

# AI at a Turning Point: How Can We Create Equitable AI Governance Futures?

**FORUM Report of the Launch of the AI Ethics and Governance in Practice Programme at AI at a Turning Point Fringe Event, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023, at Queen Mary University of London.**

On Thursday 2 November, Queen Mary University of London, in partnership with The Alan Turing Institute, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on AI, and Big Innovation Centre, hosted the in-person and online public event '[AI at a Turning Point: How Can We Create Equitable AI Governance Futures?](#)', as part of the [AI Fringe](#) (30 October – 3 November 2023).

The public event was held to coincide with the UK government's international AI Safety Summit (November 1 and 2), aiming 'to make frontier AI safe, and to ensure nations and citizens globally can realise its benefits'. The event aimed to broaden the conversation of the Summit to focus on the current turning point in safe and responsible AI; namely, how can people and communities, at both local and global levels, realise the benefits, and the immense potential, of AI given existing socioeconomic and political headwinds?

The AI at a Turning Point event opened with UNESCO's Assistant Director General, Gabriela Ramos, setting the scene for the day, exploring the importance of inclusive rights-based visions of AI ethics and governance that centre social justice concerns. Other sessions included panel discussions on such areas as AI and children's rights, global data justice and generative AI to inclusive international AI governance in the Age of Foundation Models.

The final session of the event launched the [AI Ethics and Governance in Practice programme](#), a series of eight workbooks, mandated in the [UK's National AI Strategy](#), that updates and expands the UK's official [Public Sector AI Ethics and Safety Guidance](#).

The session was introduced by the keynote speeches of Tim Clement-Jones CBE (House of Lords) and Helen Margetts OBE (University of Oxford and The Alan Turing Institute). These were then followed by a panel integrated by Cami Rincón (Ada Lovelace Institute), Claire Lesko (Equality and Human Rights Commission), Robert Bancroft (Equality and Human Rights Commission), and Rebeka Wilson (Local Government Association), and chaired by David Leslie (The Alan Turing Institute). The panel was also joined by Conor Rigby, Antonella Perini, and Smera Jayadeva, who represented the AI Ethics and Governance in Practice programme team at The Alan Turing Institute.

In light of the launch of the national public sector AI Ethics and Governance in Practice programme, keynote speakers and panellists reflected on how this practical guidance can help public servants implement responsible innovation practices.



In his keynote speech, **Lord Tim Clement-Jones** emphasised the critical importance of the quality of decisions made by automated processes, particularly in the public sector. He highlighted the UK's official public sector guidance on AI Ethics and Safety as a crucial step forward and welcomed the AI Ethics and Governance in Practice programme for taking the original guidance to a

level of detail and practicality that will expand trustworthy public sector AI and strengthen public trust in public service use of AI.

**Helen Margetts** reflected on the government's use of AI when the Public Policy Programme at The Alan Turing Institute was established in 2018. The government was not only having difficulties in acquiring technical expertise but was also concerned with establishing a framework for responsible innovation to guide AI use in government. Helen highlighted that the launch of the AI



Ethics and Governance in Practice programme marks the realisation of early aspirations for the Public Policy Programme and the culmination of extensive research within The Turing. The guidance, she emphasised, illustrates the feasibility of a synergistic relationship between research and real-world application, as it provides both research evidence and practical support for the development and deployment of AI in the public sector.

Following the keynote speeches, **David Leslie** chaired a panel that focused on the importance of the responsible and trustworthy development, procurement, and use of AI technologies in the public sector and how corresponding public sector standards of good practice can serve as a model for the broader AI innovation ecosystem.

**Cami Rincón** opened the panel session by bringing to light the structured design and the scalability of the programme as the two key aspects that would facilitate civil servants and government bodies to put the guidance into practice. Each workbook, they explained, corresponds to an actionable principle that is translated into real-world AI project processes. Cami also envisioned that the 'train the trainer' approach of the programme would provide individuals in key roles within public sector organisations with the tools to conduct internal training and implement the guidance in real-world projects. They encouraged public sector organisations to seize the opportunity by empowering their staff to become AI Ethics Champions.

**Claire Lesko** shared her thoughts on the state of play for responsible innovation practices within the public sector. She observed a cautious approach among local authorities, testing AI before deciding on whether or not to mainstream it. Claire noted, however, that there is also a widespread misunderstanding of AI usage, with some local authorities initially not

realising AI is being used within their remit. Claire emphasised the need for public servants using AI to systematically think about equality through the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) framework. This encourages not only consideration of the potential negative impacts or discriminatory effects of AI but also making sure to collect evidence to assess if AI systems are delivering the intended benefits for the communities.

**Robert Bancroft** talked about the resources that Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) as a fairness regulator has available for public sector organisations when considering fairness in AI systems, as well as the initiatives to identify socio-technical solutions to fairness in AI models, such as the Fairness Innovation Challenge alongside the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation and the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Robert highlighted that public sector organisations are mostly considering equality as part of the data protection impact assessments. For this reason, he cautioned that changes to requirements to do data protection impact assessments will affect equality and fairness considerations. In response to Claire and Robert's interventions, David Leslie reiterated the important input and influence of EHRC in piloting and writing content for the AI Fairness in Practice workbook, which helped to provide a much more multi-layered approach to equality.

**Rebeka Wilson** gave an overview of challenges within local governments, including different levels of maturity and readiness, the need to support complex decisions with good governance, disparate levels of comfort with digital environments, a risk-averse culture, and capability gaps. She stressed that the AI Ethics and Governance in Practice programme has the potential to provide a foundation to support local authorities in developing data strategies for those procuring, developing, and implementing AI. Rebeka envisioned the workbooks to help reflect on what good governance in decision-making processes looks like, particularly emphasising stakeholder engagement and clarity in responsibilities to ensure AI integrity. She commended the workbook series for its use of non-technical language and strong visual components for facilitating conversations at leadership levels. Lastly, she recognised the workbooks for raising awareness of risks and providing ways to monitor impact, as well as for offering guidance on upskilling the workforce and identifying necessary skill sets for the evolving demands of AI implementation.

Next, the project team gave insights into the processes that contribute to the creation of the AI Ethics and Governance in Practice workbook series. **Conor Rigby**, graphic designer of the team, shared his experience in translating concepts into accessible visualisation. He stressed the importance of having a collaborative and open dialogue with the project researchers to visualise values, principles, and frameworks in a clear way. **Antonella Perini** gave an overview of the engagement processes with various stakeholders to pilot the workbooks, such as the Ministry of Justice, EHRC, and ICO, who contributed to the piloting of the workbooks. This process helped the team identify potential needs and the accompaniment that the Turing can provide. **Smera Jayadeva** highlighted that the feedback received by participants of the pilot workshops is central to the design of the programme. She stressed that while participants are part of a public sector organisation, they will also be impacted if the public sector chooses to use AI systems and can respond to some of the workbook activities from their own lived experiences.



To conclude the session, panellists gave some final thoughts about the challenges to ethically evaluate AI systems within the public sector, and the practices they would hope to see materialise to address such challenges. **Cami Rincón** acknowledged that the common rhetoric of stakeholder engagement often falls short in practice and discussed the delicate balance between ensuring engagement is proportionate to the risks posed by an AI system, especially in the context of resource constraints for public sector organizations. They also emphasised the significance of identifying specific identity and contextual factors that may heighten vulnerability to certain AI systems. **Claire Lesko** added that she hoped to witness more transparency, accountability, and trust. She expressed interest in seeing the development of a repository of AI use by the public sector, public bodies engagement with communities likely to be affected (both negatively and positively) by the use of AI, which could inform exchanges about the equality impact of the use of specific AI technologies. **Robert Bancroft** stressed the resources challenges faced by regulatory bodies to keep up with the scale of private companies and envisioned the building of a broader definition of fairness and emphasised the importance of human rights in the development and deployment of AI systems in the public and private sectors. Lastly, **Rebeka Wilson** closed the panel by highlighting the importance of careful project scoping to determine where AI can add value and what are its limitations when councils source or procure AI technology. She underscored the relevance of identifying trusted partners who adhere to the same ethical principles and clear standards to maintain public trust and protect local service integrity, as well as committing to explaining to the community the public value of the technologies used. Rebeka concluded that councils play a vital role in local democracy and in including, informing, and assuring citizens that the technologies that are being used are being governed properly.

### Key takeaways

- Local governments have different levels of maturity, readiness, and comfort with digital environments. It is important that they undergo careful project scoping to determine where AI can add value and identify trusted partners who adhere to the same ethical principles, as well as include, inform, and assure citizens that the technologies used are being governed properly.

- The common rhetoric of stakeholder engagement often falls short in practice and discussed the delicate balance between ensuring engagement is proportionate to the risks posed by an AI system, especially in the context of resource constraints for public sector organizations. Identifying specific identity and contextual factors that may heighten vulnerability to certain AI systems is an essential prerequisite to meaningful engagement.
- Public servants using AI need to systematically use the Public Sector Equality Duty framework to encourage consideration of the potential negative impacts or discriminatory effects of AI whilst also making sure to assess if AI systems are delivering the intended benefits for the communities.
- At the moment, public sector organisations are mostly considering equality as part of the data protection impact assessments (DPIAs). Any changes to requirements on DPIAs will affect equality and fairness considerations.
- The AI Ethics and Governance in Practice programme provides research evidence and practical support to guide on good governance practices for the development and deployment of AI in the public sector. In doing so, it also promises to strengthen public trust in public service use of AI.

#### **Next in the agenda**

- The AI Ethics and Governance in Practice programme will host a workshop at AI UK 2024 titled 'AI Ethics for the Public Sector: A Café Dialogue', where participants will explore workbooks distilling official guidance on values, safety and responsibility across the AI lifecycle and take part in vital discussion around the challenges and preferred approaches for ethical AI innovations in the public sector. For more information and registration visit <https://ai-uk.turing.ac.uk/programme/>

#### **To watch the full recording of the session, visit**

<https://www.youtube.com/live/RGKc4aMFn9Q?feature=shared&t=15558>

#### **To know more about the AI Ethics and Governance in Practice programme, visit**

<https://www.turing.ac.uk/research/research-projects/ai-ethics-and-governance-practice>