

DEMOS

# 'THE FRONTIER AI BILL AND...?'

BRIEFING PAPER

ELIZABETH SEGER  
GAVIN FREEGUARD  
MICHAEL BIRTWISTLE  
CLÍODHNA NÍ GHUIDIR



**CONNECTED  
BY DATA**

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15 Whitehall, London, SW1A 2DD  
T: 020 3878 3955  
hello@demos.co.uk  
www.demos.co.uk

# INTRODUCTION

On October 31st, 2024, Demos, the Ada Lovelace Institute and Connected by Data convened a workshop of leading AI governance experts across civil society, industry, and government to discuss the forthcoming UK AI Bill – or, more precisely, to discuss what is happening around it.

The government has indicated that the AI Bill under consideration by DSIT will be narrowly focused on the regulation of frontier AI systems - the “models of tomorrow”.<sup>1</sup> The stated aim is to ensure that adequate safety testing and evaluations are undertaken prior to model release in order to protect against risks posed by increasingly capable AI models. As such, the Bill as trailed will likely apply only to the largest developers of AI models (e.g. Meta, OpenAI, Google), and likely only some subset of their AI products.

The Bill builds on the UK’s substantial political momentum as a global leader in AI safety discourse and would deliver on the Government’s commitment made in the King’s Speech<sup>2</sup> and the Labour Party Manifesto<sup>3</sup> to regulate frontier AI.

Part of the government’s intention in drafting a narrow bill is also understood to be to allow a swifter passage through parliament, without it becoming a ‘Christmas tree bill’<sup>4</sup> for all matters relating to AI.

However, many worry about the Bill’s narrow focus, pointing out the real and realised harms posed by the AI systems of today being deployed in critical settings such as healthcare, transportation, HR, and law. Others are concerned that the Bill and its focus on AI safety distracts from the UK’s urgent need for a broader AI strategy, and consumes the Parliamentary time and political capital available for AI legislation on a subset of risks. The Bill will also do little to help address the concerns of UK based AI SMEs who are struggling with AI implementation, for example with the lack of guidance and support in dealing with bias and discrimination challenges.

The newly released AI Opportunities Action Plan<sup>5</sup> goes some distance towards outlining plans specifically oriented toward promoting AI industry and AI adoption in the UK. We are pleased to see that the Plan’s recommendations align with several of the topic areas we also identified as important, and we encourage further work to offer more specificity around how those ideas will be executed in order to allay concerns.

**However, as things stand, there remains a risk that if the frontier AI Bill is presented without parallel commitments and concrete plans for dealing with the array of harms and challenges posed by present day AI, that the Bill may struggle to move through parliament due to its perceived omissions. In turn, the Bill could fail to achieve its ambitions for frontier AI regulation and progress on wider AI regulation and policy would stagnate.**

1 Lord Vallance, Parliamentary Debate on Framework Convention on AI

2 The King’s Speech 2024, Oral Statement to Parliament

3 Labour Party Manifesto. p.35

4 Secretary of State Peter Kyle, Financial Times

5 AI Opportunities Action Plan: Independent Report. (January 13, 2025). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-opportunities-action-plan/ai-opportunities-action-plan>

On the other hand, if DSIT announces the Bill at the same time as parallel commitments to address the issues of current day systems, it seems likely the Bill may pass through Parliament with less concern and amendment - delivering on Government's frontier commitments, while also making meaningful headway on dealing with current day harms and industry interests; a win for everyone.

We convened our workshop to help articulate the spectrum of reassurances DSIT could offer to allay fears about the narrowness of the AI Bill, demonstrating clear intentions for making wider progress on AI policy. The workshop was oriented around the following prompt:

*What would we want to see happening alongside the Bill to provide assurance that other aspects of AI safety and societal and industry impacts are also being taken seriously and acted upon?*

*What would we need to see happening to be ok with the scope of the AI bill because we are satisfied that our broader concerns are being addressed by other means?*

We offer the following brief summary of workshop findings as a supportive resource for DSIT in planning for the announcement of the frontier AI Bill and for helping to clarify its broader AI policy strategy for the UK. We also hope it will prove useful for discussion across civil society, academia, industry and elsewhere.

These findings do not represent the views of any individual participating organisation, but a summary of discussion and issues raised during the event. The civil society, academic, and industry organisations present at the workshop expressed their willingness to work with government to help clarify and crystallise AI strategy parallel to the frontier AI Bill.

**Part 1** articulates the five broad focus areas across AI policy that need to be addressed in parallel to frontier AI safety.

**Part 2** presents a menu of concrete reassurances under each focus area that, announced in parallel to the AI Bill, would help demonstrate DSIT's broader AI strategy for the UK and allay worries around the narrow AI Bill focus.

# PART 1

## IDENTIFYING KEY POLICY AREAS

The first half of the workshop looked to identify and consolidate key policy areas that need to be addressed in parallel to frontier AI regulation. Participants were prompted to discuss in small groups a wide variety of desirable high-level outcomes from AI regulation. The groups then collaboratively distilled five thematic policy areas to provide a framework for articulating a menu of reassurances alongside the AI Bill.

### **POLICY AREAS**

#### **1. Industry, growth, and competition.**

This policy area pertains to the UK's economic strategy with AI. How is the UK going to attract, seed, and scale AI industry to foster innovation and use AI to deliver economic growth? Relevant policy subtopics include clarifying the UK's open-source strategy, making a plan for compute infrastructure investment, encouraging AI adoption to facilitate efficiency across other industries, clarifying liability, attending to AI visa and youth mobility schemes, and developing the National Data Library for domestic use.

Since our workshop, the AI Opportunities Action Plan has been released ahead of the frontier AI Bill, offering analysis and 50 recommendations for helping to strengthen the AI sector and promote adoption in the UK. We are pleased to see that several of the topics covered in the plan align with the recommendations we produce in Part 2.

#### **2. Public Sector / Public benefit.**

This policy area is about understanding whether and how AI generates public benefit, and ensuring the benefits of AI are broadly distributed. A key component of this agenda will be in navigating the implementation of AI in the public sector - within government departments

and throughout the UK's public services. Relevant policy subtopics include procurement standards, public sector skills development, monitoring and evaluation, data sharing policy, and algorithmic transparency.

### 3. Feedback and Accountability.

This policy area is about incentives, clarifying responsibilities of various actors through the AI lifecycle and establishing clear mechanisms for redress where harm is caused. Particularly in responding to harms from bias, clear methods are needed for surfacing discrimination and responding accordingly. Relevant sub policy areas include liability clarification, algorithmic transparency requirements, and incident reporting.

### 4. Regulatory capacity and mechanisms.

AI touches everything, and effective regulation behind the frontier can not happen in isolation, siloed between different regulators and government departments with distinct purviews. This policy area is about ensuring various regulatory bodies have the resources and skills to establish and enforce regulatory requirements around AI as is relevant to their particular domain. Key subpolicy areas include ensuring adequate funding and support for regulators, and facilitating greater communication between regulators.

### 5. The Big Picture.

The AI governance ecosystem is both nascent and dispersed. It's unclear who is responsible for what and what high-level goals and outcomes various AI policy efforts are meant to align to. This policy area is about connecting the dots. Relevant policy sub areas include clarifying the structure for the overarching AI governance ecosystemic in the UK, connecting AI policy to Labour's 5 missions, and addressing power imbalances.

**Recommendation:** The AI Bill should be communicated as *one instalment* of a more comprehensive policy agenda in pursuit of the above policy areas. Commitment to the more comprehensive AI policy agenda can be communicated through the presentation of various plans - such as the AI Opportunities Action Plan - and timelines as discussed in Part 2.

# PART 2

## CONCRETE REASSURANCES

In the second phase of the workshop, teams applied themselves to articulating concrete and practicable reassurances that Government can offer in the near term regarding its policy intentions. Offered in concert with the introduction of the frontier AI Bill or the Bill's consultation, a selection of these reassurances would help confirm to key stakeholders across civil society, industry, and academia that the broader policy challenges beyond frontier AI regulation are being taken seriously and attended to. Providing a credible vehicle for these concerns to be addressed would likely result in a smoother road for the passage of the frontier AI Bill and a fruitful acceleration to planning around the UK's broader AI policy strategy.

These reassurances are not recommendations for specific policies the government should seek to implement. Rather, this paper articulates recommendations for communicating *plans* for moving and doing in key policy areas.

For a plan to convey the kind of reassurance that will alleviate worries, it must be accompanied by clear commitments according to which the government can be held to account. We recommend committing to:

- **Timeliness:** The timeline over which a plan would be executed (which also indicates priority).
- **Responsibilities:** Who (what individual or departments) will be tasked with executing on the plan.
- **Support:** What financial, personnel, or other support will be offered to enable plan execution.

Where relevant actions are already being taken (e.g. development of the AI Opportunities Action Plan), those plans should be clearly reiterated and a progress update given at the time of the Bill's announcement.

The following subsections recommend concrete reassurances DSIT could offer. These are organised under the policy areas identified in Part 1.

## REASSURANCES BY POLICY THEME

**TABLE 1**  
INDUSTRY, GROWTH, AND COMPETITION

<p><b>a. A plan for establishing the UK’s compute investment strategy</b></p>	<p>Funding cuts earlier this year have yielded uncertainty among UK businesses and researchers about reliable future access to critical compute resources. As articulated in the AI Opportunities Action Plan and agreed in the government’s response,<sup>6</sup> DSIT should produce a plan clarifying the UK’s compute strategy. Who will be responsible for implementing the strategy, over what timeline, and with what commitment of funds?</p>
<p><b>b. A plan for articulating the UK’s open-source strategy</b></p>	<p>We expect the AI Bill will apply primarily to models with a clear, regulatable decision point about model release, but what regulatory mechanisms will apply to models developed through open-source processes? How can open-source AI ecosystems be preserved for their substantial economic benefit while implementing proper safeguards through the AI lifecycle. Could DSIT announce a plan for considering the UK’s open-source AI strategy? Who will be leading the investigation and over what timeline?</p>
<p><b>c. A plan for encouraging AI adoption across various sectors</b></p>	<p>The economic opportunities of AI for the UK will only partially be realised by developing the UK’s own AI sector. There are also gains to be had through increased adoption, both by providing a market for UK AI companies and by increasing productivity of the sectors to which AI is applied. As recommended in the AI Opportunities Action Plan, DSIT should announce plans for encouraging and enabling AI adoption where it will be most beneficial.</p>
<p><b>d. A plan for facilitating AI talent immigration to the UK</b></p>	<p>Perhaps the strongest holding for the UK in the AI stack, and where it holds a legitimate comparative advantage on other countries, is in talent. While the UK strategizes on how to build its AI industry and make itself an attractive place to start and scale its business, the UK needs to maintain and build its talent base. Some of it will be home grown, but much of it will be sourced internationally. As recommended in the AI Opportunities Action Plan, can DSIT announce a plan for working with the Home Office to review AI talent immigration? Factors to consider may include streamlining application processes or updating nationality thresholds. Who will be responsible for the review, and over what timeline?</p>

<sup>6</sup> AI Opportunities Action Plan: Government Response (January 13, 2025). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-opportunities-action-plan-government-response/ai-opportunities-action-plan-government-response>



**e. A plan for establishing the National Data Library with SME and research access**

The government's manifesto promises the delivery of a national data library, but few details are available on how that library is meant to take shape, who it will serve, and who will have access. Alongside compute, access to quality data is a chokepoint for AI developers that could be eased by providing (appropriately restricted) access to SMEs that establish and scale on UK soil. As recommended in the AI Opportunities Action Plan, can DSIT publicise a more detailed plan for how it will go about establishing the National Data Library - considering levels of access provided for SMEs, researchers, and public use? Who will be responsible for establishing the National Data Library plans? Will consultations be employed? What resources will be allocated to the processes, and what are the expected timelines for execution?

**f. A plan for clarifying responsibilities regarding AI safety throughout the AI lifecycle**

SMEs are suffering from lack of guidance on what, precisely, being a responsible developer of safe AI looks like. Without clear standards on safety testing and responsibility pre-and post model deployment (for all models, not just frontier) companies can be hesitant to deploy potentially beneficial AI solutions for fear of being held liable for downstream harms, even where responsible development was taken very seriously. Regulation will be good for industry growth where it sets out the clear parameters in which AI developers can operate and specific protections for safety standards adequately met. Could DSIT more clearly articulate its high-level plans for establishing regulatory standards for current day AI tool deployment across different sectors? Where these plans are being delegated to individual regulators, could DSIT instigate progress by committing technical expertise to support the regulators?

**TABLE 2**  
**PUBLIC SECTOR / PUBLIC BENEFIT**

<p><b>a. A plan for establishing procurement standards and guidelines to aid in the acquisition of AI tools in the public sector</b></p>	<p>Local councils often lack resources and expertise to acquire the AI tools that best serve their needs. There are many AI tools and solutions available, and not all are high quality or well suited at specific needs. Councils need the help of centralized procurement standards and guidelines for AI tools to help inform their decisions. At the same time smaller UK based AI application developers cannot compete with large big tech providers in going council to council to sell their solutions and may be hesitant to deploy potential solutions out of uncertain liability concerns. Clear procurement guidelines would help provide more certainty to developers and could allow a central database of “recommended” solutions for different public service challenges that councils could draw on without smaller businesses having to go council to council. Who is responsible for coordinating these procurement standards and with whom would some kind of AI procurement database sit?</p>
<p><b>b. A plan for articulating a UK interpretation of digital human rights</b></p>	<p>Many civil society organizations are concerned about how human rights are being extended into the Digital age, and especially in light of the potential applications of AI for surveillance and generating media content or in domains that require processing private information. How are established human rights under the ECHR such as the right to freedom of expression, rights to free and fair elections, and right to freedom from discrimination being protected in the AI era? Furthermore, do any <i>wholly new</i> digital rights need to be established - e.g. right to connectivity, the right to disconnect, or the right to explanation for algorithmic decision making?</p>
<p><b>c. A plan for continuing and enforcing the algorithmic transparency recording standard</b></p>	<p>While many civil society organisations see the work of the Responsible Technology Adoption Unit in developing the Algorithmic Transparency Recording Standard as a step in the right direction, there was concern that the ATRS is not being adopted quickly or widely enough. At present, only 23 records have been submitted to the Algorithmic Transparency Recording Standard Hub after much delay. How can the RTAU drive forward greater adoption of the ATRS? Does this require stronger enforcement, up to and possibly including putting the ATRS on a statutory footing?</p> <p><i>[Note: we include this for completeness, but note DSIT publications on 17 December containing further records and the mandatory scope/exceptions for the ATRS.]</i></p>

**TABLE 3**  
**FEEDBACK AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

<p><b>a. A plan for establishing AI incident reporting mechanisms</b></p>	<p>What are the signals that tell us whether AI is working or not – for individuals and more widely in society? Incident reporting allows us to trace where harms are and gives the public an active voice to articulate the strange and novel harms that might emerge. It also allows regulators to understand what challenges are developing and how they should target their resources. This needs to be owned by the right body: the UK’s proposed sectoral approach to regulation means this is unclear; people are often not aware of what services regulators offer (or who they are being regulated by); and regulators may sometimes feel constrained by the funding they receive from government. An AI Ombudsman (an independent body people can submit to) could be one option; expanding the role of something like the DRCF another; but whatever the proposal, anonymous feedback (including support for whistle-blowers), and a clear explanation of which regulators are responsible for what and which services they offer (perhaps a public-facing hub) will be necessary. Providing guidance for good incident reporting – as the MHRA and aviation authorities do – is also vital.</p>
<p><b>b. A plan for creating an evidence base on AI use and impacts, including researcher access to data</b></p>	<p>The Data (Use and Access) Bill currently in parliament introduces the ability for external researchers to access data about social media platforms (the EU’s Digital Services Act has a similar provision). Something similar, especially for foundation models, would allow researchers from academia, civil society and industry to understand how they are being used, their widespread (collective) impacts, and possible harms. We should also understand where AI is working positively, as well as what isn’t working. An evidence centre – perhaps based on some of the existing What Works Centres – could help understand what is working well and help solve problems where things aren’t.</p>
<p><b>c. A plan for a safe space for conversation, engagement and sharing feedback</b></p>	<p>For an effective AI regulatory ecosystem, government will need to listen to a variety of people – including the end users of AI systems (and organisations who may be supporting them), academia, civil society, businesses (and their trade associations), and regulators. These may be sensitive for several different reasons – some AI harms being experienced by individuals may be very personal, businesses may be reluctant to share with the regulators regulating them (and governments providing them with funding support), and regulators also need a space to explore what is working and what isn’t. How to incentivise these honest conversations – and fund the mechanisms in such a way that allows organisations to maintain their independence from government – will be important.</p>

**TABLE 4**  
**REGULATORY CAPACITY AND MECHANISMS**

<p><b>a. A plan for establishing better mechanisms of communication and coordination both between regulators and between regulators and government departments regarding cross-cutting AI harms</b></p>	<p>AI is a cross cutting technology with potential applications and implications spanning multiple domains. Regulators in these independent domains will be considering many of the same challenges (e.g. data privacy, algorithmic transparency, bias and discrimination). There is a risk of independent policy development conflicting or being inefficiently developed in parallel. Minor discrepancies in multiple regulator policies can then become overburdensome for smaller AI developers to navigate as well as for organisations working at the intersection of domains. While some mechanisms like the DRCF, the regulators’ AI working group, and the ‘one stop shop’ exist, these respectively do not include all regulators, do not provide formal methods of cooperation (e.g. around data sharing/joint investigation), and are lightly funded on a pilot basis. Stronger mechanisms for coordination between regulators would help mitigate these challenges.</p> <p>The nature of disruptive, general purpose technologies like AI is that they reveal gaps in existing regulatory systems, which regulators themselves cannot address, necessitating policy responses from government - for example, we have historically regulated human drivers and the advent of autonomous vehicles has required a legislative response from government to set up new governance institutions and measures. As risks and harms posed by AI are identified and evidenced by regulators, they will need formal mechanisms for reporting to government and parliament those which fall outside of existing governance regimes to or would otherwise be insufficiently mitigated or redressed.</p>
<p><b>b. A plan for regulating AI in domains that do not have regulators capable of addressing AI risks (e.g. recruitment. education)</b></p>	<p>The UK’s regulatory landscape has many gaps in terms of the scopes, mandates, powers, and technical capabilities of regulators.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some domains or sectors have no vertical regulators. For example, there is no regulator who explicitly looks at employment or recruitment practice. Even under the previous government’s proposal of principles-based sectoral regulation, there would have been no institution to enforce the principles in these domains. Many parts of the public sector also have no regulator, most notably functions performed by most central government departments, such as benefits and tax administration. Horizontal regulation may apply (e.g. data protection or equality law) but those regulators will not take an overview of all risks presented by AI; only those that interface with their narrow mandates.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some domains are regulated 'diffusely'; that is, they do not have a single regulator with clear responsibility for technology impacts and use, such as policing, or education. For example, Ofsted and Ofqual do not have specific mandates to address edtech; their mandates relate to the quality of education providers and examination/qualification respectively. So neither is equipped to, for example, investigate the use and impact of facial recognition in classrooms, or the provision of chatbots to students unless it directly relates to the question of the providers' overall quality of education, much less technically or legally able to audit the technology in question, or prevent it being sold to schools.</li> <li>• Outside of safety case-based regulators like the MHRA, most regulators cannot address risks that occur further up the value chain, and can only look at AI point of use. This means for example that a public body could be reprimanded for breaching equality law for using an AI product they have no ability to modify to reduce that risk, or even to audit to determine the risk exists.</li> </ul>
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**TABLE 5**  
**THE BIG PICTURE**

<b>a. A plan for mapping out the AI governance ecosystem in the UK</b>	The AI governance ecosystem is nascent and dispersed with various actors taking on different (potential) roles. Government departments, regulators, and third party auditors all have their say, but it's unclear where responsibilities lie. The first step to providing more clarity is to systematically map the AI governance ecosystem in the UK. Doing so will provide insight for plugging holes and taking advantage of opportunities for the UK to lead in AI policy.
<b>b. A plan for tying the UK's broader AI strategy to Labour's 5 missions or a 10-year plan</b>	There is a risk that if UK AI regulation is presented (as we recommend) as one installment in a series of AI policy developments, the overarching AI policy development agenda could feel hodgepodge – disconnected and unclear why some policy needs are being prioritised before others. DSIT could coordinate with other government departments to align AI policy priorities with Labours 5 missions or an alternative 10-year outcome driven agenda. The overarching agenda would help unify policy goals across departments and explain to the wider public why specific efforts are being prioritized.

**c. A plan for systematically reviewing existing legislation to appraise where it provides protections from AI related harms and where there are gaps to be filled (gap analysis)**

AI is a new technology, but the application domains to which it is being applied are not. Medicine, education, law enforcement, transportation etc. are all subject to existing legislation and in many cases this legislation will already have implications for AI application to the domain. In some cases the requirements may be clear, while in others the legislation may need to be updated to clarify its implications for AI applications specifically. But overall, wholly new AI legislation will likely not be needed in many cases, and pursuing new legislation could raise conflicts with that already existing. DSIT should engage in or commission a systematic legislation review to identify AI implications in existing legislation as well and the genuine holes that need filling. Who will be responsible for this process, and what resources and access will they be provided?

# CONCLUSION

Throughout our workshop the overall feeling in the room was one of appreciation for the effort being put into delivering the frontier AI Bill, but with an overwhelming sense that it's just the tip of the iceberg. Several parties expressed concern that the Bill will distract from more foundational work that needs to be done to drive innovation and support the AI industry in the UK and to protect citizens from harms that are already being realized.

In this brief we have provided recommendations for plans that DSIT might communicate alongside the presentation of the AI bill. Communicating a selection of these plans would help to allay concerns, build confidence in the government's AI governance plans, and to facilitate the Bill's progression through parliament - ultimately enabling the Bill fulfill its ambitions for frontier AI regulation while also progressing wider AI regulation and policy initiatives.

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**Demos** is a champion of people, ideas and democracy. We bring people together. We bridge divides. We listen and we understand. We are practical about the problems we face, but endlessly optimistic and ambitious about our capacity, together, to overcome them.

At a crossroads in Britain's history, we need ideas for renewal, reconnection and the restoration of hope. Challenges from populism to climate change remain unsolved, and a technological revolution dawns, but the centre of politics has been intellectually paralysed. Demos will change that. We can counter the impossible promises of the political extremes, and challenge despair – by bringing to life an aspirational narrative about the future of Britain that is rooted in the hopes and ambitions of people from across our country.

Demos is an independent, educational charity, registered in England and Wales. (Charity Registration no. 1042046)

Find out more at [www.demos.co.uk](http://www.demos.co.uk)

# DEMOS

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15 WHITEHALL, LONDON, SW1A 2DD

T: 020 3878 3955

[HELLO@DEMOS.CO.UK](mailto:HELLO@DEMOS.CO.UK)

[WWW.DEMOS.CO.UK](http://WWW.DEMOS.CO.UK)