No 10 acknowledges 'existential' risk of AI for first time

The "existential" risk of artificial intelligence has been acknowledged by No 10 for the first time, after the prime minister met the heads of the world's leading AI research groups to discuss safety and regulation. Rishi Sunak and Chloe Smith, the secretary of state for science, innovation and technology, met the chief executives of Google DeepMind, OpenAI and Anthropic AI on Wednesday evening and discussed how best to moderate the development of the technology to limit the risks of catastrophe. "They discussed safety measures, voluntary actions that labs are considering to manage the risks, and the possible avenues for international collaboration on AI safety and regulation," the participants said in a joint statement. "The lab leaders agreed to work with the UK government to ensure our approach responds to the speed of innovations in this technology both in the UK and around the globe. "The PM and CEOs discussed the risks of the technology, ranging from disinformation and national security, to existential threats … The PM set out how the approach to AI regulation will need to keep pace with the fast-moving advances in this technology." It is the first time Sunak has acknowledged the potential "existential" threat of developing a "superintelligent" AI without appropriate safeguards, a risk that contrasts with the UK government's generally positive approach to AI development. Sunak will meet Sundar Pichai, the Google chief executive, on Friday as he continues to hone the government's approach to regulating the industry. Pichai wrote in the Financial Times this week: "I still believe AI is too important not to regulate, and too important not to regulate well." OpenAI's chief executive, Sam Altman, published a call this week for world leaders to establish an international body similar to the International Atomic Energy Agency, which regulates atomic weapons, in order to limit the speed at which such AI is developed. Altman, who has been touring Europe meeting users and developers of the ChatGPT platform as well as policymakers, told an event in London that, while he did not want the short-term rules to be too restrictive, "if someone does crack the code and build a superintelligence … I'd like to make sure that we treat this at least as seriously as we treat, say, nuclear material". The UK's approach to AI regulation has come under fire from some quarters for its light-touch approach. At a Guardian Live event earlier this week, Stuart Russell, a professor of computer science at University of California at Berkeley, criticised the UK for relying on a mishmash of existing regulators rather than working out how best to regulate the field to ensure everything from labour market effects to existential risk were minimised.