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New UK government should embrace open source, says industry non-profit

News By [Emma Woollacott](#) published yesterday

Open source ideals could help drive digital uptake in the sluggish public sector, according to OpenUK



(Image credit: Getty Images)

The UK government should make better use of [open source](#) technologies in the [public sector](#) and adopt a more open approach to [AI](#) development, according to OpenUK.

The non-profit group, which represents the country's open source community, made the call to action just hours before polls closed ahead of the 2024 general election last week in its latest manifesto launch.

A key talking point in the new manifesto centers around fostering closer ties between the open source ecosystem and government, which the group has been keen to push in recent years.

Open source could, the organization says, supercharge the UK economy and unlock marked benefits for public sector bodies.

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"The Open Manifesto is a rallying cry to develop skills that will enable jobs in our left-behind rural communities. It's also a call to seize our late-mover advantage in the public sector, to build the next generation of open source skills and management across the UK public sector," said Amanda Brock, CEO of OpenUK.

"Only by doing this will the digital infrastructure we all rely on today be allowed to flourish. This will both revolutionize the UK's public services and bolster our already strong homegrown community."

Based on data mined from [GitHub](#) on a quarterly basis, OpenUK said that with 3.6 million GitHub account holders - 5% of the UK's population - the UK has the highest per capita number of any country in the world.

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But while the UK is still number one in Europe in open source, France is now the fastest adopter nation thanks to Macron's pro-open source approach. As such, the new government must look to support its open source community to ensure the UK's digital economy doesn't lose its position of strength.

Leaders and founders frequently leave to work and build businesses in the US, the report warned, while Brexit, delays in policy, and lack of understanding have left the UK trailing behind.

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Driving open source in the public sector

In particular, the UK public sector must use its late-mover advantage to structure its curation - the good practices in management - of open source, and funding should be increased.

Mike Bracken, founder of Public Digital, said public sector technology investment approaches have focused on closed technology supply chains for too long, adding that this "has to stop immediately" to deliver benefits for workers, reduce costs, and drive productivity.

"The UK has a solid body of open source in operation and a talented, committed set of professionals curating it," he said. "What is lacking is open governance, with a central standards body capable of driving adoption and control across the public estate."

In terms of AI, the manifesto calls for greater openness to more effectively manage risk. The government should utilize open source in [AI safety](#) and management tooling, building on work by the [UK AI Safety Institute](#).

"Open source software is typically safer and more secure, as well as more compute efficient to operate, due to all the ongoing feedback, scrutiny, and development from the community," the report said. "This is a big deal because safety is one of the most important issues in AI."

Open source could have a friend in Labour

With the Labour Party securing a landslide victory in the general election, the open source community could have a friend in the new government.

The Labour Party specifically highlighted engagement with the open source ecosystem as a key focus as part of its broader technology industry strategy earlier this year.

Speaking at *State of Open Con 2024* in February this year, former shadow minister for science and innovation Chi Onwurah [told attendees the party is a strong supporter of the open source industry](#).

Onwurah said boosting support for the ecosystem represented an "opportunity to democratize technology". Core to Labour's mission with open source would be engendering a sense of empowerment across the UK tech workforce, Onwurah said at the time.

Onwurah suggested open source values and practices could help provide a greater level of access to the skills and materials needed to thrive in software development, particularly in rural areas.



Emma Woollacott



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