

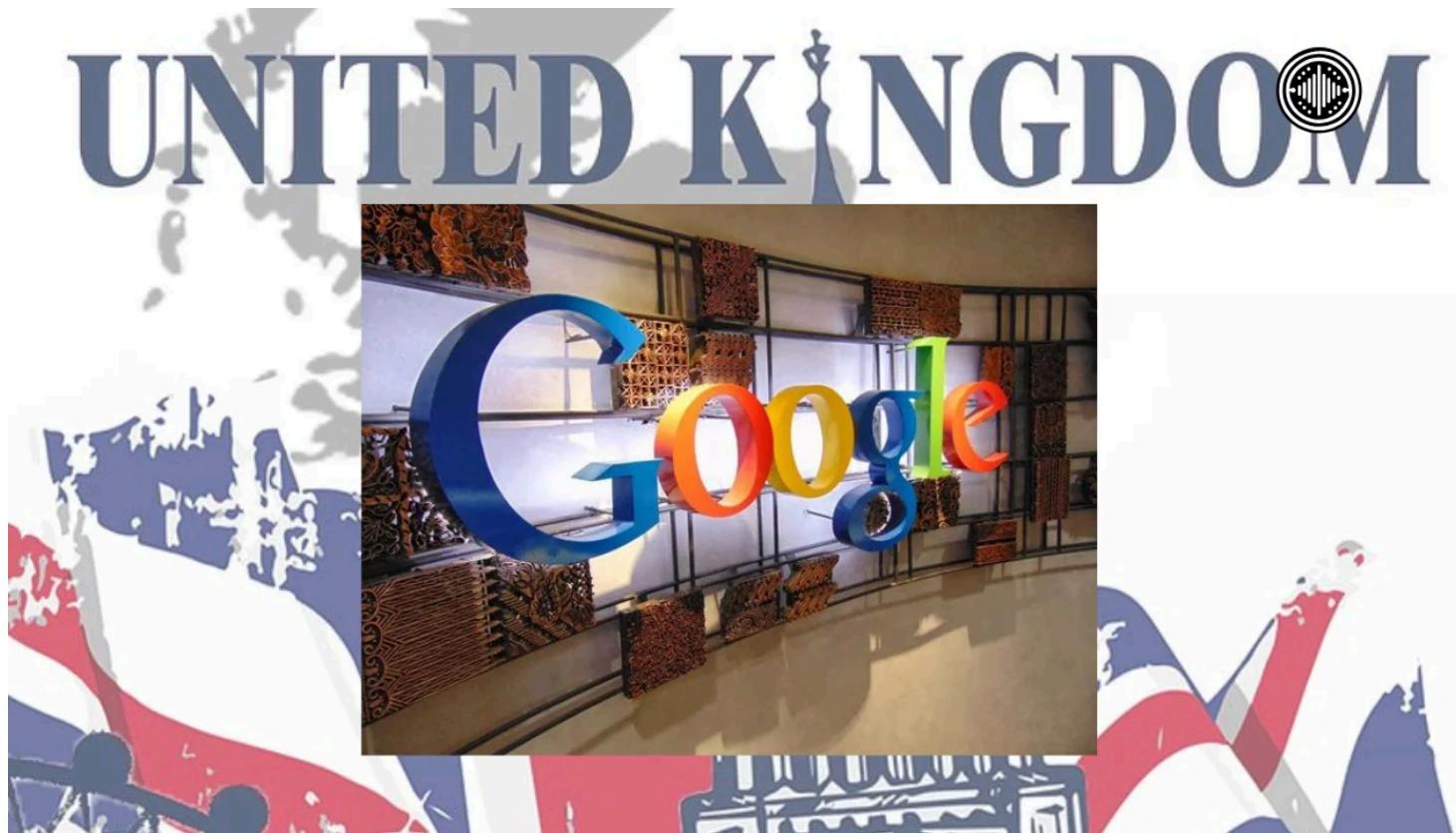
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UK Government Partners with Google to Upgrade Public Sector Systems

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The UK government has struck a high-profile deal with Google to supply free cloud technology and training to public services, including the NHS and local councils, prompting warnings from privacy advocates that the arrangement risks over-reliance on a single US company and jeopardises digital sovereignty.

Announced by Science, Innovation and Technology Secretary Peter Kyle, the deal will see Google Cloud, offering computing, database, and machine learning tools, provide no-cost services and “upskill” thousands of civil servants and NHS staff. The partnership, which does not require government spending, aims to replace outdated IT systems and reduce vulnerability to cyberattacks. Independent trials have already shown productivity boosts, such as a reported 26-minute daily saving per civil servant using Microsoft’s AI tool.

However, campaigners like Foxglove’s co-executive director, Martha Dark, and Imogen Parker from the Ada Lovelace Institute caution that this move may tie the UK to Google’s cloud infrastructure and foreign data storage. Dark warned that granting such access without robust safeguards could hand Google “the keys to the data kingdom,” particularly under an unpredictable future US administration.

The government did not seek open competitive procurement, claiming the deal falls within public procurement rules since no payment is involved. Despite this, campaign groups argue that transparency remains limited and voice fears of an emerging “lock-in” situation where switching providers in the future becomes difficult.

Kyle defended the move, stating that UK firms, both large and small, will still be able to compete for future contracts. He emphasised that data ownership remains with the government, with options for encryption and local storage “air-gapped” from external access. The minister said the agreement addresses the need to escape decades-old “ball-and-chain” legacy systems, secured at taxpayer expense and vulnerable to disruption.

According to Independent reporting, Kyle warned competitors should “bring us your best ideas” to ensure a level playing field, and said Google could invest “hundreds of millions” in public sector technology infrastructure.

While initial trials suggest benefits in efficiency, the expanded deal renews the debate over whether public services should depend heavily on a dominant US tech provider, potentially limiting future government flexibility and leaving critical national data under external influence.