the benefits it has identified."

More information: Report: [www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uplo … ce-in-government.pdf](www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uplo)