# UK civil servants reclaim two weeks yearly with AI tools in government trial



The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into government operations in the UK has transitioned from a visionary concept to a practical implementation, as evidenced by recent findings from a government study. Civil servants have reportedly harnessed AI tools like Microsoft’s Copilot to streamline their workflow, leading to an impressive reduction in administrative burdens and significant time savings. According to the Financial Times, the average civil servant using these tools has managed to reclaim around two weeks of work per year, primarily through tasks such as document drafting and meeting summaries.

This initiative, which involved over 20,000 officials over a three-month trial, aligns with the broader goals espoused by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer to modernise the public sector and introduce substantial cost savings estimated at £45 billion through digital transformation. Notably, 82% of participants expressed a desire to continue utilising AI technology in their daily roles. While the benefits of AI are clear, caution remains regarding its limitations—some users reported no time savings, reflecting a mixed reception even among those involved.

The implications are profound, especially in a sector beset by bureaucratic delays that often hamper decision-making. By automating routine tasks, such as document creation, AI not only saves time but also reduces the cognitive load on officials, thereby mitigating burnout and enhancing job satisfaction. The findings suggest that the introduction of AI could distinguish a new era of enhanced public service efficiency, paving the way for more strategic engagement with policy development and citizen interactions.

Moreover, the initial success of tools like Copilot may prompt the government to explore further AI applications. For instance, the recently piloted AI tool named 'Humphrey,' inspired by the sitcom *Yes, Minister*, aims to assist local authorities in cutting costs and boosting efficiency across 25 councils. Early results indicate that 'Minute,' a component of Humphrey, could save up to one hour of administrative work per hour-long meeting. As a part of this digital transformation strategy, the government is also working on AI-based services such as a digital wallet for official documents, further indicating a robust commitment to integrating technology into governance.

Despite these advancements, the integration of AI is fraught with challenges, particularly concerning data security and privacy. The handling of sensitive information necessitates stringent compliance with regulatory standards, which remains a critical barrier to broader acceptance. Experts have echoed the sentiment that while AI like Copilot can greatly improve productivity, it is imperative to address potential risks, such as bias in data and the technology's susceptibility to errors.

Furthermore, the Social Market Foundation has highlighted other potential applications of AI, suggesting that automation could significantly streamline call handling in larger departments like the Department for Work and Pensions and HM Revenue and Customs, saving millions of hours each year. Currently, citizens spend thousands of working years on calls to these departments, and the automation of two-thirds of these interactions could yield substantial time savings.

Looking ahead, the successful deployment of AI within UK civil service not only promises enhanced efficiency but also offers a framework for data-driven decision-making and improved transparency. As governments around the world observe these developments, the UK’s journey into AI-assisted governance might serve as a model for others striving towards modernisation in public administration. However, achieving the desired outcomes will require careful planning, ethical considerations, and effective training programs to ensure civil servants are equipped to thrive in this new digital landscape.

As recent trials and government reports demonstrate, while the promise of AI in transformation is significant, the path forward also calls for vigilance against potential pitfalls. The early signs indicate that this journey could lead to a more agile, responsive government better equipped to meet the demands of its citizens in an increasingly complex world.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.webpronews.com/ai-saves-uk-civil-servants-two-weeks-yearly-with-automation/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/7c2aa19d-4c92-490d-bb35-f329a246fe5b)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.webpronews.com/ai-saves-uk-civil-servants-two-weeks-yearly-with-automation/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/7c2aa19d-4c92-490d-bb35-f329a246fe5b), [[3]](https://www.itpro.com/business/public-sector/governments-humphrey-ai-tool-helps-local-authorities-cut-costs)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.techradar.com/pro/humphrey-to-the-rescue-uk-gov-seeks-to-save-millions-by-using-ai-tool-to-analyse-input-on-thousands-of-consultations), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/workers-could-save-122-hours-year-by-adopting-ai-admin-tasks-says-google-2025-04-24/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.civilserviceworld.com/professions/article/government-ai-automation-dwp-hmrc-save-812-million-hours)
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* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/7c2aa19d-4c92-490d-bb35-f329a246fe5b), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/workers-could-save-122-hours-year-by-adopting-ai-admin-tasks-says-google-2025-04-24/), [[6]](https://www.civilserviceworld.com/professions/article/government-ai-automation-dwp-hmrc-save-812-million-hours)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.webpronews.com/ai-saves-uk-civil-servants-two-weeks-yearly-with-automation/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/7c2aa19d-4c92-490d-bb35-f329a246fe5b)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.webpronews.com/ai-saves-uk-civil-servants-two-weeks-yearly-with-automation/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/7c2aa19d-4c92-490d-bb35-f329a246fe5b> - A UK government study revealed that civil servants using AI tools like Microsoft’s Copilot improved productivity by saving approximately 26 minutes daily or two weeks annually on administrative tasks such as document drafting and meeting summaries. The three-month trial involved over 20,000 officials, with 82% expressing a desire to continue using the technology. The initiative aligns with Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer’s goal to modernize the public sector and achieve £45 billion in cost savings through digital transformation and artificial intelligence. Despite productivity benefits, experts caution about AI’s limitations and potential for errors. The trial showed Copilot to be particularly effective in drafting documents and creating presentations, though 17% of users reported no time savings. Additionally, the Alan Turing Institute suggested AI could assist in up to 41% of public sector tasks, notably lesson planning for teachers. However, concerns remain over AI misuse, citing examples like problematic predictive policing in the UK and discriminatory fraud detection practices in the Netherlands. The UK government is also developing other AI-based tools and services, including a digital wallet for storing official documents. Efforts to attract foreign AI investment by relaxing copyright laws have faced criticism from creative industries.
3. <https://www.itpro.com/business/public-sector/governments-humphrey-ai-tool-helps-local-authorities-cut-costs> - The UK government is piloting an AI tool named 'Humphrey,' inspired by the 1980s series Yes Minister, to assist local authorities in improving efficiency and reducing costs. Developed by the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT), the tool is currently being trialed in 25 local councils. A key component, 'Minute,' helps streamline note-taking in services such as planning and social care, freeing up staff to focus on more critical tasks. Central government trials indicate that Minute can save up to one hour of administrative work per one-hour meeting. The initiative aligns with the Prime Minister’s goal to achieve £45 billion in productivity savings through digital transformation. The State of Digital Government Review highlighted inefficiencies like redundant tech spending and insufficient digital staff. The government aims to improve data sharing between councils and encourage collaborative tech procurement and best practice sharing. AI and digital minister Feryal Clark emphasized the tool’s potential to accelerate planning decisions, support homebuilding targets, and modernize council operations as part of the broader 'Plan for Change' strategy.
4. <https://www.techradar.com/pro/humphrey-to-the-rescue-uk-gov-seeks-to-save-millions-by-using-ai-tool-to-analyse-input-on-thousands-of-consultations> - The UK government has launched a homegrown artificial intelligence tool named ‘Humphrey’—inspired by the bureaucratic character from the sitcom Yes Minister—to streamline the review of public consultations. Central to this effort is an AI system called ‘Consult,’ which has undergone successful real-world testing in Scotland during a public consultation on regulating non-surgical cosmetic treatments. The AI analyzed over 2,000 responses and identified key themes similar to those found by human analysts, offering significant time and cost efficiencies. Proponents claim that such technology could shave off around £20 million annually by automating the analysis of roughly 500 consultations, equating to about 75,000 administrative workdays. Technology Secretary Peter Kyle highlighted its potential to enhance productivity and reduce human bias, asserting that AI should handle tasks it performs more efficiently. However, concerns linger about transparency, accuracy, and potential bias influenced by the AI's training data. Although not yet benchmarked independently, Consult's use signals a broader governmental shift toward incorporating AI in policymaking processes.
5. <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 recent Google report highlights that UK workers could save an average of 122 hours annually by integrating AI into administrative tasks, potentially contributing £400 billion ($533 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.
6. <https://www.civilserviceworld.com/professions/article/government-ai-automation-dwp-hmrc-save-812-million-hours> - Using artificial intelligence to automate and redirect calls could save the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) millions of hours each year, according to a new report that calls for the science department to be given greater powers to advise departments on the use of AI and automation. The Social Market Foundation has called for the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) to act as a 'one-stop shop' for all public sector AI and automation needs, supporting other departments to identify areas where they could save resources by adopting these approaches and issuing guidance. To illustrate the potential of AI and automation for government, the cross-party think tank said two of government’s biggest departments could drastically cut down on call times by automating and 'deflecting' calls from citizens. Citizens spent the equivalent 6,895 working years on the phone to the DWP and HMRC in 2022-23. Today’s report estimates that two-thirds of these calls could be automated, based on case studies where automation and AI tools were introduced in similar sectors – saving 8.12 million hours, or more than 4,300 working years. Other use cases in the report include cutting down on paper-based decision-making at the Driving and Vehicle Licensing Authority, where more than 200,000 DVLA medical-licensing decisions – nearly 20% of the total – took over 90 days in 2023. 'While estimating time savings is difficult, a majority of these decisions are paper-based, meaning AI and automation have significant potential to decrease user wait times through technologies such as OCR and triaging,' the report said. OCR, or optical character recognition, could be used to categorise and extract documents internally, while AI could help to prioritise cases by identifying the most complex applications. But the report found a number of 'structural impediments' to adopting automation and AI in the civil service, including aversion, difficulty scaling pilots, and a lack of institutional capacity or expertise. Other barriers include a reluctance to fund training or AI projects that could provide long-term savings; and siloed decision-making, 'with vertical organisational structures that do not maximise horizontal coherence across the public sector when it comes to AI/automation adoption'.
7. <https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/somerset-council-using-microsoft-copilot-improve-productivity> - Somerset Council, a local authority in South West England, has adopted Microsoft 365 Copilot to enhance public services amid funding reductions and policy changes. By leveraging Copilot, the council has improved productivity and saved employees’ time, enabling them to focus more on important tasks and better support residents. The council's commitment to monitoring the value of Copilot has yielded positive results, with staff reporting significant time savings in drafting meeting minutes and actions. Notably, 88% of neurodiverse users experienced productivity gains, particularly during meetings and document creation. Overall, 75% of users reported improved focus, and 53% found their work more enjoyable with Copilot. On average, Copilot users saved between 2 and 4 hours per week, achieving a return on investment (ROI) of 4 to 10 times. These initial benefits stemmed from simple uses like meeting recording and note generation, without formal training. The council plans to explore service-specific use cases of Copilot to further enhance efficiency and service delivery.