

International collaboration on AI and data governance

Good afternoon everyone, to those here in London and to all those joining us from around the world. It's a real pleasure to be speaking with you today.

Thank you Jeni for that very kind introduction, and for your leadership of GPAI's work on data governance. You are a credit to the UK; thanks for all that you do.

My thanks also go to those at the Open Data Institute, The Alan Turing Institute, the Data Trusts Initiative, GPAI's Montreal Centre of Expertise and all other partners who have put in countless hours of effort to produce these reports.

It's fascinating to hear first-hand about the forefront of research on data governance, and the UK is proud to have supported such important work.

Thank you to AI UK as well for having me here today. This Government sees AI as a truly transformative set of technologies with the power to drive growth and prosperity around the country so everyone can benefit.

And as Minister for Technology and the Digital Economy, I am keenly aware of the importance of the UK's AI sector.

Events like AI UK demonstrate how the UK is leading the way in AI development by showcasing the best of our home-grown talent, whilst offering a vital platform to discuss how we can foster better links with our international partners.

But before I begin, we must firstly acknowledge the impact that digital connectivity and the free transfer of trustworthy data has in upholding our democratic freedoms, in light of events unfolding in Ukraine.

In my Department, we have mobilised policy teams from digital and tech, to cyber security and online mis- and disinformation to do what we can to help.

And this Government has launched an unprecedented package of economic sanctions developed, working in close collaboration with our international partners.

Our thoughts are with the Ukrainian people today.

International collaboration on AI and data has never been more important.

These technologies are already transforming lives across each corner of the globe. Every day, our lives are made easier, and the services we use are made better, by AI and data applications.

Autocompleted text in emails; mapping apps helping us get from A to B;

suggestions for new contacts based on who we've connected with previously online – the list goes on and on.

But to completely understand the extent of this transformation, we need to hear from all communities around the world – to understand how the introduction of AI across societies impacts people differently.

We also need to ensure that data and AI technologies can help us tackle the biggest challenges facing us globally – such as climate change, or new pandemics.

These are the key motivations that have guided the research you're going to hear a bit more about today.

Bringing together colleagues from here in the UK, Canada, Kenya, Chile, India and many other countries, the projects we'll be discussing this afternoon exemplify the best of cross-national research focused on overcoming these challenges.

I want to commend The Alan Turing Institute and their Policy Pilot Partners for working with communities right across the globe – in particular those in the Global South – through their research on furthering our understanding of data justice.

And as Jeni discussed, the ODI's research on data trusts shines an important light on how better stewardship of our data can equip citizens with the tools to confront climate change.

This work is timely, and much needed.

I'll come to the focus of the research in more detail shortly.

But – as all of you who have been listening to talks at AI UK will know, this year's conference is based around the UK's world-leading National AI Strategy.

And as the Minister who launched this Strategy back in September, it would be remiss of me to not mention how proud I am of the work that's been done since the Strategy's publication.

In a short space of time we've taken significant steps to keep the UK at the forefront of AI; I am pleased to announce we are launching our second call for the Turing AI World-Leading Researcher Fellowships.

We are making up to £20 million of funding available through two rounds, which will support exceptional AI researchers to advance AI through world-leading programmes of research.

This is part of a strategic government investment to retain, attract and develop AI research talent; the new fellowships will join the existing cohort of 25 Turing AI Fellowships awarded to date, including five world-leading researcher fellowships, that have been awarded to date.

Applications for the prestigious Fellowships open in the coming weeks.

The Strategy also sets out how the UK can build international collaboration on AI governance.

Indeed, one of the Strategy's three Pillars focuses on ensuring the UK gets the national and international governance of AI technologies right, because this will encourage innovation and investment, and most importantly, protect the public and our communities.

This requires forging new strong partnerships across academia and industry to understand how we can do this properly, as demonstrated by the Data Governance work presented today.

Our work on this pillar started with the publication of the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation's AI assurance roadmap, the first major step towards reviewing the AI governance landscape.

There is a huge opportunity here: not only will an effective AI assurance ecosystem enable the trustworthy adoption of AI, but it also represents a new multi-billion pound professional services industry in its own right.

The roadmap was followed by the AI Standards Hub Pilot. We are pleased that the Hub will be led by The Turing, partnered with the National Physical Laboratory and British Standards Institution.

In this, we aim to increase the UK's contribution to the development of global AI technical standards. We will explore international collaboration with similar initiatives to ensure standards are shaped by a wide range of AI experts, in line with our shared values.

And we'll be setting out more details about the UK's approach to international AI governance in the upcoming White Paper, which will be published later this year.

Our Strategy is a bold 10-year vision, where we cooperate with our overseas partners on using AI for good and advocate for international standards that reflect our values.

We must all work together – across governments, global industry and civil society more broadly – by supporting research into these emerging technologies to determine how we can use them for the betterment of society.

To encourage further collaboration, the UK and its partners around the world must combine our efforts through international frameworks.

That is why we are keen to continue our involvement with organisations like the Global Partnership on AI. We are proud to be one of GPAI's founding members, highlighting our longstanding commitment to bring key partners around the table to discuss the development of AI.

I attended GPAI's Ministerial Council meeting in Paris last November, where I was able to hear first-hand about the Partnership's brilliant work.

I was particularly intrigued to hear about the research commissioned by GPAI's Working Groups, focusing on Responsible AI, the Future of Work, Innovation and Commercialisation, AI and Pandemic Response, and – of course – Data Governance.

Besides the work you're hearing about today, a fantastic example of this cutting-edge research includes the recent Climate Change and AI report, led by the Responsible AI Working Group and presented at COP 26. The report sets out clear recommendations on how governments can support the responsible use of AI to tackle climate change.

This, alongside the other innovative research projects conducted by the Working Groups over the past year, exemplifies why organisations like GPAI are so important for governments and society more broadly. Each Working Group links experts from every corner of the globe to solve some of the biggest challenges facing us today.

For example, the Climate Change report was written by researchers in the UK, Germany and Canada, whilst overseen by colleagues in France, Sweden and the USA – demonstrating the truly global nature of the work that GPAI does.

The UK's Office for AI also seconded one of its officials to help establish the Partnership's Montreal Centre of Expertise, backing the initiative of the Canadian and Quebec Governments in setting up the Centre and building on years of collaboration on AI between our two great countries.

I firmly believe that only through this kind of international collaboration can we effectively and smoothly facilitate the introduction of AI across society.

And I'm looking forward to seeing the results of the innovative research that GPAI produces over the coming months, alongside the two projects we're discussing today.

That brings me onto the two exciting projects you'll be soon hearing more about on this stage.

As you're all aware, the research being presented today is one of the outputs of GPAI's Data Governance Working Group.

The UK is proud to have contributed £1 million to this work, making a significant contribution to turning data trust theory into practice, and facilitating one of the largest and most comprehensive global consultations to date on data justice.

On Data Trusts, a research team bringing together the ODI, the Data Trusts Initiative and the Aapti (pronounced AP-TEE) Institute examined how real-world data trusts can empower individuals to more actively control how their data is measured, particularly in relation to the climate.

The team consulted with more than 50 organisations around the world and looked at three key use cases.

The first focused on city cycling – with a particular focus on London and how a data trust with the cycling community here could help guide planning on infrastructure investment; The second looked at small shareholder farming in India, examining how data trusts can support local farmers in generating local datasets suited to their environmental circumstances.

And lastly, they looked at Peru as a case study on climate migration, using their feasibility assessment to consider how local communities and organisations could form a climate and displacement data trust, providing a powerful mechanism for indigenous data stewardship.

This critical examination helped the team to draft a clear roadmap for how similar data trusts for climate change could be implemented in the UK, as well as in other cities around the world.

The UK has been a pioneer in the field of data trusts, thanks to institutions such as the ODI and the Data Trusts Initiative.

And it's wonderful to see this work now being taken forward on the international stage.

Meanwhile, the Turing and its partners focused on expanding our understanding of Data Justice in the age of AI.

The UK's support for this research has produced new guides on data justice that will help policy makers and AI leaders make informed decisions on policy that protects the communities at risk of marginalisation by AI and machine learning systems.

I'm particularly pleased that this research has involved 12 Policy Pilot Partners from low and medium income countries across Africa, Asia, Oceania and Latin America.

For too long, our focus on the impact of AI and data more has ignored much of the world and focused only on high income countries. It's important that we support research that incorporates and understands the impacts of data collection on all people around the globe.

To all those that have worked tirelessly to complete both these projects, thank you for your efforts.

Managing our data transparently and effectively has never been more important, especially when it comes to AI and machine learning.

We need to make sure that data and AI can be used for society's benefit, whilst ensuring that data systems reflect the needs of all those in society.

It's important to emphasise again that these are not national issues, but international.

AI and data are already transforming lives everywhere, and it's vital that we work together to confront the issues we face as a global community.

Before I finish, I'd like to reiterate to everyone listening that the UK is always open to work with colleagues across the world to push the boundaries of research on emerging technologies.

This Government will always encourage scientific innovation here in the UK, but we are equally determined to facilitate close collaboration with our international partners to advance new research.

I hope the reports presented here today provide a stepping stone for even broader collaboration.

Thank you all very much for your time today, and have a fantastic remainder of AI UK.