Priorities of the Business and Trade Committee for 2026

Response by BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT

1. Introduction

1.1. BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT is the professional body for technology, representing 70,000 people working across technology today.

1.2. As a third-sector organisation with a Royal Charter mission to 'make IT good for society', BCS positions itself so that it may provide expert, impartial insight and evidence to policymakers to inform good public policy.

1.3. We welcome the opportunity to provide a response to the priorities of the committee for 2026 and will focus our attention on three areas of '*Pro-Growth Reforms and Investment', 'Productivity Growth'* and '*Better Regulation'.*

1.4. BCS is able to provide evidence on issues relating to technology, skills and education but we also welcome the opportunity to discuss the concept of individual professionals as a dynamic, innovative form of regulation that is under-utilised in the UK.

2. Pro-Growth Reforms and Investment

Which areas of reform—planning, infrastructure, regulation, skills—are most urgent for unlocking growth?

2.1. Growth is underpinned by organisational efficiency, effectiveness and performance. BCS considers skills not only as a fundamental basis for these concepts, but a base that is particularly relevant to the UK economy as it currently stands. We have welcomed the government's focus on digital skills throughout 2025 but fundamental inefficiencies remain within skills policy which if addressed can lead to growth.

2.2. In January 2025, BCS research found that 61% of senior tech leaders ('Leaders') considered AI to be the most notable existing skills gap within their own

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organisations.[1] This is up from 59% the previous year and shows a substantial and growing need for AI skills. Qualitative research amongst BCS' peer organisations and within professional communities has further reinforced BCS' conviction that the AI skills gap is a fundamental growth issue for businesses, including SMEs and those that are not primarily technologically focused.

2.3. The same BCS survey showed that 40% of IT Leaders consider cybersecurity skills as the most in demand – second only to AI.

2.4. Only 5% of Leaders and IT professionals thought their organisation had enough resources (e.g. skills, budget, qualifications) to achieve their priorities for 2025, the lowest it has ever been in BCS surveys. 63% felt that their organisation needs enhanced IT capability and skills in their existing workforce to achieve their priorities.

2.5. When considering how IT Leaders would address their identified skills gaps, whether they be AI, Cybersecurity or other, the vast majority (68%) stated that on the job training/upskilling would be appropriate, Outsourcing (31%), Professional Certifications (31%) and importantly using AI/automation (29%) were the top solutions.

Trust as a Growth Strategy

2.6. The AI Opportunities Action Plan (January 2025) and the Skills England 'AI skills for the UK workforce' paper (October 2025), affirmed that AI adoption could grow the UK economy by an additional £400 billion by 2030 through enhancing innovation and productivity in the workplace.[2]

2.7. In September 2025, the Tony Blair Institute published research that suggested AI adoption was being hindered by a lack of public trust, with 38 per cent of respondents citing a lack of trust in AI content as a barrier, making it the biggest

[1] https://www.bcs.org/articles-opinion-and-research/tech-priorities-survey-overview-2025/
[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-opportunities-action-plan/ai-opportunities-action-plan#:~:text=AI%20adoption%20could%20grow%20the,and%20productivity%20in%20the%20workplace.

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single obstacle to AI adoption.[3] More than 30 per cent of UK adults view a lack of trust in AI-generated content and concerns about privacy and data security as the biggest barriers to adoption.

2.8. Throughout 2025, BCS has focused research on the issue of trust within technology, particularly AI, publishing findings in the media[4] and conducting original research on the issue that we consider as a policy priority in the intersection of business and technology.

2.9. Starting from that understanding that trust in AI hinders adoption and that adoption drives growth, BCS has been researching how to increase trust in AI and particularly in the people that design, manage and operate AI systems.

2.10. A BCS-commissioned YouGov survey[5] (August/September 2025) found that public trust in AI and technology more broadly can be increased through the professionalisation of those working on those technologies:

2.10.1. 85% of the public agreed that IT professionals working on systems that affect the public should be required to join a public register and follow an independent code of conduct, like doctors or lawyers.

2.10.2. 82% believed that IT professionals working in high-impact AI roles should be professionally registered and held to independent standards of competence and ethics.

2.10.3. 75% said they would trust an IT professional more if they were listed on a public register and accountable to a code of conduct.

2.11. As a result of these findings, BCS is building such a register to drive trust, accountability and visibility of those working on high-impact AI in the UK.

[3] https://institute.global/insights/tech-and-digitalisation/what-the-uk-thinks-about-ai-building-public-trust-to-accelerate-adoption
[4] https://labourlist.org/2025/11/trust-in-ai-and-digital-needs-safeguards/
[5] https://www.bcs.org/articles-opinion-and-research/ai-ethics-and-professional-registrations-in-the-uk-report/

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2.12. A public register of IT professionals would provide assurance and accountability in high impact roles including automated decision making or handling special category data. It would ensure IT professionals are accountable to independent standards of ethics and competence.

2.13. BCS therefore consider that government should endorse such measures that increase trust in AI so that adoption may rise, driving productivity and growth within both the public and private sectors.

2.14. We believe public trust is the starting point for a virtuous cycle. When people see that AI can be safe, ethical and improve products and services, demand will rise. That bottom-up demand creates the consent, mandate and expectation needed for businesses to invest and adopt AI at scale.

2.15. BCS welcomes government support and endorsement of increasing trust in technology and AI as a means of driving AI adoption and economic growth, particularly through the professionalisation of technologists and the concept of a visible public register of those technologists.

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3. Productivity Growth

What role should technology, skills, and innovation policy play in boosting long-term output per worker? How can productivity gains be shared fairly across the economy?

3.1. When organisations invest time, effort and resources into upskilling workers in technologies such as AI, those workers feel the benefit and the productivity gains can be shared with those workers. Research from Google found that workers saved an average of 122 hours over the course of a year when they were suitably trained to use AI.[6] Even light exposure to generative AI tools allowed workers to feel more positive about the technology and increased AI adoption even months afterwards.

3.2. The results of the Google pilot are intuitive but point to the simple fact that unless workers are given the necessary permissions, access and support in their workplace to utilise generative AI tools, then such results may not occur. Organisations, executives and managers in particular must be encouraged to expose workers to these technologies in a reasonable way so that workers are not left behind compared to their peers.

3.3. A recent analysis of 191 peer-reviewed articles on AI, algorithms and robots by LSE found that employees are shouldering more of the negative consequences of AI in work than employers – particularly from lower senses of achievement when using AI and loss of creativity.[7]

3.4. It follows therefore that there exists a specific risk that poor management may prevent workers from realising the benefits of technological advancements.

3.5. Workplaces that do not invest in skills or encourage sensible innovation can create conditions where staff spend unnecessary time on low-value tasks. In many cases, workers either lack exposure to AI tools through their employer or do not have the permission or support to use them. The latter is a growing issue, as many workers are already adopting AI independently of formal corporate policies.

[66] https://static.googleusercontent.com/media/publicpolicy.google/en//resources/ai_works_2025_en.pdf
[7] https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2025/09/26/ais-winners-and-losers-in-the-workplace-a-stakeholder-analysis/

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3.6. Government should therefore be aware that employers have a duty of care to ensure their workers are provided with the opportunities to improve their wellbeing through the use of AI, if doing so is appropriate, by using AI to perform basic, administrative tasks – tasks that are often repetitive, lack meaning and do not provide job satisfaction. Exposing workers to that technology is important for the future career development of those workers.

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4. Better Regulation

What opportunities exist to streamline or consolidate regulators to improve efficiency?

Introduction

4.1. BCS supports the concept of professional self-regulation as a means of limiting the need for otherwise burdensome top-down regulation, supporting a pro-growth environment while supporting high-standards, ethics and accountability.

4.2. As a caveat, we do not necessarily consider this sufficient to change any specific existing regulation, proposed regulation or future regulation, but we wish to highlight the reality that professional self-regulation exists within the UK regulatory ecosystem, that it is underutilised and provides significant opportunities for greater levels of trust, transparency and accountability within business and government.

4.2.1. The concept centres on 'the professional individual' – i.e. someone who is registered with a chartered or professional body, as a unit of regulation. In this model, individuals (e.g. chartered engineers, certified accountants, BCS-registered IT professionals) are bound by industry-specific codes of conduct and CPD requirements that are then enforced by their professional bodies themselves.

4.2.2. We argue that this **"light-touch"** approach could prevent the need for *some* additional blanket, industry-wide rules. Rather than imposing heavy, one-size-fits-all mandates on every firm or product, regulators may recognise that professional bodies uphold standards among their members.

4.2.3. In practice this could mean, for example, requiring tech workers in public-sector roles to hold a chartered status or similar registration, with disciplinary enforcement by the professional body. This reduces costs and red tape for both companies and government while still ensuring competence and accountability via an impartial third-party.

Background

4.3. The Government's announcement of the Regulatory Innovation Office (RIO) accepted the premise that red tape causes barriers and delays to products and

services powered by technologies such as Artificial Intelligence[8]. The UK's agile, sector-based regulatory framework has been vindicated through the maintenance of its position as the third largest AI market, with almost 90% of AI business representatives recently surveyed expect their revenues to grow within the next 12 months.[9]

4.4. The European Council has stated that deregulation for growth is their priority, including 'simplification' of their digital regulation.[10]

4.5. The UK Government should look to preserve and extend its global position on AI, knowing that regulation could stifle industry, but it must also respond to the real need to mitigate risk and build public trust.

4.6. BCS refers to recent research commissioned through YouGov that presents professional registration as a way of building public trust – in this case in technology and AI[11]. For example, 85% of the public agreed that IT professionals working on systems affecting the public should be required to join a public register and follow an independent code of conduct. 75**%** said they would trust an IT professional more if they were listed on a public register and accountable to a code of conduct.

The Professional Individual as a Mode of Regulation

4.7. The General Medical Council (GMC) licences its doctors and without such a licence, any doctor is unable to practise ('Licence to Practise'). Similarly, a lawyer may be struck off by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) if they contravene the SRA's own code of conduct.[12]

4.8. The SRA annual report shows how disciplinary measures keep the public safe and demonstrate to both the public and the profession that the SRA will act to remove bad actors.

[8] https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-10-08/hcws111
[9] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/artificial-intelligence-sector-study-2024/artificial-intelligence-sector-study-2024
[10] https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-leaders-double-down-deregulation-drive/
[11] https://www.bcs.org/articles-opinion-and-research/ai-ethics-and-professional-registrations-in-the-uk-report/
[12] https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/code-conduct-solicitors/

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"… if solicitors fall short of what is expected, we step in to keep the public safe. We brought 78 cases to the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal (SDT) in 2023/24 compared to 99 in 2022/23. The number of cases we bring to the SDT varies year on year and, over the last five years, has ranged from 76 to 112 per year. We also intervened into and closed down 59 law firms where we felt there was a significant and immediate risk to clients and the public. This compares to 65 interventions in the 2022/23 year. In recent years, we have seen a general increase in the number of interventions we are carrying out, as well as more large-scale interventions."[13]

4.9. Whether it be doctors, lawyers or technologists, individuals who are professionally registered do reduce risk within their environments and the results can be seen in public trust with the top three most trusted professions all being based upon professional registration (nurses, doctors and engineers).[14]

4.10. Regulatory efficiency means the government appreciating the extent to which impartial third parties such as BCS, the SRA and the GMC can themselves act to protect the public interest – lessening the burden on public servants to do the same.

4.11. A professional-body approach to regulation can be more cost-effective and flexible for government. Businesses pay less if they do not need expensive compliance departments to meet every detailed regulation; instead, individuals pay membership/CPD fees to their professional bodies (often reimbursed by the company). Regulators save resources by auditing professional bodies rather than every firm. A lighter regime can also adapt more easily to new technology: professional bodies can update codes more quickly than governments can pass new laws or regulators update guidance. For instance, the UK's new Regulatory Innovation Office was created to help regulators work *"more effectively… speeding up the regulatory pathway"*. Encouraging professional certification aligns with that vision: certified professionals can be seen as self-regulating experts who need less prescriptive oversight.

[13] https://www.sra.org.uk/globalassets/documents/sra/research/solicitors-regulation-authority-limited-financial-statements-2024.pdf?
[14] https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/ipsos-veracity-index-2024

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4.12. In this context, regulating individuals via professional bodies rather than broad industries can be seen as a way to **target oversight where needed** without imposing unnecessary burdens on all businesses.

4.13. BCS continues to research what a successful model of professional self-regulation looks like and welcomes the opportunity to discuss this further with the committee.

Further information

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