# AI adoption could give UK small businesses a productivity boost worth an extra day a week



Artificial intelligence could transform productivity for small businesses across the UK, with new research from Google suggesting that AI tools may free up the equivalent of one working day each week. The study, conducted with economic consultancy Public First, estimates that small and medium-sized enterprises could see productivity rise by up to 20% through everyday AI use—from drafting marketing content to turning ideas into actionable business plans.

Debbie Weinstein, Google’s EMEA president, told the PA news agency that AI is helping people communicate more effectively and express ideas more clearly, particularly those with learning differences such as dyslexia. “AI will become part of everyday work for many industries,” she said, highlighting its potential to empower rather than replace human creativity.

Google’s commitment to the UK reflects this optimism, with £5 billion set to be invested over the next two years to meet rising demand for AI tools. Its Gemini AI assistant is being integrated into Workspace products to enhance productivity, while competitors such as Microsoft’s Copilot illustrate the growing momentum of AI-enabled workflows across the economy.

Upskilling remains central to maximising AI’s potential. Weinstein emphasised the importance of helping workers understand how to apply AI to their specific roles, especially as employers face rising labour costs and increasing pressure to automate repetitive tasks. Recruitment firm Hays reports that many UK businesses are now digitising non-essential work to cut costs and improve efficiency.

Google’s research suggests that adopting AI could save UK workers an average of 122 hours per year, potentially adding £400 billion to the economy. In pilot schemes with small businesses, schools and unions, AI usage increased sharply once workers were given training and encouragement. Among women over 55, weekly AI use jumped from 17% to 56%, and daily engagement tripled.

Public sector trials show similar gains. A government pilot involving 20,000 civil servants found that generative AI saved nearly two weeks of time per employee each year by assisting with drafting and summarisation. Coders using AI tools gained almost an hour a day—equivalent to 28 working days annually—demonstrating the technology’s impact on efficiency.

To build on these results, the UK government is partnering with major technology firms including Amazon, BT, Google, IBM, Microsoft and Sage to deliver AI skills training to 7.5 million workers. The initiative aims to give one-fifth of the workforce foundational AI skills, encouraging innovation and access to higher-value jobs.

AI is also revolutionising public administration. A new tool called *Extract*, developed with Google’s support, can digitise decades-old planning documents in minutes, potentially saving 250,000 hours annually. This technology supports the government’s “Plan for Change,” which aims to accelerate housing development while modernising public services.

These initiatives form part of a wider strategy to embed AI responsibly across the economy. Success depends on more than investment—it requires upskilling, cultural readiness and ensuring that AI complements human expertise. Both Google and government officials emphasise that building trust and confidence will be essential to unlocking AI’s full potential.

The UK’s commitment to combining technological progress with inclusive workforce development reflects an optimistic vision for the future. As AI becomes embedded in both business and government, it promises to boost productivity, foster creativity and drive sustainable economic growth—laying the groundwork for a digitally empowered nation.

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.the-independent.com/tech/google-microsoft-research-peter-kyle-chatgpt-b2842115.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/workers-could-save-122-hours-year-by-adopting-ai-admin-tasks-says-google-2025-04-24/> - A Google report highlights that UK workers could save an average of 122 hours annually by integrating AI into administrative tasks, potentially contributing £400 billion to the British economy. The findings come from Google's AI Works pilot programs conducted with small businesses, educational trusts, and unions. The report emphasizes that simple measures—such as granting employees permission to use AI and providing a few hours of training—can significantly boost AI adoption and ongoing use. The pilot revealed that two-thirds of workers, especially older women from lower socio-economic backgrounds, had never used generative AI at work. However, after brief training and encouragement, AI usage among this group increased dramatically. For instance, among women over 55, weekly AI usage rose from 17% to 56%, and daily usage from 9% to 29% within three months. Many workers initially hesitated due to uncertainty about the legitimacy of using AI in their roles, a barrier alleviated by managerial support and reassurance. The report underscores the economic and productivity benefits of empowering and educating the workforce in AI technologies.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-government-trial-shows-ai-could-save-civil-servants-nearly-2-weeks-a-year> - A government-led trial involving over 20,000 civil servants demonstrated that using generative AI for tasks like drafting documents and summarising emails saved an average of 26 minutes per day per person. This equates to nearly two working weeks annually, highlighting AI's potential to enhance productivity in public service delivery. The trial supports the government's Plan for Change by driving innovation and modernising public services through technology.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-coders-using-ai-to-each-save-28-days-a-year-and-build-more-tech> - AI assistants have significantly boosted productivity among government coders, saving them almost an hour daily. Over 1,000 tech experts across 50 government departments utilised AI to assist in writing code and developing new technology, leading to time savings equivalent to 28 working days annually. This initiative aligns with the government's Plan for Change, aiming to modernise public services and improve efficiency through technological advancements.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tech-giants-join-government-to-kick-off-plans-to-boost-british-worker-ai-skills> - Leading tech firms, including Amazon, BT, Google, IBM, Microsoft, and Sage, have partnered with the UK government to deliver AI skills training to 7.5 million UK workers. This initiative aims to equip a fifth of the UK workforce with essential AI skills, breaking down barriers to opportunity and unlocking economic growth. The collaboration is poised to accelerate the delivery of the government's Plan for Change, fostering innovation and high-paid jobs.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-unveils-ai-breakthrough-to-slash-planning-delays-and-help-build-15-million-homes-6-june-2025> - The UK government has introduced 'Extract', an AI assistant developed with support from Google, to expedite planning permissions. This tool can convert decades-old, handwritten planning documents into data within minutes, aiming to reduce the 250,000 estimated hours spent annually by planning officers on manual checks. The initiative is part of the government's Plan for Change, targeting the construction of 1.5 million homes and modernising public services through technological innovation.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-harness-the-power-of-ai-to-improve-public-project-delivery-under-new-framework> - The UK government has launched a new framework to harness AI in enhancing public project delivery. This initiative empowers civil servants working on over £805 billion of public projects to utilise AI, aiming to improve effectiveness and efficiency. The framework supports the government's Plan for Change by driving innovation, fostering economic growth, and modernising public services through the adoption of advanced technologies.