# UK businesses urged to adopt people-first AI strategy amid government-OpenAI partnership



A leading expert in technology and automation, James Disney May, has called on UK businesses to take a focused, people-first approach to artificial intelligence, following the UK government’s strategic partnership with OpenAI. The collaboration—centred on AI security, infrastructure and public sector integration—marks a significant step in accelerating AI adoption across the country.

Despite growing interest, many firms remain unsure how to implement AI effectively. “Too many organisations rush into AI expecting a revolution and walk away with a proof of concept. There’s a real gap between adopting AI and making it work,” said Disney May. He emphasised the need for businesses to target specific, measurable problems such as delivery delays, inaccurate forecasting or inconsistent customer service.

AI could contribute over £200 billion to the UK economy by the mid-2030s, yet many companies are stuck in pilot phases. Lloyds Banking Group data shows that 82% of firms using AI report productivity gains, while 76% see increased profitability. But, as Disney May notes, the key to success lies in selecting the right projects and building employee trust.

“AI is not a systems issue, it’s a trust issue,” he said. While 63% of UK firms investing in AI are also investing in upskilling, generic training often fails to empower staff. True adoption means making AI relevant to day-to-day roles and involving employees in its implementation.

He also underscored the need for clean, well-governed data. No AI system can outperform the quality of the information it’s trained on. For smaller firms in particular, disciplined data practices are crucial to long-term success. Alongside this, ethical governance is vital—especially with over half of UK businesses reportedly lacking board-level AI expertise. “Businesses must be able to understand, challenge and explain AI outputs,” Disney May warned.

Beyond efficiency, he urged firms to use AI to rethink how they operate. The government’s £14 billion AI Opportunities Action Plan supports this ambition through regional AI Growth Zones and sector-specific programmes, encouraging firms to explore transformative applications.

The UK’s agreement with OpenAI strengthens this environment. The partnership includes AI security research, expanded infrastructure, and deeper public sector collaboration. OpenAI’s tools are already being trialled on government platforms such as ‘Consult’, which summarises public submissions, with further deployments planned across justice, education, defence and security.

The AI Safety Institute, launched in 2023, continues to support safe AI development, working with leading firms to assess risks before models are released. This ensures safety and ethics remain embedded as adoption accelerates.

As the UK builds a world-leading AI ecosystem, James Disney May’s guidance offers a clear route forward: solve real problems, focus on people, embed ethics early and use AI as a lever for meaningful reinvention. With strategic support from government and practical insight from industry, the UK’s AI journey is poised to deliver long-term, responsible growth.

Created by [Amplify](https://www.hbmadvisory.com/amplify): AI-augmented, human-curated content.

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/business/tips-for-ai-enabled-business-growth-from-a-business-expert-5249337> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/media/press-releases/2025/lloyds-2025/ai-boosts-productivity-profitability-uk-businesses.html> - A recent study by Lloyds Banking Group reveals that 82% of UK businesses using AI report increased productivity, and 76% have seen improved profitability. The research also indicates that over half of UK businesses plan to invest further in AI over the next year, with a quarter of non-adopters intending to start using the technology. The primary drivers for AI investment include enhancing productivity and profitability, with many firms also aiming to attract new customers and compete with larger rivals. However, challenges such as technology costs, lack of AI-specific skills, and concerns over data privacy and energy consumption persist.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/5ef3b1e2-20d0-4365-8e15-a816d49bc5c8> - The UK government has entered into a strategic partnership with OpenAI to advance AI integration into public services. This agreement includes a non-binding commitment from OpenAI to explore investments in UK AI infrastructure, such as data centres, and to collaborate on AI security research. In return, the UK government plans to adopt OpenAI's AI technologies in sectors like justice, defence, and education, potentially involving the use of data from millions of citizens. This partnership aims to enhance AI capabilities within the UK while addressing regulatory and ethical considerations.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/openai-uk-sign-new-ai-agreement-boost-security-infrastructure-2025-07-21/> - OpenAI and the UK government have signed a strategic partnership to enhance AI security and infrastructure. The agreement focuses on deepening collaboration in AI security research and may involve investments in infrastructure such as data centres. OpenAI, supported by Microsoft, will also expand its presence in London by increasing its research and engineering teams. The partnership aims to deploy AI in public sectors including justice, defence, security, and education, ensuring alignment with UK regulatory standards to improve the efficiency of taxpayer-funded services.
5. <https://www.itpro.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/uk-government-strikes-deal-with-openai-here-are-all-the-big-tech-firms-its-working-with> - The UK government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with OpenAI to advance AI adoption in public services and boost investment in AI infrastructure. As part of the deal, OpenAI plans to expand its London operations and explore investments in the UK's AI Growth Zones. The partnership may also strengthen collaboration with the UK AI Security Institute to develop new safety guidelines. OpenAI's GPT-4o already powers government tools like 'Consult', used to summarise public feedback in consultations.
6. <https://www.techradar.com/pro/openai-signs-wide-ranging-deal-with-the-uk-government-with-ai-coming-to-more-of-our-everyday-lives> - OpenAI and the UK Government have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at advancing the UK's AI infrastructure and integrating artificial intelligence more deeply into public services. The partnership will support the development of AI Growth Zones across the UK, including regions like Scotland and Wales, making AI infrastructure and opportunities more equitable nationwide. The initiative seeks to leverage AI to enhance areas such as justice, defence, education, and public services, improving efficiency and accessibility.
7. <https://www.time.com/7204670/uk-ai-safety-institute/> - In May 2023, CEOs of major AI companies, including OpenAI, Google DeepMind, and Anthropic, met with then UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to discuss AI risks following the launch of ChatGPT. This led to the establishment of the UK's AI Safety Institute (AISI) in November 2023, with a mandate to evaluate the risks of new AI models. The AISI, funded with £100m, quickly became a leading body in AI safety testing, gaining prerelease access to models from these companies, including Google's Gemini Ultra, OpenAI's o1, and Anthropic's Claude 3.5 Sonnet.