# Demis Hassabis calls for smart AI regulation to safeguard trust and innovation in UK



Demis Hassabis, CEO of Google DeepMind, has urged UK policymakers and business leaders to adopt “smart regulation” of artificial intelligence during a speech at the inaugural SXSW event in London. He warned that ineffective oversight could lead to unintended consequences and a loss of public trust. “AI is the most important technology humanity is working on. We should be making sure we do it properly – in a way that’s safe, that gets public buy-in, and that unlocks economic value,” he said.

Hassabis’s intervention comes amid growing pressure on the UK government to close gaps in its regulatory framework. Business leaders, campaigners and lawmakers are calling for clear rules to guide the safe and responsible use of AI. A recent report by the Ada Lovelace Institute underlines the urgency, highlighting serious deficiencies in the governance of biometric technologies. The report warns that the UK’s fragmented approach risks turning it into a “wild west” for facial recognition, jeopardising privacy and civil liberties.

Facial recognition technology used by UK police and retailers has drawn particular concern. Law enforcement scanned nearly five million faces in 2024, resulting in over 600 arrests. Critics, including Privacy International, argue that current laws lack the safeguards needed to protect human rights.

Hassabis criticised the “move fast and break things” ethos of Silicon Valley, arguing that AI demands caution. “For something this fundamental, it is important to try and have as much foresight ahead of time as you can,” he said. He called for an ethical framework grounded in public engagement and long-term thinking.

The need for reform is echoed in Parliament. Conservative peer Lord Chris Holmes has proposed a new AI authority to enforce standards on safety, transparency and accountability. Others, including Lord Tim Clement-Jones, have raised concerns about opaque algorithmic decisions in areas such as social welfare and immigration, where the lack of transparency limits redress.

While the UK has followed a “principles-based” regulatory model, ministers have signalled a shift towards binding legislation. Following the King's speech last July, plans were announced to impose legal duties on AI developers via the upcoming Digital Information and Smart Data Bill. An AI Safety Institute has also been tasked with strengthening oversight and compliance.

Hassabis likened the urgency of AI regulation to the climate crisis, suggesting the creation of global oversight bodies similar to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. He stressed the importance of international cooperation as AI’s rapid development poses profound societal risks.

The Ada Lovelace Institute has called for a unified regulatory approach that addresses the concentration of power among a few dominant firms while prioritising the public good. Survey data shows that 72% of the UK public support AI regulation, with 88% backing government action to mitigate harm once systems are deployed.

As the UK charts its regulatory course, the focus is shifting from rule-making to trust-building. With industry leaders and lawmakers aligned on the need for action, the decisions made now could shape the global future of AI governance.

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.cityam.com/ai-regulation-needs-to-be-smarter-in-the-uk-urges-deepmind-boss/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/oct/24/ai-risk-climate-crisis-google-deepmind-chief-demis-hassabis-regulation> - Demis Hassabis, CEO of Google DeepMind, has called for AI risks to be treated with the same urgency as the climate crisis. He advocates for immediate action to address potential dangers of AI, including its use in bioweapons and the threat posed by super-intelligent systems. Hassabis suggests establishing oversight bodies similar to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to manage AI risks effectively. He emphasizes the need for international cooperation and swift response to prevent potential existential threats from advanced AI technologies.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/c572a796-258b-433f-b005-9a3ff6f56062> - Gaia Marcus, Director of the Ada Lovelace Institute, advocates for stronger AI regulation to ensure equitable and safe technology deployment that aligns with public expectations. She highlights concerns over the concentration of AI power among a few large companies and stresses the importance of understanding the socio-technical implications of AI. Survey data indicates increasing UK public demand for AI regulation, with 72% feeling more comfortable with laws in place, and 88% supporting government intervention to prevent harm post-deployment.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/09ce1755-554e-43c9-90ad-8e07196763b0> - A report by the Ada Lovelace Institute has raised urgent concerns about the UK's regulation of facial recognition technology, calling for comprehensive legislation and a dedicated regulator. The Institute highlights significant gaps and inconsistencies in the current governance of biometrics, warning that the legal framework is insufficient to address the growing use of facial recognition by police and private companies. In 2024, UK police scanned nearly 5 million faces, resulting in over 600 arrests, and the technology is increasingly used in retail and sports venues.
5. <https://www.adalovelaceinstitute.org/report/ryder-review-biometrics/> - The Ryder Review, led by Matthew Ryder QC and commissioned by the Ada Lovelace Institute, emphasizes the urgent need for new legislation specifically addressing the use of biometric technologies in the UK. The review highlights that existing legal frameworks are fragmented and inadequate, failing to keep pace with technological advancements. It recommends comprehensive legislation governing biometric technologies, oversight by a national, independent regulatory body, and a moratorium on systems capable of mass identification or classification in the public sector until new legislation is enacted.
6. <https://www.adalovelaceinstitute.org/report/regulating-ai-in-the-uk/> - The Ada Lovelace Institute's report on regulating AI in the UK highlights significant gaps in the current regulatory framework. It points out that existing regulators lack sufficient powers, resources, and information to effectively oversee AI technologies. The report emphasizes the need for a unified and comprehensive approach to AI regulation, including the establishment of clear codes of practice and the creation of an AI ombudsman to support individuals in resolving complaints and ensuring accountability in AI deployment.
7. <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202502/uk-needs-unified-regulation-for-facial-recognition-biometrics-institute> - The Biometrics Institute has called for a clearer and consistent framework for governing facial recognition in the UK. The organization warns that missteps in deploying the technology could erode public trust and advocates for a strong ethical framework, robust regulatory oversight, and a commitment to transparency and accountability. The Institute emphasizes the need for a unified regulation to ensure the responsible use of facial recognition technology in public spaces.