



# AI Fringe 2025

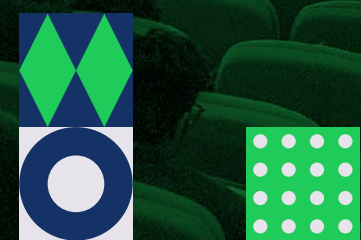
*AI for everyone*

11-12 February

Perspectives from London & Paris

Panel  
**The regulators' view on AI**

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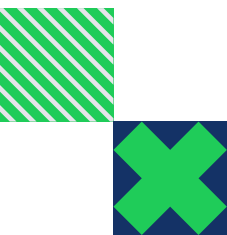
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The AI Fringe, convened by [Milltown Partners](#), brings together the most prominent voices in AI to share diverse perspectives on the artificial intelligence debates at the forefront of both policymakers' and the public's minds. Working with [partner organisations](#) from civil society, academia and industry we host discussions about the development, deployment and adoption of AI with a mission to inform and engage policymakers and the AI ecosystem at large.

The AI Fringe's goals are to:

- Bring together the views of industry, civil society and academia on safe and beneficial AI.
- Provide a platform for all communities - including those historically underrepresented - to engage in the discussion.
- Enhance understanding of AI and its impacts so organisations can harness its benefits.



# Introduction



When Milltown Partners convened the first [AI Fringe](#) on the sidelines of the UK's inaugural AI Safety Summit in November 2023, avoiding “catastrophe” and “extinction” from futuristic AI systems was the main item on the Summit's agenda. Fifteen months on, the AI Action Summit in Paris exemplified a shifting AI zeitgeist by moving away from a singular focus on frontier safety in favour of a set of wider themes encouraging AI innovation and adoption for the benefit of society. As H  l  ne Duch  ne, French Ambassador to the UK, set out in her opening address to the third AI Fringe, the Paris Summit's focus was on “increasing inclusivity and showcasing the opportunity of AI”.

Against the backdrop of this evolving geopolitical and technological context, the aim of the AI Fringe has remained the same: to diversify the AI conversation. Now more than ever, as advanced AI moves from being a curious novelty to a very real disruptive force,

we strive to bring together the broadest set of voices to work towards the best possible outcomes for everyone in an AI-powered future. The UK's AI Minister, Feryal Clark MP, restated the importance of this ambition in her remarks at the Fringe, which she described as “an essential way of bringing more people into the conversation, especially those who haven't always had a seat at the table”.

The Paris Summit's emphasis on pursuing inclusive AI developed in the “public interest” echoes the AI Fringe's aims. Our wide-ranging programme, taking place in both London and Paris during the Summit week, brought together 26 partners to convene 29 sessions, with over 100 expert speakers and 600 attendees. It brought together individuals and communities from across industry, academia, civil society, government and policy to dig deeper on the difficult questions and chart the paths forward.

This paper collects the insights from the full spectrum of AI Fringe events, with reflections from those who were on the ground in Paris set alongside UK-specific perspectives. Discussions mirrored the five Summit “tracks” of public interest AI, the future of work, innovation and culture, trust in AI and global AI governance, as well as addressing its three core “deliverables” of sustainability, competitiveness and openness.

While the AI Summits come and go, it's important to remember that the value of the AI Fringe isn't only in the event itself, but also in continuing the conversation over the weeks and months ahead. If you would like to stay connected with the Fringe community, please sign up to the mailing list via [our website](#). Finally, a word of thanks to our [26 partner organisations](#), for playing an essential role in delivering the AI Fringe and furthering its aims.





# 1

## Safety and opportunity

*Policy conversations in the US and Europe were once defined by concerns about the risks posed by AI. But over the past year focus has shifted to the technology's opportunities. Prior to the Summit, the new US administration reversed President Biden's Executive Order on AI safety, and the UK delayed AI safety legislation while pressing ahead with its AI Opportunities Action Plan. At the Paris Summit, the accelerationist mood continued to hold sway. In the end the declaration emerging from Paris made four references to "safety". The declaration at Bletchley, the inaugural AI Summit, made thirteen.*

The Fringe opened with a welcome from the French Ambassador, H  l  ne Duch  ne, who explained how the Paris AI Action Summit had departed from precedent: a wider, more ambitious agenda; more countries than ever with a seat at the table; more involvement for civil society; and, above all, a greater emphasis on AI action, yielding initiatives such as the "Current AI" Foundation.

Over the two days of sessions that followed, discussion returned again and again to the Summit's focus on action to unlock the opportunities created by AI, including how and how far this should be weighed against protections against the dangers of AI. In Setting the scene: AI for everyone, the panellists surveyed the shifting contours of the AI landscape over the past year, from the impact of DeepSeek to the arrival of new administrations in the US and UK. The panel agreed that the focus on AI opportunity was

a welcome evolution, with one speaker noting that neglecting AI opportunities posed its own risks – a point echoed at the Paris Fringe in a panel on AI Adoption.

However, there was also a recognition that the sheer speed and unpredictability of technological development posed serious challenges for anyone fashioning AI policy, be it for the purposes of safety or opportunity. This unpredictability was clear from the variety of responses given to the question "what should we look out for in AI in the next 12 months?". Agentic AI, AI tools for mental health, countering extremism and "leapfrogging" (emerging countries using AI to bypass the traditional approaches of more developed ones) were all nominated as areas of promise – as was the use of AI in scientific research, both in London and in another session on the topic in Paris.



In the closing reflections from the Summit, panellists echoed earlier comments about the need for governments to orient themselves towards AI's opportunities, not just its risks. But there was also a feeling that the Paris Summit had missed a chance to progress the AI safety agenda. AI safety and governance are developing in a linear fashion, while the power of AI technology is advancing exponentially, as was reinforced in the fireside conversation introducing the AI trust and safety: the building blocks panel convened by Milltown Partners. Indeed, opportunity and safety go hand in hand, the panel intimated, and we should be wary of

the false dichotomy of pitting the two against each other: as one panellist pointed out, “you can drive fast and wear a seatbelt”.

Since the Summit, the early indicators are that safety may continue to slide down the political agenda. In the UK, for instance, the AI Safety Institute has already been renamed the AI Security Institute, in a further signal of the wider geopolitical deprioritisation of “safety”. The question is whether this will be replicated across the rest of the AI ecosystem, or whether – as one speaker suggested – industry collaboration on safety may in fact continue to improve, even as governments move further apart.



## 2

## UK Perspectives

*The UK saw a flurry of AI policy announcements in the months prior to the Summit including the launch of entrepreneur Matt Clifford's AI Opportunities Action Plan, a new plan for digital government and a consultation on proposals for AI and copyright. Speakers at the Fringe gave their perspective on the approach of Sir Keir Starmer's Government on AI, and debated how the UK should position itself globally.*

In a session on the regulators' view on AI, the Digital Cooperation Regulation Forum and its four constituent members from the CMA, FCA, ICO and Ofcom shed light on their approach to regulating AI. Growth was a hot topic on the panel, with speakers keen to defend how the right regulation could support it together with innovation. Another major theme emerging from the panel was the view that AI is fundamentally a cross-cutting technology, requiring collaboration between regulators at both national and international levels. The panel revealed that, away from the headline-grabbing intergovernmental summits like Paris, much of this under the bonnet work is already taking place.

The Fringe also saw UK investors and founders tackle the question of how to ensure AI startups and scale-ups can compete on the global stage in a session hosted by the Startup Coalition. In the panel's judgment, the Government's messaging on AI is welcome but must now lead to more concrete action. Reforming spinouts, lowering business energy costs, subsidising compute and reforming public procurement to support domestic startups were called out as important policies to consider. The panel agreed that the UK currently plays the role of an "AI incubator" in the global innovation landscape, helped by its strong technical talent pool, R&D ecosystem and science heritage. The conclusion was that while the US is likely to remain the primary destination for scaling startups, the UK nevertheless has a significant opportunity to carve its own niche in AI by leaning into its "incubator" role and focusing its scaling opportunities on downstream AI applications.





The **industrialisation of AI** panel hosted by techUK took up this theme in the consideration of what market conditions are needed for the UK to be able to make the most of the “fourth industrial revolution” of AI as it moves from research to commercialisation. Again, there was a general feeling that UK policy and regulation was going in the right direction, but this panel saw better cross-government coordination as the key to unlocking the full economic potential of AI in the UK, citing the AI Energy Council established under the Government’s AI Opportunities Plan as a good example of the types of mechanism needed. Skills policy was identified as another key area for the UK to develop, with one speaker quipping that if the US’s economic mantra is “drill, baby, drill”, then the UK’s should be “skill, baby, skill”.

Moving from skills to data, a roundtable discussion on the National Data Library, convened by the Startup Coalition, asked how the UK could make the most of its public data assets to spur AI development and

innovation. A key theme that emerged from the participants was that the Government may benefit from starting with a targeted, use-case orientated approach to implementing its ambitious AI opportunities agenda, with a focus on identifying the highest value datasets to curate and open.

All these threads of regulation, startups, industrial strategy and data came together in the keynote address and fireside delivered by Feryal Clark, the UK’s AI minister. Clark insisted that although the UK did not sign the Paris declaration, the Government’s AI plans were nevertheless aligned with the main themes and priorities of the Paris Summit. The Minister made it clear that there is “lots to do” to encourage AI development and adoption in the UK, and identified progressing the AI Opportunities Action Plan, ensuring Whitehall is ready to become an “AI customer” as well as an AI enabler, and increasing public trust in AI-enabled public services as Government priorities in the months ahead.





# 3

## Making AI work for the public

*“Public interest AI” was a notable feature of the agenda at the Paris Summit, with the “Current AI” foundation one of the main outputs. While few would argue against the notion that AI should serve the public interest, how exactly this can be achieved remains an open question, and one that speakers at the Fringe returned to often.*

In the AI in public services panel hosted by techUK, speakers assessed where the opportunity lay for the UK to improve government and public services through data and AI. The panel agreed that a culture of risk aversion in government and lack of political will had held back previous efforts at digitisation more than any substantive constraints, which provided clear historical lessons for the current government to learn. Another interesting theme emerging from the panel was the nuance and variety in public attitudes towards the use of technology in public services. Accountability, governance and redress will be key to getting public buy-in – as will efficacy: “people trust what works”.

Making AI in the public interest led by Colorintech began with case studies on how communities could play a role in developing and auditing AI models in their interest in

a presentation from Nesta. The panel saw promise in these social models of governance, but concluded that responsibility sat ultimately with governments and technology companies for making technology serve the public interest. There was also a discussion of how model size interacted with questions of public interest: could specialised models built in service of specific communities and use cases be the key to making AI work for the public? This was especially the focus for Connected By Data’s panel in Paris, which gave insight on several different grassroots and global approaches to include public voices in the development and governance of AI and the need to embed a “participatory turn” in the future of AI – maintaining public trust, avoiding “participation washing” and delivering AI in the public interest.







Moving from model size to model type, a panel on open-source AI: maximising the opportunity hosted by Mozilla covered the benefits of open source models, from transparency, to low costs, to ease of adaption, as well as the risks. The panel argued that open source systems had a key role to play in creating a pluralistic future where AI would be in the hands of - and therefore in service to - the broadest set of interests. The panel echoed others in suggesting that focusing on specialised AI applications made sense for the UK, and suggested that a thriving open source ecosystem could be the foundation of this downstream innovation if the Government creates the right conditions for it.

A session entitled AI slop? Consumers say no! hosted by Which? brought together experts from dating, financial services, children's rights and law, to discuss how AI might affect the experience of consumers in each of these domains. While there were clear benefits to be had, like smarter matching algorithms on dating apps, there were also considerable risks, for instance receiving erroneous legal advice from chatbots. The key question emerging from the panel was: would AI improve the experiences of all consumers, or would there be winners and losers if the technology reproduced and exacerbated existing inequities?



# 4

## Transparency

*The principle of transparency has become deeply entwined with the definitions of “responsible” and “ethical” AI. The Paris Summit declaration designated the development of transparent AI as a priority area, while one of the focus areas of “Current AI”, the public interest AI initiative launched as the major outcome of the Summit, is to ensure “transparency and trust”. Often more difficult to discern is what AI transparency means in practice: which parts of AI systems require more transparency and how can this be encouraged in a highly complex, international, and often hidden supply chain? This issue came up time and again across the discussions at the AI Fringe.*

In the AI trust and safety panel, transparency across the AI supply chain emerged as the bedrock of trustworthiness in technology. The panellists suggested that developers, deployers and governments all have a role to play in this - from greater quality assurance of data used for training (described by one panellist as the “feedstock” of AI), to better consumer understanding of how AI-enabled products and services are developed, and closer government-industry collaboration on major technological breakthroughs and their potential risks

Nevertheless, as the deepfake defences presentation from Ofcom (the UK’s communications regulator) underlined, it is the regulatory bodies that must bear the brunt of the current consumer risks stemming from generative AI. The demonstration illustrated

how the increasing volume of deceptive, AI-generated synthetic content presents a serious and evolving threat that continues to create headaches for regulators and developers alike.

Moving from deepfakes to data centres, the importance of transparency was discussed from a very different angle in the designing, building and using sustainable AI panel, hosted by the Royal Academy of Engineering which highlighted the current lack of reliable, national-level data on the energy usage and efficiency of AI infrastructure. The panellists agreed that in order to define the best metrics for measuring AI’s energy impact and set meaningful standards on environmental impact, more and better data should be collected by data centre providers and shared with developers, governments and civil society.



Finally, looking even further back in the supply chain, the ODI hosted an AI, labels and global labour rights panel discussed the importance of transparency for improving labour rights in some of the most hidden, but valuable, parts of the AI workforce. Cracking open the “data black box” – the human effort behind data labelling and content moderation, much of which takes place in the Global South – was raised as an essential part of developing ethical AI. Turning from theory to practice, one suggestion for how to achieve this was to create an ethical assurance standard for AI, similar to the “fair trade” labels in our food supply chains.

Overall, the picture that emerged across panels was that embedding transparency across the AI supply chain is a necessity, not a luxury. Not only is transparency essential for consumer trust and protection, which in turn is essential for the broad adoption of AI (a point raised in the industrialisation of AI discussion, among others), but it is also fundamental to developing stable, secure and ethical AI supply chains, which will ultimately support rather than hinder innovation.





# 5

## Looking to the future – It's all to play for

Across the range of themes on the agenda at the Paris Summit, a unifying topic was how open the future of AI still is. The inaugural International AI Safety Report, published ahead of the Summit, concluded that the trajectory of AI will rest on the outcome of human decisions, whether taken as individuals, businesses or governments. Just as we shouldn't expect the benefits of AI to appear automatically, nor should we expect to avoid the potential risks without careful thought about how to contain them.

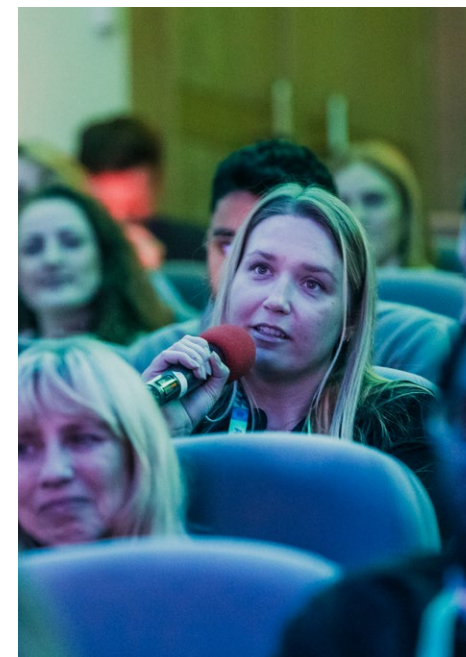
*In essence: the future is all to play for.*

The feeling that the trajectory of AI is in our hands to shape was echoed at the AI Fringe in both London and Paris. The AI Fringe event in Paris held panels on trustworthy AI, the AI adoption imperative and how to seize AI's potential to transform scientific research hosted by Clifford Chance, AWS and Google DeepMind respectively. In London, meanwhile, the Fringe convened a discussion on maximising the opportunity of open-source AI. The panel concluded that the UK has the potential to become an open-source AI leader, particularly as breakthroughs such as DeepSeek point the way to a more pluralistic AI future, but that success is likely to be contingent on better support for the ecosystem and thoughtful open-source regulation.

The opportunity to pursue new forms of AI leadership was also explored in the panel on international collaborations to advance responsible AI hosted by RAI UK. The US's decision to pull back from its international leadership role on AI safety was seen as an opportunity for new regional collaboration initiatives in the Global South: inspiration for

countries outside the Global North to find new avenues of AI influence on the international stage was found in African countries' leadership in fintech and blockchain innovation over the past decade. In Paris, a panel led by JPMorganChase explored the challenges and opportunities for private sector companies of all sizes to collaborate and influence international coordination in AI policy.

The need for a greater cross-section of society to have a stake in the future trajectory of AI is vital for ensuring that no one is left behind in an AI-driven future, as was reflected in the panel discussion on making the future work: getting AI in the workplace right hosted by the Institute for the Future of Work. The discussion highlighted that while there are continued uncertainties over the impact of AI on employment, frictions over the implementation of new technologies can only be managed through rigorous employee involvement and clear communication. The importance of bringing employees on the innovation journey was also echoed in the setting the scene: AI for everyone panel.





Employer-led initiatives such as Evidence House, which upskills civil servants in AI tools through hands-on learning and experimentation, can precipitate a broader cultural shift towards embracing AI in the workplace.

Professionals in the arts and humanities sectors feel particularly at risk of marginalisation from this new wave of technology. In the supporting creative futures in arts, culture and AI panel co-hosted by DACS and the Institute for the Future of Work, there was a general feeling that Governments are not doing enough to reassure the creative sector, many of whom are self-employed, that its interests will be protected in the age of data-hungry generative AI. However, there was also optimism about innovative solutions for including artists in an AI-driven economy, such as the example of cultural institutions acting as “data brokers” for creatives in the curation and licensing of their data to AI developers. One concluding reflection was that the creative industries are likely to feel more empowered to embrace AI if the arts receive a greater share of AI funding - an issue that was also raised in the panel on the role of the social

sciences, arts and humanities in delivering public interest AI. Although STEM (science, technology, economics and maths) disciplines are integral to building AI, the panel agreed that more needs to be done to include the SHAPE (social sciences, humanities and the arts) disciplines in the ethical deployment of AI.

Nowhere was the conclusion that the future of AI is still to be decided more evident than in the showcase debate hosted by Debate Mate along with Common Sense Media, on the motion of “this House believes that AI will be the great equaliser”. The session featured spirited contributions, parries and ripostes from both the debaters themselves and from the floor, raising questions such as “is it possible for AI to be an ‘equaliser’ if humans are feeding it with our own biases?”. In the end, although team opposition took a comfortable victory from the already sympathetic majority in the room, the intervention that received the most cross-cutting support came from a school pupil in the audience: shouldn't the motion itself be thrown out, on the grounds that it is impossible to talk in absolutes about the future of a technology that is developing so fast?



# AI Fringe partners

The AI Fringe was convened by Milltown Partners and organised in collaboration with partners from across industry, civil society and academia.



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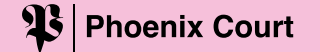
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