



# Open source in the UK: Why it must continue to rise

 ON MAY 23, 2022([HTTPS://TECHNATIVE.IO/2022/05/23/](https://technative.io/2022/05/23/))

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## Organisations across the world have woken up to the value of open source software

They recognise that non-proprietary forms of code can be both cost-effective and efficient. Interestingly, Red Hat's recent report (<https://www.redhat.com/en/enterprise-open-source-report/2022>) highlighted that 82% of IT decision makers are more likely to choose a vendor that contributes to the open source community.

The UK is no exception with increased adoption of open source, driven by the rise of public cloud, rapid digital transformation, and increased confidence in open source security.

For this growth to continue and the UK to realise the full potential of open source, organisations need to make sure they are giving back to the

community. Offering support and input to enable contributors to best continue developing the technology.

## **Open source in the UK**

The adoption rates of open source have been on a meteoric rise in recent years. According to Aiven's research, 54% of UK businesses are widely using open source, with 26% utilising it as a cornerstone of their IT infrastructure. These adoption figures do however vary from sector to sector. Data heavy industries are prioritising the use of open source, 37% in the financial services sector currently heavily rely on it, whereas only one in eight public sector organisations are making use of the technology.

Although many of these organisations choose to use open source due to its non-proprietary nature and ease of access, there are broader factors contributing to the increase in usage. The primary one is the growth of public cloud. According to

Statista (<https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1202942/public-cloud-revenue-united-kingdom#:~:text=United%20Kingdom%3A%20public%20cloud%20revenue%202017%2D2025&text=In%20the%20United%20Kingdom%2C%20the,billion%20U.S.%20dollars%20by%202025.>)

, the UK public cloud market generated approximately \$12.3 billion of revenue in 2020, set to increase to \$23.8 billion by 2025. The use of technologies that integrate well with public cloud, like open source, will continue to increase, capitalising on its success.

Furthermore, the onset of the pandemic has brought about a greater requirement from businesses for improved agility. The volatility of the last two years, from adapting to working at home requirements, to meeting fluctuating customer demands, means businesses now more than ever

want to embark on quick and efficient digital transformations. Access to the ready-made infrastructure and code, that open source affords, is proving to be one of the most effective ways for businesses to do just that.

Confidence in the security of open source has strengthened in recent years. Historically, a greater degree of contributors – and therefore end points that could potentially result in more vulnerabilities – left many sceptical over open source’s security measures. However, these concerns have been alleviated by projects such as the Open Source Security Foundation (<https://openssf.org/>), where tech leaders like IBM, GitHub and Google have implemented industry-wide security standards, boosting confidence in the open source’s resilience.

Alongside the business cases, using open source software is heavily driven by developers. According to Aiven’s research (<https://aiven.io/press/research-the-future-is-open-source-over-90-of-developers-believe-that-open>), 69% of developers cited transparency of code as a benefit, with 52.5% acknowledging reduced vendor lock-in and building their features as key aspects of the open source offering. In total, 90% of developers believed open source would be part of the future of their organisations.

## **The need for open source support**

Open source by its very nature is a free resource, available to use for anyone that requires it. This non-proprietary approach allows for continuous development and is a foundation of what makes open source software such an attractive prospect. However, it does come with a degree of responsibility to give back to open source contributors. For open source in the UK to reach its full potential, open source needs to receive support from all that use it. Its crucial that the community works together to grow

and improve repositories. Fixing bugs and innovating for the future, together.

There have been many news stories of open source developers being overworked due to the demands of corporations who utilise their open source programmes, offering no support in return. A lack of support does have consequences, most notably of which was the Log4J Volunteer dependency, leading to widespread cybersecurity vulnerabilities. Moreover, such exploitation is prompting strong pushback from developers. The Apache PLC4X creator recently vowed to end his free programmes unless he received financial support.

### **Giving back to the open source community**

The wider industry is waking up to the requirement to give back to open source.

Research (<https://openuk.uk/press-releases-posts/89-of-uk-organisations-run-open-source-according-to-openuk-survey/>)

from Open UK found that 53% of non-tech companies contribute back to open source projects, compared to 65% of organisations generally. While a good start, there is clearly more that needs to be done. Indeed, if the adoption of open source in the UK is to continue at a sustainable rate, adequate support, either financial or otherwise, needs to be given to prevent developer burnout and open source projects ceasing to exist.

There are a variety of ways for companies to give back to open source outside of purely financial support. At a recent White House meeting to discuss the Log4J vulnerability, Google proposed an open source maintenance marketplace, where companies who use open source programmes volunteer the time of their employees to assist with open source maintenance work, thereby reducing the workloads on

developers.

The recent rise in the number of open source programme offices (OSPOs) is another example of how companies can enable the sustained growth of open source. By dedicating entire teams who contribute to open source for the sake of contributing to open source, and providing them with the resources required, organisations can help support the maintenance and development of open source projects.

Open source is proving to be of great value throughout the UK, enabling digital transformations and aiding developers. For this great work to continue, open source needs to receive the support it deserves.

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## About the Author

Heikki Nousiainen is Chief Technology Officer and one of the founders of Aiven (<https://aiven.io/>), a next-generation managed cloud services company offering the best Open Source data technologies to empower businesses around the world and make developers' lives better. Having raised \$210M at a \$2B valuation and scaled Aiven on three continents with headquarters in Helsinki and hubs in Berlin, Boston, Paris, Toronto, Sydney and Singapore, Nousiainen has a vast knowledge of technology, open source and licenses, IoT and more. He previously worked as a software architect, information security specialist and software engineer for computer software and IT companies, especially driving cloud adoption.

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