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Briefing on Canada's New Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation

Canada has recently established a new cabinet position: **Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation**. This unprecedented role signals a heightened focus on AI governance and digital transformation at the highest level of the Canadian government. Below, we outline the official responsibilities, placement, priorities, and initiatives of this new ministry, and then compare it to similar or equivalent roles in the **United Kingdom** and **Portugal**, highlighting key similarities and differences in title, scope, institutional positioning, responsibilities, and recent initiatives.

Canada's New Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation

Creation and Context: In May 2025, Prime Minister **Mark Carney** (Canada's head of government) appointed **Evan Solomon** – a former journalist and newly elected Member of Parliament – as Canada's first-ever Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation [1] [2]. This move carved out a **dedicated ministry** solely focused on artificial intelligence (AI) and digital innovation, whereas previously AI fell under broader portfolios like industry or innovation [3]. The creation of this ministry reflects Canada's commitment to make AI a cornerstone of its economic and technological future [2] and to bolster national leadership in AI development and regulation [4].

Organizational Placement: The Minister of AI and Digital Innovation is a full **cabinet-level** position in the federal government, heading a new ministry. This ministry stands alongside traditional departments, rather than being a sub-unit of an existing one, underscoring the strategic importance of AI. Prime Minister Carney's decision to create a stand-alone AI ministry integrates AI governance into the highest levels of government [5]. (Previously, AI policy was handled under the Innovation, Science and Industry or similar economic portfolios; the new ministry consolidates those responsibilities under one roof [3].) The Minister likely works closely with related departments (e.g. Industry, Innovation, Privacy) given the cross-cutting nature of digital innovation.

Official Responsibilities: Minister Evan Solomon's **mandate** covers a range of AI and digital innovation policy areas. According to initial outlines of his role, he will oversee:

- **AI Policy Development and Regulation:** Formulating national AI policies, including potential regulations for high-impact AI systems (e.g. setting rules for advanced AI applications) [6]. A key goal is to ensure Canada has a framework to govern AI technologies responsibly.
- **Promoting AI Investment and Innovation:** Driving investments in AI research, skills training, adoption, and commercialization to boost Canada's tech sector and economy [6]. This includes supporting AI startups, funding AI talent development, and integrating AI in traditional industries.
- **Balancing Innovation with Privacy & Security:** Ensuring that AI deployment in Canada is **responsible and ethical**, by balancing rapid innovation with privacy protection, data security, and public trust [6]. Solomon is expected to work on guidelines or standards for ethical AI (aligned with Canadian values such as transparency and equity [7] [8]).

- **Digital Innovation Agenda:** While centered on AI, the portfolio also encompasses broader **digital innovation** initiatives. This may involve supporting digital transformation projects and possibly oversight of digital infrastructure or regional innovation agencies. Notably, Solomon was also tasked with overseeing the **Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario**, indicating a regional innovation support aspect to his role [9].

These responsibilities make Solomon the point person for both **AI governance** (policies, ethics, regulation) and **digital innovation promotion** (economic development through tech).

Key Priorities and Initiatives: With the ministry's formation, several priorities and policy initiatives have been highlighted:

- **Enacting AI Legislation:** A major policy on the horizon is the proposed **Artificial Intelligence and Data Act (AIDA)** – a comprehensive federal bill outlining a national AI governance framework [10]. AIDA (part of Bill C-27) has been in development to introduce rules for high-impact AI systems and to promote trustworthy AI. Solomon's appointment is expected to revive momentum for passing and implementing AIDA, which has not yet become law [10]. This indicates the new minister will push forward a legal/regulatory structure for AI in Canada.

- **National AI Strategy and Investments:** Canada was an early leader in AI research (e.g. the Pan-Canadian AI Strategy launched in 2017) and hosts institutes like **CIFAR** and the **Vector Institute** [8]. The new ministry will build on this foundation by expanding support for AI innovation. For example, increased funding for AI hubs, incentives for AI startups, and public-private partnerships in AI are likely under Solomon's remit [11] [12]. The aim is to better capitalize on Canada's AI R&D excellence and keep home-grown AI talent and IP in country (addressing concerns that Canada has lagged in commercializing its AI innovations [13]).

- **Ethical AI and Alignment with Global Norms:** The ministry is prioritizing the **ethical and responsible use of AI**, ensuring AI systems align with Canadian rights and freedoms. Officials have noted the possibility of **aligning Canada's AI regulations with European-style tech governance** [14]. Given Prime Minister Carney's ties to the UK/EU, Canada may look to frameworks like the EU's **Digital Markets Act** and draft **AI Act** as models for balancing innovation with accountability [14]. In other words, Canada might pursue a middle path between the EU's stringent regulation and a more laissez-faire approach, to foster innovation while protecting the public.

- **Digital Government and Services:** Although the focus is AI, "Digital Innovation" in the title suggests a role in modernizing digital services and government use of technology. We can expect initiatives to promote digital government transformation, perhaps in coordination with the existing Minister of Digital Government (if that portfolio persists) or integrated under this ministry. Early announcements hint at using AI to improve federal services and exploring digital identity solutions, which parallels efforts in other countries (this aligns with the comparative roles discussed below).

In summary, Canada's new Minister of AI and Digital Innovation occupies a **central, cross-cutting role**: championing AI-driven economic growth, crafting regulations for AI and data, and steering the nation's digital innovation strategy – all at the cabinet table. This groundbreaking portfolio "signals to the world how serious [Canada's] government is about AI," as industry leaders have noted [15].

United Kingdom: Equivalent Role in AI and Digital Innovation

The United Kingdom does **not** have an exact counterpart titled "Minister of AI and Digital Innovation," but it has assigned similar domains to a dedicated ministerial role within its government structure. In the UK, responsibilities for AI and digital technology are handled by a **junior minister** rather than a separate full ministry.

Title and Institutional Position: In 2023 the UK government (under PM Rishi Sunak) created the position of **Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Artificial Intelligence** – a role often informally called the "AI Minister." This post was first held by **Jonathan Berry, 5th Viscount Camrose**, who was appointed in March 2023 [16]. The role was situated within the **Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)** – the government department overseeing tech, science, and digital matters [17]. Being a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State means it is a **junior ministerial position** (not in the Cabinet). Notably, Viscount Camrose sat in the House of Lords, so his remit included representing AI policy in the Lords [18].

In 2024, after a change in government, the remit was adjusted and the title became **Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for AI and Digital Government** (now held by **Feryal Clark** as of July 2024) [16]. This reflects continuity in focusing on AI, with an added emphasis on digital public services under a new administration. The position remains under DSIT and is a sub-Cabinet role. In summary, the UK's "AI minister" is **embedded within an existing ministry (DSIT)** rather than heading a standalone department, and typically is one of several tech-focused ministers under the Secretary of State for Science and Technology.

Scope and Responsibilities: Despite being a junior role, the UK's minister for AI and digital matters has a broad portfolio that covers both **AI policy** and **digital government initiatives**. According to the official government description, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for AI and Digital Government is responsible for:

- **AI Policy and Governance:** Overseeing the UK's AI strategy and its implementation [19]. This includes setting direction on **AI regulation**, ethics, and opportunities. The minister's remit explicitly lists *"AI transparency and ethics," "AI regulation," "AI Safety Institute," and "AI opportunities"* as key policy areas [20]. In practice, this means the minister works on guidelines for safe AI development, frameworks for AI governance (in lieu of an AI-specific law, the UK has issued principles-based guidance), and promoting beneficial AI uses in the economy.

- **AI Safety and Compute Infrastructure:** A notable focus in the UK is on **AI safety** research and the infrastructure needed for advanced AI. The minister is charged with establishing an **AI Safety Institute** [20] – a new body to research AI risks and advise on guardrails for advanced AI (this initiative came after the UK hosted a global AI Safety Summit, discussed below). Additionally, the **"Large Scale Compute Review"** is in the portfolio [21], referring to efforts to upgrade the UK's high-performance computing capacity for AI. This stems from the UK's recognition that cutting-edge AI requires powerful compute resources; a national review was conducted to plan investments in supercomputing for AI and science.

- **Cybersecurity and Digital Government:** The UK minister's brief spans beyond AI into general digital transformation of government. **Cybersecurity policy** is one responsibility [22], ensuring government and critical sectors are protected against cyber threats (often related to tech systems). The minister also oversees *"Digital public services"* and the **"Digital Centre of Government"** [23] – essentially, programs to digitize the delivery of government services and

coordinate digital innovation across government agencies. For example, this includes digital identity policy (creating secure digital IDs for citizens) [23] and improving online government platforms. Under Feryal Clark, there's an emphasis on **modernizing public services with AI and data**, as reflected in interviews where she discusses using AI to transform public service delivery and increase trust in digital government systems.

- **Intellectual Property (IP) and Data:** Under Viscount Camrose, the role also encompassed **Intellectual Property Office oversight** and copyright issues [24], because AI innovation intersects with IP (e.g. copyright and patents for AI technologies). The combination of "AI and Intellectual Property" in the early title recognized that things like copyright law and patents need adaptation in the age of AI. In the updated remit, IP remains listed (the IPO and Copyright Tribunal are in the portfolio) [24]. This means the UK's AI minister also handles policies on data use and IP rights pertinent to AI (such as text-and-data mining exceptions, AI-generated content issues, etc.).

Overall, the UK's equivalent to an AI and digital innovation minister is a **multifaceted role covering AI governance, promotion of AI opportunities, and the digitalization of government services**, all within the framework of the DSIT. It is inherently cross-disciplinary: the same minister deals with AI tech policy and the practical application of digital tech in government operations.

Recent and Notable Initiatives in the UK: In the past couple of years, the UK government has launched several initiatives under the purview of this ministerial portfolio:

- **AI Safety Summit and AI Governance:** In November 2023, the UK hosted a high-profile **Global AI Safety Summit** at Bletchley Park, convening governments, academia, and industry to discuss frontier AI risks (like those from advanced general AI models). This summit, championed by PM Sunak with support from the AI minister, underscored the UK's desire to be a leader in shaping **international AI safety norms**. One outcome was the plan for a U.K. **AI Safety Institute** – now part of the minister's responsibilities – to research AI risks like bias, misuses, or even long-term AI safety issues [20].

- **"Pro-Innovation" AI Regulation Approach:** Instead of immediately passing an AI-specific law, the UK has opted for a sector-by-sector, principles-based approach to AI regulation. In March 2023 it published a White Paper outlining **guiding principles for AI regulation** (like safety, transparency, fairness, accountability) to be implemented by existing regulators in different sectors [14]. The AI minister has been involved in promoting this *"light-touch" regulatory framework* – often contrasted with the EU's prescriptive AI Act – to ensure the UK remains an attractive place for AI development. This approach is under ongoing consultation and review.

- **Investments in AI and Prizes:** The UK is backing AI innovation through funding programs. It established an **"AI Foundation Model Taskforce"** with an initial £100 million to drive safe development of large AI models (such as generative AI), reporting directly to the Prime Minister and advised by experts – an initiative likely coordinated with the AI minister's office. The UK government also announced the **Manchester Prize** – a £1 million competition to reward breakthroughs in AI, aimed at raising the profile of UK AI pioneers [25]. In 2024, finalists for this prize were unveiled, spotlighting cutting-edge British AI projects. These efforts signal the UK's intent to boost homegrown AI talent and companies.

- **Digital Government Reforms:** On the digital government side, recent initiatives include the launch of a new **"Government AI Playbook"** to guide departments in deploying AI ethically in

public services [26], and an **AI Bootcamp for civil servants** to build AI skills in the public sector [27]. The minister has highlighted projects like developing generative AI chatbots for citizen services [27] and implementing digital identity verification to streamline interactions with government. Moreover, the responsibility for the **Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO)** was moved under DSIT, meaning the AI and Digital Government minister now helps oversee government-wide IT and data strategy [28]. In practice, this means closer integration between AI policy and actual digital service delivery improvements.

In summary, the **UK's equivalent role** to Canada's new minister is the **Minister for AI and Digital Government**, a junior minister who combines oversight of AI technologies with driving digital transformation of government. The scope in the UK is broad (spanning AI, cybersecurity, data, and digital services) but the role's **institutional weight is lower** (not a standalone ministry). The UK approach so far emphasizes integrating AI oversight into an existing tech ministry and focusing on frameworks and guidance rather than creating a separate AI department or sweeping new legislation.

Portugal: Equivalent Role in AI and Digital Innovation

Government Structure for Digital and AI: Portugal does not have a direct analog titled "Minister of AI," but it addresses artificial intelligence and digital innovation through its broader **digital transformation and innovation governance framework**. In Portugal, responsibilities for digital affairs and AI are distributed across a couple of roles: - A **senior ministerial portfolio** that has combined the economy and digital transition, and - A **Secretary of State** dedicated to digital transformation of government and society.

In recent governments under Prime Minister António Costa (2015–2023), **digital transition** was considered a strategic priority, and institutions were set up to coordinate it. Notably, the **XXII Governo (22nd Government, 2019–2022)** created the position of **Minister of State for the Economy and Digital Transition** (held by Pedro Siza Vieira). This was a cabinet-level post merging economic development with the digital agenda. The mission of that ministry explicitly included drafting and implementing policies for **digital transition** alongside economic growth and innovation [29]. In fact, the minister was tasked to *"follow the implementation of the inter-ministry measures to carry out the Government's program on digital transition,"* coordinating with other ministers (Finance, Public Administration, Science & Technology, Education, etc.) [30]. This underscores that Portugal treated **digital transformation as a cross-cutting program**, led by a top economic minister in collaboration with multiple ministries.

To support this effort, Portugal also **created a dedicated Secretariat of State** for digital affairs. In the **XXIII Governo (2022–2024)**, the role of **Secretary of State for Digitalization and Administrative Modernization** was established, reporting to the Prime Minister's office (Presidency of the Council of Ministers). **Mário Campolargo** served in this position from March 30, 2022 to April 2, 2024. The creation of this Secretary of State role was specifically to coordinate the country's digital transformation initiatives [31]. In Portuguese, he was *"Secretário de Estado da Digitalização e da Modernização Administrativa"*, indicating his focus on **digitalizing public administration** and broader digital transition programs. This role is the closest equivalent to an "AI/Digital Innovation minister" in Portugal, albeit at a sub-ministerial level (similar to a deputy minister or undersecretary).

Scope and Responsibilities: The Portuguese approach to AI and digital innovation can be seen as twofold – **digital transformation of government/economy**, and **promotion of AI through national strategies** – executed by the combination of the Economy Ministry and the Secretary of State:

- **Digital Transition of Society and Government:** The Secretary of State for Digitalization was responsible for implementing the **Digital Transition Action Plan** (*Plano de Ação para a Transição Digital*) launched in 2020 [31]. This comprehensive plan had three main pillars [32]: (1) **Digital capacitation of people** – improving digital skills, education, and inclusion for citizens; (2) **Digital transformation of business** – supporting SMEs in adopting digital technologies, fostering digital innovation and tech startups, and transferring scientific research to the economy; and (3) **Digitalization of public administration** – modernizing government services, making public administration more agile and connected, including nationwide e-government services. The Secretary of State coordinated these efforts across ministries and monitored their execution. Essentially, this role drives the **"digital innovation" agenda in public services and the economy** – analogous to a "digital minister," though at a junior rank.

- **Administrative Modernization:** Alongside digitalization, the portfolio included **administrative modernization** – simplifying and streamlining government processes using technology. This includes deploying online citizen portals, reducing bureaucracy via digital means, and introducing tools like digital identity for accessing services. (Portugal has been a leader in some e-government indicators, and this role capitalized on that momentum to further integrate AI and digital tools in administration.)

- **AI Strategy and Innovation Policy:** While no single official is titled "AI Minister," Portugal addresses AI through national strategies led by ministries such as Science & Technology, Economy, and the Digitalization Secretary. The flagship policy is **AI Portugal 2030**, a national AI strategy aligned with the European Union's digital decade goals. AI Portugal 2030 (part of the broader **INCoDe.2030 program** for digital competencies) aims to **"foster AI development and integration across various sectors"** and build a **"knowledge-intensive labor market"** [33]. It sets goals for AI adoption in industries, encourages research and innovation in AI, and emphasizes "responsible AI" principles. The implementation of this strategy is a collaborative effort: the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education oversees AI research funding; the Ministry of Economy (and Digital Transition) works on business adoption and innovation incentives; and the Secretary of State for Digitalization helps incorporate AI into public services. In essence, **Portugal's AI governance is handled through strategic plans rather than a dedicated AI minister** – the closest champion being the digitalization office and relevant ministers.

- **Data and Governance:** Portugal also works within EU frameworks on data governance (e.g., complying with GDPR for data privacy, participating in EU AI regulatory discussions). The Secretary of State likely liaised with European bodies on digital policy and ensured Portugal's national strategies (like its **National Digital Strategy 2030**) were in sync with EU initiatives.

Recent Initiatives in Portugal: A number of significant initiatives illustrate Portugal's approach to AI and digital innovation:

- **National Digital Strategy 2030:** In late 2024, Portugal's government published the **"Estratégia Digital 2030"**, setting a roadmap for the digital transformation of the country towards 2030. This strategy earmarked substantial funding (approximately **€355 million**) to achieve its goals, and one headline target was to dramatically raise AI adoption in businesses (e.g. from only ~8% of companies using AI as of early 2020s to 75% by 2030) [34]. It also proposed the creation of a new

Digital Agency to coordinate initiatives. This strategy, championed by the Ministry of Economy and the Secretary of State for Digitalization, underscores Portugal's commitment to boosting digital competitiveness and AI usage.

- **AI Portugal 2030 and Innovation Programs:** The **AI Portugal 2030** strategy led to various programs: support for **Digital Innovation Hubs** (centers that help companies and public entities pilot AI and other technologies), **innovation vouchers** for SMEs to adopt AI solutions, and funding for **public sector AI projects** [33] [35]. An example in the public sector is the use of AI in improving healthcare services or justice system processes, which have been trialed under the innovation agenda. The government also signaled it may develop oversight for **high-risk AI systems**, in line with EU's forthcoming AI Act [36] [37].

- **Accelerat.ai Consortium:** Portugal leveraged EU Recovery and Resilience Facility funds to invest in digital transformation projects. A prominent example is **Accelerat.ai**, a government-backed consortium launched in 2022 with **€48 million** in funding to **accelerate AI adoption in Portugal's public and private sectors** [38] [39]. This project, part of the EU's Digital Compass initiative, established a **Center of Excellence for AI** in Portugal [40]. It brings together tech companies (like Defined.ai, Talkdesk, Microsoft, etc.), universities, and government to develop AI solutions — for instance, improving Portuguese-language AI models so that local businesses and agencies can use AI tools tailored to European Portuguese [41]. The involvement of the Minister of Economy and Prime Minister in announcing Accelerat.ai shows high-level political support for AI innovation, even absent a singular AI minister [42].

- **Digital Governance and Services:** Portugal has made strides in e-governance, many of which fall under the Secretary of State's purview. For example, the country expanded its **"Citizen Card" digital identity and authentication system**, introduced a **digital signature for citizens** (the news in May 2025 of free digital newspaper subscriptions for 15-18 year-olds tied to a youth digital program [43] indicates ongoing digital inclusion efforts), and rolled out numerous online public services through the ePortugal portal. These initiatives often incorporate AI-driven features – such as chatbots for citizen inquiries or machine learning to route service requests – reflecting how AI is being embedded in digital government reforms.

In summary, **Portugal's approach** relies on integrating AI and digital innovation goals into broader **digital transition strategies**. The **closest role to an "AI and Digital Innovation Minister"** would be the **Secretary of State for Digitalization and Administrative Modernization**, who coordinates national digital policy implementation [31]. However, strategic leadership also comes from higher-level ministers (Economy, Science/Technology) and the Prime Minister's office. The key difference is that Portugal's structure emphasizes **multiministry collaboration and plans** over a single high-profile AI minister – though the end goals (fostering AI adoption, ensuring ethical use, and modernizing services) are comparable to those in Canada and the UK.

Comparative Analysis: Canada vs. UK vs. Portugal

All three countries recognize the critical importance of AI and digital innovation in government, but they have structured roles for these domains **differently**. Below is a comparison across several dimensions:

Title and Scope of the Role

- **Canada:** *Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation* – a **Cabinet minister** exclusively focused on AI policy and digital innovation nation-wide [2]. This is a standalone portfolio created

in 2025, indicating Canada's intent to treat AI/digital as a top-tier policy area. The scope explicitly covers both **artificial intelligence** and **digital innovation**, implying oversight of AI technologies across sectors as well as general digital transformation initiatives. It is the most specialized title among the three countries (solely dedicated to AI/digital).

- **United Kingdom:** *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for AI and Digital Government* – a **junior ministerial role** within a larger department (DSIT) [17]. The title signals a dual focus: **AI** and **digital government** (i.e., improving government services through digital means). Earlier, the role was *Minister for AI and Intellectual Property*, highlighting IP alongside AI [16]. The scope in practice spans AI policy and parts of the digitalization agenda, but as an **"Under-Secretary"** it is narrower in rank and influence than Canada's full minister. It supports the Secretary of State for Science and Tech.
- **Portugal:** No single minister has "AI" in the title. The closest is the *Secretary of State for Digitalization and Administrative Modernization*. This is a **sub-ministerial post** focused on **digital transition** (which includes aspects of digital innovation and indirectly AI in government). At the Cabinet level, the title *"Minister of Economy and Digital Transition"* (2019–2022) encompassed the digital scope, but not AI specifically by name [29]. In essence, Portugal's approach uses broader titles (Digital Transition, Science & Technology, etc.), and **AI is covered under those broader scopes** (e.g., national AI strategy under Science/Tech, digital innovation under Economy/Digital Transition). The absence of "AI" in an official title reflects that **Portugal integrates AI into existing portfolios** rather than separating it out.

Similarity/Difference: Canada's and the UK's roles explicitly name **Artificial Intelligence**, marking it as a distinct area of responsibility, whereas Portugal's strategy is to embed AI goals within the wider **digital transformation** agenda. Canada's title also includes "Digital Innovation," somewhat analogous to the UK's "Digital Government" remit and Portugal's "Digital Transition" theme – all indicating a focus beyond just AI to the broader digital ecosystem.

Institutional Positioning within Government

- **Canada:** The Minister of AI and Digital Innovation leads a **new ministry at the Cabinet level**. This means the minister sits at the cabinet table as an equal to other ministers (e.g., Finance, Health), reports directly to the Prime Minister, and presumably has their own departmental apparatus [3]. This high rank facilitates cross-department coordination on AI issues. The ministry's creation was part of a cabinet shake-up signaling AI is a national priority [44]. In short, institutionally it has strong clout and visibility.
- **United Kingdom:** The AI minister is a **Parliamentary Under-Secretary**, which is the lowest rung of minister (beneath Secretaries of State and Ministers of State). This role is housed within the **Department for Science, Innovation and Technology** [17]. Practically, the position answers to the Secretary of State for DSIT. It often serves to represent AI/digital policy in the House of Lords (as was the case with Viscount Camrose) [18] and to handle specific briefs delegated by the senior minister. Thus, institutionally, the UK's AI lead has a more limited direct authority – it relies on the DSIT's mandate and the Prime Minister's support for major initiatives. However, by embedding AI in DSIT, the UK ensures integration with science, research, and innovation policies (rather than siloing AI in a separate ministry).
- **Portugal:** The Secretary of State for Digitalization is part of the **Presidency of the Council of Ministers** (the Prime Minister's orbit) and works under a coordinating minister (often the Minister of the Presidency or a similar role). This indicates a **central coordination role** but not standalone authority. Additionally, key decisions on AI/digital are made at the cabinet level by ministers of Economy, Science, etc. Institutionally, Portugal opted for a **committee or inter-ministerial model**: the digital transition program is overseen by multiple ministers collectively

[30], with the Secretary of State ensuring day-to-day coordination. This means Portugal's structure is more diffused – no single AI "czar," but a network of officials and ministries.

Similarity/Difference: Canada's approach centralizes authority in a *new cabinet ministry*, which is a significant structural commitment. The UK and Portugal incorporate AI/digital roles within existing structures (DSIT and the PM's office, respectively). The **UK and Portugal roles are junior and embedded**, relying on higher ministers, whereas Canada's is a top-level position. All three approaches try to facilitate cross-department collaboration (since AI/digital impacts many sectors), but Canada does so by empowerment of one leader, the UK by giving a dedicated brief to a junior minister, and Portugal by strategic coordination among several leaders.

Key Responsibilities and Policy Domains

- **Canada:** The Canadian minister's core responsibilities are **AI-centric**, with additional digital innovation aspects. Key domains include developing **AI regulations and policies** (e.g. setting rules for AI use in industry, ethics guidelines) [6], advancing **AI research and commercialization** (funding AI labs, training programs, startup support) [6], and safeguarding **data privacy and security in AI deployments** [45]. The inclusion of "Digital Innovation" means the minister also looks at broader tech innovation trends (possibly fintech, digital skills development, etc.) beyond AI proper. In effect, the Canadian ministry straddles **innovation policy** and **digital governance** with AI as the focal point. It also has an economic development angle (as shown by oversight of a regional development agency) [9], indicating responsibility for leveraging AI to drive economic growth in regions.
- **United Kingdom:** The UK's AI/Digital Government minister handles a mix of **technology governance and public sector digitalization**. On AI, the responsibilities cover **AI ethics, safety, and regulatory strategy** [20] – for instance, shaping the UK's approach to AI risk (via the AI Safety Institute) and ensuring AI deployments align with ethical norms. The role also promotes **AI opportunities**, meaning encouraging adoption of AI in industries and skilling initiatives [20]. Simultaneously, a large portion of the brief is dedicated to **digital government**: improving online public services, implementing digital identity frameworks, and enhancing cybersecurity across government systems [46]. The minister thus works on both outward-facing AI policy and inward-focused governmental IT reforms. Furthermore, with **Intellectual Property Office** in the portfolio [24], the UK role uniquely spans legal issues of innovation (copyright, patents) which neither Canada's nor Portugal's explicitly do in their mandates. In summary, the UK minister's domains are **AI governance**, **digital public service delivery**, **cybersecurity**, and **IP management** – reflecting an integrated tech governance approach.
- **Portugal:** The Portuguese Secretary of State's responsibilities revolve around executing the **Digital Transition Action Plan**, which encompasses: **digital skills training**, **business digital innovation**, and **e-government modernization** [32]. These domains include use of AI as a tool – e.g., promoting AI in small businesses or automating public services with AI – but framed under general digitalization. Additionally, through programs like **AI Portugal 2030**, the government focuses on **AI R&D and innovation**: facilitating collaborations between universities and companies on AI, setting up **digital innovation hubs** for AI, and ensuring "responsible AI" principles in line with EU guidelines [33]. Another domain is **data governance and connectivity** (Portugal works on expanding broadband, 5G, etc., which are prerequisites for digital innovation). Unlike Canada/UK, **regulation of AI** in Portugal is largely deferred to EU level (EU AI Act) or addressed via soft measures (ethical charters, participation in EU pilot projects), rather than national AI-specific legislation. Therefore, Portugal's officials concentrate on **adoption and integration of digital tech** (including AI) rather than crafting standalone AI regulations. The responsibilities are broad (covering education, economy, and administration), reflecting Portugal's holistic view of digital transition.

Similarity/Difference: All three countries' roles involve balancing **innovation promotion** with **governance/ethical oversight** of AI: - Canada leans towards **policy development and industry support** specifically for AI. - UK balances AI policy with the practical task of **digitizing government services**, plus handling related areas like cybersecurity and IP. - Portugal emphasizes **digital capacity-building and implementing technology across society**, with AI being one component of that wider mandate.

Canada and the UK both explicitly address **AI regulation and ethics** at the national level (Canada through forthcoming AIDA, UK through its AI framework and institute) [10] [20]. Portugal, being in the EU, aligns with EU's regulatory regime for AI and thus its local efforts focus on **AI adoption and innovation ecosystems**. Another difference is that Canada and the UK have a person specifically accountable for AI policy (hence easier to coordinate AI initiatives), whereas in Portugal, accountability is spread (the Science & Tech Minister might handle research funding for AI, the Economy Minister handles digital business incentives, etc., with the digital state secretary coordinating).

Notable Initiatives and Policy Actions

- **Canada:** The landmark initiative associated with the new ministry is the development of the **Artificial Intelligence and Data Act (AIDA)**, a proposed law to ensure AI systems are deployed safely and transparently in Canada [10]. Pushing AIDA towards enactment will be a top agenda item for the minister. Additionally, Canada's move hints at adopting **European-style tech regulation** for issues like online safety, competition in digital markets, and AI oversight [14] – we may see Canada introduce policies akin to the EU's Digital Services or Markets Acts, tailored to AI. On the innovation side, expect expansions to the **Pan-Canadian AI Strategy** with new funding to retain AI talent and attract AI investment to Canada (addressing the "brain drain"/IP leakage concern where foreign companies benefit from Canadian AI research [13]). Another initiative is likely the convening of an **AI Advisory Council** or public consultation process to guide AI regulations (Canadian governments often work closely with expert panels, and this could be revived under the new ministry). In short, **AIDA and allied policies** form the centerpiece of Canada's AI governance push, while investment in the AI ecosystem is the core of its innovation push.

- **United Kingdom:** The UK has recently led high-profile AI initiatives on the world stage. The **Global AI Safety Summit 2023** put the UK at the center of international AI discussions, and follow-up steps (like establishing the **AI Safety Institute** and coordinating research on AI risk) are directly in the UK minister's charge [20]. Domestically, the UK's publication of an AI *white paper* in March 2023 and subsequent consultations is a key policy process – it outlines a *"pro-innovation approach to AI regulation"* that the minister is helping refine and implement. Another notable initiative is the **£1 million Manchester Prize for AI** innovation [25], which is part of a broader strategy to incentivize AI breakthroughs and signal the UK's support for AI talent (the prize finalists were announced in 2024, celebrating UK AI achievements). The **Future Compute Review** results, which recommended a major upgrade to the UK's computing capabilities (including potentially building an exascale supercomputer), are being acted upon, with the government committing funds – this falls under the minister's remit to ensure the UK's AI researchers have the infrastructure needed [21]. On digital government, the launch of a new **Digital Government Strategy** in 2024–2025 is noteworthy: it includes plans for one-login digital access for all government services, use of AI assistants in public agencies, and strengthening cyber defenses – initiatives that Minister Feryal Clark has been publicly promoting. In summary, the UK is combining **international leadership in AI safety** with **domestic reforms to harness AI for economic and government benefits**, under the guidance of its AI/Digital Government minister.

- **Portugal:** Portugal's notable initiatives revolve around national strategies and EU-funded projects. The **AI Portugal 2030** strategy is central – it doesn't just exist on paper; it has led to concrete programs like the creation of **+21 AI laboratories and testbeds** across universities and industries (through the Carnegie Mellon Portugal partnership and others) [33], and the inclusion of AI modules in educational curricula. The **National Digital Transition Action Plan (2020)** produced quick wins such as the "Europass Digital Credentials" implementation and broad digital literacy campaigns (e.g., **Upskill** – a program to retrain workers in digital/AI skills). **Accelerat.ai**, mentioned earlier, is a flagship in public-private partnership: by targeting the Portuguese language in AI, it addresses a niche need (language localization) while boosting the country's tech capacity [41]. Also notable is that in 2021–2022, Portugal's government established the **National Cybersecurity Strategy** which, alongside the digital plan, ensures that as digital systems (and AI) proliferate, security and trust are maintained – the Secretary of State for Digitalization played a role in its rollout. Finally, at the European level, Portugal has been active in **EU AI governance dialogues** and was among the first to pilot the EU's **AI regulatory sandbox** (allowing companies to experiment with AI under regulatory supervision), reflecting its proactive stance. In summary, Portugal's key initiatives are encapsulated in strategic documents (Digital Strategy 2030, AI 2030) and their implementation through funding and partnerships, rather than standalone national legislation or new government bodies for AI.

Summarizing the Differences and Similarities:

- **Centralization vs. Integration:** Canada stands out for **centralizing AI/digital governance in a single high-level ministry**, giving one person broad authority to shape policy and drive innovation. The UK and Portugal have **integrated approaches** – the UK integrates AI oversight into an existing science/tech department and pairs it with digital government duties; Portugal integrates AI goals into a cross-government digital strategy managed by various actors. All aim for coordination, but Canada does it via a dedicated minister, the UK via a dedicated brief within a ministry, and Portugal via strategic coordination without a singular "AI minister."

- **Policy Focus:** Each country's focus reflects its governance style:

- *Canada* emphasizes **national regulation and strategic investment** in AI (e.g., crafting AIDA law, funding AI sector growth) [10] [13].
- *UK* emphasizes **global leadership in AI safety and enabling innovation** through guidelines (e.g., hosting safety summits, setting up institutes, avoiding heavy-handed laws) [20] [14].

- *Portugal* emphasizes **digital capacity and EU-aligned strategy**, using EU funds and frameworks to digitize its economy and government (e.g., achieving targets for AI uptake, rolling out digital public services) [38] [31].

- **Institutional Power:** Canada's minister likely has more direct power to initiate programs or regulations (backed by a ministry budget and staff). The UK minister works through DSIT and must obtain buy-in from senior ministers and Treasury for big projects (though the prime minister's backing of AI gives the role influence). Portugal's Secretary of State must persuade and coordinate across ministries for implementation; major initiatives require collective cabinet decisions, which can be slower but ensure multi-sector involvement.

- **Common Ground:** All three have set up **specialized bodies or strategies**: Canada with its upcoming AI advisory/regulatory framework [10], the UK with its AI Safety Institute and taskforces [20], and Portugal with its AI Center of Excellence and consortium projects [40]. They share goals of fostering **responsible AI**, improving public services via digital tech, and boosting

their digital economies. Each is also grappling with how to regulate AI in a way that protects citizens without stifling innovation – a universal challenge being addressed through their respective roles.

To illustrate the comparison succinctly, the table below summarizes key aspects of each country's approach:

Aspect	**Canada** (Minister of AI & Digital Innovation)	**UK** (Parliamentary Under-Secretary for AI & Digital Govt)	**Portugal** (Secretary of State for Digitalization)
Official Title & Scope	Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation – *Cabinet minister* focused solely on AI policy and digital innovation [2] .	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for AI and Digital Government – *Junior minister* in DSIT, covering AI and digitization of government [17] [20] .	Secretário de Estado da Digitalização e da Modernização Administrativa (Secretary of State for Digitalization & Admin. Modernization) – focuses on nation-wide digital transition; AI included as part of digital initiatives [31] .
Institutional Level	**Cabinet-level department** (new ministry) reporting to PM, indicating high priority and a standalone budget/ staff [3] .	**Sub-Cabinet role** within Science/Tech Department; reports to a senior minister (DSIT Secretary); narrower authority and primarily policy-driven [17] .	**Junior role under PM's office** or a coordinating minister; works across ministries. No separate AI ministry – uses existing structures for implementation [30] .
Key Responsibilities & Domains	- Develop national **AI policies & regulations** (e.g., AI Act/AIDA) [6] . - **Invest in AI innovation** and skills to grow tech sector [6] . - Ensure **ethical, secure AI** deployment (balance innovation with privacy/ security) [45] . - Guide **digital innovation** projects (cross-sector tech adoption, regional innovation support) [9] .	- Oversee **AI ethics, safety, regulation** strategy (incl. setting up AI Safety Institute) [20] . - Promote **AI opportunities** in the economy (innovation funding, AI skills) [20] . - Lead **digital government** reforms (online services, digital identity, data strategy) [46] . - Handle related domains: **cybersecurity** and **Intellectual Property** policy [46] [24] .	- Coordinate **Digital Transition Plan**: digital skills training, SME digitalization, startup innovation [32] . - Drive **e-government modernization** (services online, administrative simplification) [47] . - Support **AI integration** via **AI Portugal 2030** strategy (AI R&D, sector adoption, ethics guidelines) [33] . - Align national efforts with **EU digital/AI policies** (GDPR, upcoming EU AI Act, etc.).

Aspect	**Canada** (Minister of AI & Digital Innovation)	**UK** (Parliamentary Under-Secretary for AI & Digital Govt)	**Portugal** (Secretary of State for Digitalization)
Recent Initiatives	- **Artificial Intelligence and Data Act (AIDA)** – proposed law for AI governance (pending approval) [10] . - New **AI ministry launch** with mandate to align with EU-style tech regulations (inspired by EU Digital Acts) [14] . - Continued investment in **Pan-Canadian AI Strategy** and talent retention [8] .	- **Global AI Safety Summit 2023** and follow-up creation of **AI Safety Institute** [20] . - **AI Regulation White Paper (2023)** outlining pro-innovation principles [14] . - **Manchester Prize** (£1 million) for AI innovation awarded to UK AI pioneers [25] . - Launch of **One Login for Government** and AI chatbots to transform public services (2024 initiative).	- **National Digital Strategy 2030** – €355 million plan to boost AI adoption to 75% of firms and modernize infrastructure [34] . - **Accelerat.ai** consortium (€48 million) establishing an AI Center of Excellence and Portuguese-language AI tools [38] [39] . - Ongoing **INCoDe.2030** programs for digital skills and inclusion, and AI hubs for innovation [33] . - Implementation of EU's **Digital Decade** targets (e.g., nationwide 5G, digital public services) with EU support.

In conclusion, while Canada, the UK, and Portugal all aim to harness artificial intelligence and drive digital innovation, their government structures reflect different philosophies:

- **Canada** has made a bold move with a *dedicated ministry*, giving AI/digital innovation singular prominence and accountability at the highest level [2] . This suggests Canada is gearing up to move quickly on AI policy (e.g., passing new legislation) and to unify efforts that were previously siloed.

- **The UK** uses a more *integrated but lower-tier approach*: a specialist minister works within the science/tech department to coordinate AI strategy and digital government improvements [17] [20] . The advantage is close alignment with innovation and research policy, though it relies on strong Prime Ministerial and Cabinet support to have impact. The UK's approach has produced agile policy tools (like the AI guidance framework) and global leadership in AI safety, even without a standalone ministry.

- **Portugal** relies on *mainstreaming AI into its overall digital transformation agenda*. By empowering a Secretary of State and leveraging national strategies (linked with EU programs), Portugal ensures that AI is not treated in isolation but as part of a broader socio-economic modernization effort [31] [33] . The trade-off is less visibility for AI as a separate issue, but potentially more coherence with education, economic development, and public sector reform.

Each model has its merits: Canada's may provide strong leadership and clear mandate, the UK's fosters integration and may avoid bureaucratic duplication, and Portugal's ensures alignment with wider digital goals and European standards. Going forward, it will be informative to watch how these roles evolve – for instance, whether Canada's new ministry successfully drives innovation and regulatory balance, whether the UK's AI minister gains more clout or if a dedicated AI department emerges, and whether Portugal's next governments continue to embed AI in multi-faceted programs or elevate it to a

standalone priority. What is clear is that all three countries are actively positioning their governments to both **seize the opportunities and manage the challenges of AI** in the digital age, each in a manner suited to their political and administrative context.

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