

The case for AI is out right now

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As I noted in an article I wrote for The National yesterday, I responded to Keir Starmer's enthusiasm for AI by asking ChatGPT to do this:

Suggest reasons why AI can deliver growth for the UK economy. Use bullet points when providing those reasons. Please use no more than six of them. Use no more than 20 words in any paragraph.

This was its response:

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Boosts Productivity: AI streamlines operations and automates tasks, reducing costs and improving efficiency across industries.

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Enhances Innovation: AI enables advanced research, product development, and problem-solving, fostering innovation in key sectors like healthcare and technology.

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Attracts Investment: The UK's AI leadership can draw global investments, supporting startups and large-scale AI-focused projects.

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Upskills Workforce: AI-driven tools empower workers with new skills, increasing employability and addressing skill gaps in the economy.

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Improves Public Services: AI enhances decision-making, resource allocation, and service delivery in healthcare, education, and government services.

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Supports Exports: AI solutions and expertise can be exported, strengthening the UK's position as a global tech leader.

So, we learned that all the Prime Minister's arguments made yesterday could have been written for him by ChatGPT.

Then I asked what I thought was the obvious follow-up question, which I did not hear discussed very much yesterday, which was:

What are the preconditions for the above goals being achieved?

This was the response, with Chat GPT still using the conditions I attached to the first request:

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Strong AI Ecosystem: Development of a robust AI ecosystem with collaborations between academia, industry, and government.

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Skilled Workforce: Investment in education, upskilling, and reskilling programs to prepare workers for AI-driven roles.

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Clear Regulations: Establishing ethical, transparent, and supportive AI policies to foster innovation while addressing societal concerns.

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Sufficient Investment: Public and private sector funding to support AI research, startups, and infrastructure development.

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Digital Infrastructure: Nationwide access to high-speed internet and advanced computing resources to enable widespread AI adoption.

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Public Trust: Building trust in AI through transparent use cases and addressing biases, privacy, and accountability concerns.

I think that response is fair.

Do I see these conditions being likely to be met? Not at all.

The first is beyond the wit of a government that is intent on alienating its own employees and gutting academia.

The second assumes that there will be more training than any UK employer ever wants to provide to their staff. Unless that is given even the most basic gains from AI are not going to be secured. As my own research into it shows, writing decent requests for what is required of it is not a straightforward task.

Regulation will fall behind the progress of AI, I have no doubt. The news on copyright already does not look good. I think we can safely assume there will be a failure here.

The fourth and fifth requirements involve more money than Labour will commit.

And as to the sixth, why is the public going to trust something that looks very like it is being created to destroy jobs? People already hate automated responses, call centre scripts, and the obviously fake images now so commonly created by AI. All that improvement in these will do is increase the sense of mistrust. Not knowing whether a human or a machine is responding will lead to alienation.

I am not saying AI has no uses. Very obviously, it has. But government looks pretty silly when it says locating potholes in one of them: we can all do that.

It's also slightly absurd to suggest AI will stop tax avoidance. I think it may have a role in evasion, but on avoidance, less so, in all likelihood. The PM's suggestion that avoidance was the issue it would address just showed that unless the right answer is requested of AI it will not deliver at all.

And Peter Kyle's claim that AI is as big a change for society as electricity is absurd. That was, quite literally, a light bulb moment. AI does not deliver that. In fact, if there is one thing AI definitely is, it is opaque. The gains are far from clear. The liberating effect is also uncertain. For many, it will look like the route to being deskilled or unemployed.

I may, of course, be wrong. But candidly, I do not see AI as being the basis for growth, opportunity, sunny uplands, balanced budgets or Labour victories. I see it as a route to stress for many, to unwanted change for millions, and to increased alienation in society for most. Much as I am willing to embrace it, to a limited extent, at the end of the day, there is one thing that worries me most of all, and that is that AI creates the power for big business to dispense with labour whilst manipulating the supply of goods and services to those who might need them, and not necessarily for their benefit.

The case for AI is out right now, and Labour did nothing to advance it yesterday by making silly mistakes.

Having read this, my wife wondered why I had not asked what the potential harms of AI might be, so I asked that question of ChatGPT, repeating the other instructions noted above. This was the response:

Potential Harms of AI

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Bias and Discrimination: AI systems can perpetuate or amplify existing biases in data, leading to unfair outcomes.

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Privacy Invasion: AI can analyze vast amounts of personal data, risking misuse or breaches of sensitive information.

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Job Displacement: Automation can replace human labor, disrupting industries and causing significant economic and social challenges.

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Weaponization: AI technology may be used in autonomous weapons, increasing risks of unethical warfare and unintended harm.

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Misinformation Spread: AI can create convincing fake content, including deepfakes, fueling misinformation and societal confusion.

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Loss of Human Autonomy: Over-reliance on AI may erode decision-making capacity and diminish personal responsibility.

I definitely think that worth sharing.

It looks like Labour forgot to ask that question.