

Press pause on the use of artificial intelligence in public services

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In focusing on a possible existential risk from artificial intelligence in his speech last week (Report, 26 October), Rishi Sunak missed the most troubling effects of AI and digital technologies that people are experiencing today: their tendency to adversely affect some communities more than others, to drive economic inequality and to use vast amounts of energy. We have already seen the use of AI in the NHS resulting in older and poorer people finding it harder to access GP services – and citizens taking to the streets in protest. We cannot continue to treat AI as a tool or problem solver, nor rely on developers – whose vision of the future is being enacted through these technologies – to explain the benefits or recognise the difficulties their technologies present. Instead, we need those even contemplating adopting AI in public services to give a thorough and thoughtful evaluation of these advances, considering not just the costs and benefits of their immediate use, but also the impact they have on democratic institutions, social cohesion and the sustainability of our planet. Dr Melanie Smallman Associate professor, UCL • Have an opinion on anything you've read in the Guardian today? Please email us your letter and it will be considered for publication in our letters section.