The Chartered Institute for IT

TRUSTWORTHY TECHNOLOGY: MEETING SOCIETY'S EXPECTATIONS FOR AI

BCS, THE CHARTERED INSTITUTE FOR IT
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If you have questions and follow up suggestions please contact policyhub@bcs.uk to reach Andy Twelves, Claire Penketh and Dan Howl, who led the preparation of this report.

FOREWORD

TRUSTWORTHY TECHNOLOGY: MEETING SOCIETY'S EXPECTATIONS FOR AI

Technology now touches every aspect of our lives; from the way we access healthcare, to how we interact with local and national Government. Artificial Intelligence (AI) in particular offers extraordinary opportunities to transform public services for the better, but the pace and scale of change raise an equally important question: how do we ensure people trust the systems that are being built in their name?

This new report provides clear evidence of what the public expects. They want the professionals who design and deliver these technologies to be held to the same independent standards as doctors, lawyers and engineers. They want transparency, accountability, and the reassurance that competence is tested and kept up to date. Above all, they want to know that the people behind critical systems are committed to acting in the public interest.

At BCS, we believe professionalism must be the foundation of the UK's digital future - our role is to support technologists to meet the highest ethical and technical standards, and to give the public confidence that those standards are being met. Professional registration, underpinned by a robust Code of Conduct, is a vital part of that commitment.

The message is clear: the UK has an opportunity to lead the world in trustworthy technology. By embedding competence, ethics and accountability at the heart of public sector innovation, we can deliver digital services that are not only efficient and effective, but also fair, reliable and deserving of public confidence.

This report is both a call to action and a practical guide. It offers Government, employers, and professionals a framework for embedding trust at the centre of digital transformation. If we embrace this approach, the UK can build a digital public sector that truly serves society, and sets a global example for others to follow.

Sharron Gunn
CEO, BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the professional body for information technology, BCS has long argued that IT professionals in the public sector should be formally registered and proud to be accountable to an independent Code of Conduct.

This is a matter of increasing urgency as technology becomes more inextricable in our everyday lives, and in our public services.

Public trust is a crucial consideration for Government, as part of the wider approach to the use of AI in the provision of public services across the UK. New data can help further our understanding of how best to build and sustain that trust as a profession.

To provide that fresh evidence, BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT commissioned public polling from YouGov (summer 2025). 2202 people across the UK responded to the YouGov Survey online, with the figures weighted to be representative of all UK adults over the age of 18.

We found irrefutable public support for professional registration of IT professionals working in public sector technology roles.

SOME OF THE KEY FINDINGS WERE:

85%

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.

82%

of respondents agreed that professionals working in AI roles with a high impact on people's lives should be **required to hold Chartered, or professionally registered status.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Professional registration, underpinned by an accompanying Code of Conduct, should be an essential condition for all public sector technology roles, including contractors within the supply chain, to ensure accountability and reinforce public trust.

2 A public register of IT professionals should be utilised to provide assurance and accountability in high-impact roles, such as automated decision-making or handling special category data.

This will ensure IT professionals are accountable to independent standards of ethics and competence and are working towards regular and published Continuing Professional Development (CPD) goals, including Chartered status.

3 The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) should continue to lead in bringing UK companies and professional bodies together to set and develop ethical standards. This will be key to building public trust and accountability in AI and digital systems.

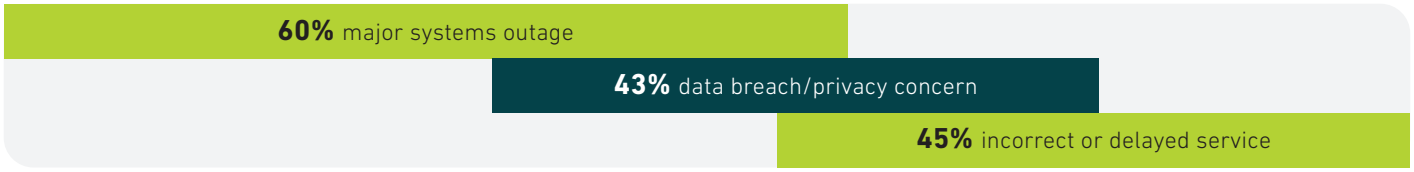
"If Government works in partnership with professional bodies, industry, and civil society, we can make the UK a world leader in trustworthy technology. The opportunity before us is to define an approach to AI that is ambitious, responsible, and ethical - one that strengthens our public services while safeguarding the rights and trust of those they serve. If we get this right, Britain will not only harness the benefits of AI but set a global example in how to do so with integrity."

Daniel Aldridge MP
Chair, Cyber Innovation APPG
Co-Chair, Digital Inclusion APPG

BCS-YOUGOV RESEARCH FINDINGS

RAISING TRUST

IT PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED



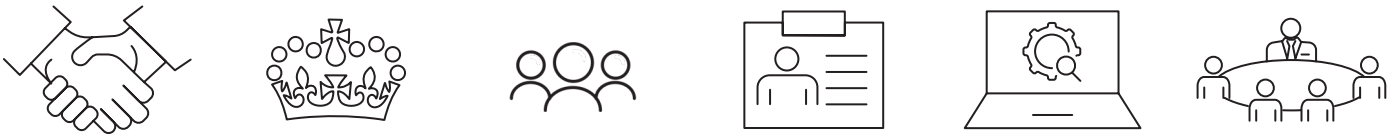
The survey revealed that just over half of UK adults (52%) have at least some trust in IT professionals to act in the public's best interests when working on major systems, with 6% expressing a great deal of trust and 46% a fair amount.

However, a significant proportion, 37%, say they have little or no trust, and 11% are unsure. Trust could be strengthened by professional regulation, as a large majority (85%) agree that IT professionals working on public-impact systems should be required to join a public register and follow an independent Code of Conduct, similar to doctors or lawyers.

Likewise, 82% agree that professionals working in high-impact Artificial Intelligence roles should hold Chartered or professionally registered status. When presented with the idea of an IT professional being listed on such a register and held to a Code of Conduct, 75% say it would make them trust that professional more, including 21% who would trust them "a lot more."

Experience with IT-related problems is widespread. 60% of respondents have personally experienced a major system outage, whilst 43% have encountered a data breach or privacy concern, and 45% have suffered incorrect or delayed service due to IT issues.

WHO SHOULD SET THE STANDARDS?



50% Professional body (e.g. BCS)

46% UK Government

42% Employers

41% Digital/AI Regulator

36% IT Professionals

33% Tech Firms/ Industry boards

WORKPLACE CONFIDENCE

67% Confident in IT Systems

21% Low Confidence

RESPONDENTS

40% Full-time

13% Part-time

24% Retired

23% Other

TRUST IN IT PROFESSIONALS

6% High

46% Fair

37% Little-None

11% Unsure

Responsibility for upholding high ethical and technical standards in IT is seen as a shared duty: half of respondents (50%) think an independent professional body such as BCS should be responsible, while significant proportions also point to the UK Government (46%), employers (42%), and a dedicated digital/ AI regulator (41%).

Over a third (36%) believe IT professionals themselves should take responsibility, while a third (33%) also cite technology companies and industry-wide certification boards (34%).

Workplace confidence in IT systems is relatively high, with two-thirds (67%) of working adults saying they are very or fairly confident that the systems they rely on are managed responsibly and securely, although 21% express low confidence. In terms of employment profile, 40% of respondents work full time, 13% part time (8–29 hours), and 24% are retired.

These results highlight a general willingness among the public to trust IT professionals, but with clear conditions. Professional accountability, robust standards, and regulatory oversight are key drivers in building that trust. IT professionals need skills that are visible and verifiable to employers and the public. Strengthening professionalism through registration, codes of conduct, and recognised qualifications can help address skills shortages and maintain confidence in high-impact IT roles.

HOW WE ESTABLISH TRUST IN PUBLIC SECTOR AI

TO ESTABLISH TRUST IN PUBLIC SECTOR TECHNOLOGIES, BCS BELIEVES THAT:

1

Professional registration should be an essential condition for all civil service, wider public sector technology roles, and successful digital tenders.

Being professionally registered, and proud to have signed a Code of Conduct, should be an expectation of technology practitioners hoping to be recruited to public sector technology roles. This should extend through the supply chain, applying first and foremost to lead and senior digital technology professionals delivering contracts of work, while still allowing for wider application across the workforce.

This means the people responsible for delivering and overseeing critical technology systems are held accountable, commit to retaining their current competence, and to following recognised ethical standards.

As with engineering, accountancy, or medicine, professional registration in IT sets a benchmark for skills, integrity, and commitment to continuous learning. Public services increasingly rely on complex systems that affect healthcare outcomes, law enforcement decisions, and financial support allocation. To build long-term trust, the professionals developing and operating these systems should strive for consistent, transparent standards.

There is a preexisting model for this within the civil service, as seen through the Government Economic Service benchmarking of economic roles. Extending this model to all technology roles would help create a culture of responsibility across the technical side of the public sector; ensuring the individuals entrusted with technology decisions are prepared to anticipate risks, protect against harm, and act in the public interest.

2

Government bodies should use a public register, to assure the accountability of IT professionals in high-impact roles.

Public registration, already becoming the standard across so many fields, should be adopted by Government for technology professionals across high impact roles in its departments and public services. This can assure the public that digital practitioners act in their interests, meet independent standards of ethics and competence, and are working towards regular and visible CPD goals, including Chartered status.

High-impact roles would include those involving automated decision-making that can determine access to essential services, handling of special category or sensitive personal data such as medical records, or the design, procurement, and management of critical infrastructure.

Using the BCS public register, supported by Royal Charter, would enable employers to confirm that an individual has been independently assessed against clear professional criteria, and is bound by an actionable Code of Conduct. This process would aim to reduce the risk of technical errors, bias, or unethical practices compromising service delivery. In practice, it would mean the difference between a system that reinforces public trust and one that becomes the subject of public concern, legal challenge, or costly remediation.

A consistent approach to professional verification would not only strengthen public sector resilience but also reassure the public that their data, rights, and wellbeing are protected by qualified and accountable professionals.

3

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) should continue to lead in uniting UK companies and professional bodies to develop and maintain world-leading ethical standards for AI and digital systems.

Public trust in AI and emerging technologies depends on the assurance that these systems are designed and deployed with fairness, transparency, and accountability at their core. The UK has the opportunity to lead the world in setting these standards, but this requires coordination and commitment from Government, industry, and the professional community alike.

DSIT is uniquely placed to convene this effort, as they are doing with AI assurance, drawing on the expertise of sector leaders, quality infrastructure bodies and professional bodies. This will ensure that ethical frameworks keep pace with technological change. These standards should evolve to address emerging risks, from algorithmic bias to environmental impacts of large-scale computing.

By embedding ethical practice into the UK's digitalisation strategy, we can ensure that growth in AI and digital services not only boosts the economy but also safeguards public values, strengthens international competitiveness, and ensures the public has confidence in the systems

CONCLUSION

The UK Government is at a defining point in its digital journey. AI and other advanced technologies are the way our public services support clinicians, allocate resources, respond to emergencies, and deliver support to the most vulnerable.

BCS' research shows that people will trust and support technology experts who are professionally registered and willingly meet a Code of Conduct.

That belief comes from knowing that the people behind the systems are competent, accountable, and guided by principles that put the public good first.

The British public already expects this of doctors, lawyers, engineers, and accountants; it's no stretch to extend that expectation to those designing and running the systems that make life-and-death decisions, handle sensitive personal data, or influence how public services function at scale.

The message is simple: professional registration should be a baseline requirement for all civil service and public sector technology posts, especially those with high impact on people's lives. Our research shows that Government can have confidence in the value of an independent public register for technologists, knowing that when the stakes are high, the professionals involved are accountable to world-class standards.

DSIT is well placed to continue to take the lead in uniting the UK's professional bodies, industry leaders, and researchers to support the setting and refinements of ethical standards that can withstand rapid innovation and public scrutiny.

By embedding these commitments now, the Government can future-proof public trust. We can ensure that AI in our public services is not only innovative and efficient but also fair, transparent, and designed to serve the public interest. We can protect against the erosion of confidence that follows a high-profile failure and build a culture in which technology is associated with reliability, safety, and fairness.

That is the opportunity in front of us: to build a public sector where trust is not a by-product of good technology, but its foundation. If we seize it, we will not only shape the future of our own services; but set a global example of how to harness AI and digital innovation for the good of everyone in society.

TO BUILD A PUBLIC SECTOR WHERE TRUST IS NOT A BY-PRODUCT OF GOOD TECHNOLOGY, BUT ITS FOUNDATION.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2202 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 6th - 7th August 2025. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

ABOUT BCS, THE CHARTERED INSTITUTE FOR IT

BCS is the professional body for information technology. Our purpose, as defined by Royal Charter, is to promote and advance the education and practice of computing for the benefit of the public. With around 70,000 members, BCS brings together academics, practitioners, industry and Government to share knowledge, inform the design of new curricula, and shape policy. BCS is also the leading end point assessment organisation for Digital Apprenticeships.

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