# User-friendly AI

Once an AI system is in place, its value depends on how well people can interact with it. A system that delivers technically accurate outputs but is confusing, hard to access, or poorly explained is unlikely to be used well. In some cases, it may even cause harm. Every AI system, regardless of how it is implemented, will affect people, whether they are people internally, service users, or members of the public. We want to ensure modern, efficient, and trusted customer-centric public services.

This module introduces the core idea of user-friendly AI. These ideas are essential for responsible public service practice, and they apply no matter whether a system is used, adapted, or built.

* User-friendly AI systems can:
* Increase adoption and engagement
* Improve accessibility for a wide range of users
* Build trust by making processes transparent
* Support good decisions through effective human-AI interaction
* Advance equity and inclusion in public service delivery

User-friendly AI is about putting people at the centre throughout the life of the AI system, and includes considering:

* Who will use the system, and in what context – discussed in the human-centred design section
* Whether the system supports or constrains equitable access, and accounts for different levels of digital confidence or accessibility needs users may have – discussed in the accessibility and inclusion section
* How transparent, explainable, and trustworthy the system will feel in practice – discussed in the transparency and explainability section

## Human-Centred Design

User-friendly AI begins with human-centred design. This means developing systems that are shaped around the people who use them – their needs, contexts, and values.

This goes beyond usability. It is about delivering systems that are understandable, respectful, and fit for purpose within the public service. Human-centred design helps ensure that AI systems support, rather than replace or override, human judgement.

What It Involves

Human-centred design involves:

* Understanding the real-world tasks, goals, and challenges that users face
* Considering cultural, social, and organisational contexts
* Identifying where AI can support people, and where human control must remain
* Involving users throughout the design process
* Testing, iterating, and refining based on feedback

## Why Human-Centred Design matters when thinking about implementing AI systems

AI systems can shape how people experience services, access entitlements, or make decisions. Without a human-centred approach:

* Systems may be confusing or inaccessible
* Important user needs may be missed
* Trust in public service delivery can be undermined

Human-centred design is especially important in contexts where people are under pressure, dealing with complexity, or have limited experience with digital systems.

Key Takeaways

* AI systems should be designed with and for the people who will use them
* The objective is to enhance public service staff and processes to support improved goal is not to automate everything, but to support better outcomes
* Design should include diverse perspectives, especially from those most affected by the system’s use

Accessibility and Inclusion

Public services must work for everyone. That includes disabled people, people with different language and literacy needs, and those who access services in diverse ways. While some AI systems may help with accessibility (e.g., automatically providing captions, allowing voice to text and vice versa), AI systems often need to be designed and tested to be accessible and inclusive from the outset. This includes the system interface, the way outputs are presented, and the data and assumptions that shape how it behaves.

What Inclusive AI Design Involves

* Designing with disabled people, not just for them
* Considering a wide range of needs, including vision, hearing, mobility, and cognitive diversity
* Following accessibility standards, such as Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)
* Ensuring that AI-generated outputs are accessible (for example, plain language, screen reader–compatible, or captioned)
* Testing with diverse users, including those from under-served communities

Why Accessibility and Inclusion matters when thinking about implementing AI systems

AI systems can amplify existing barriers if not designed carefully.

For example:

* A chatbot that does not work with screen readers may exclude users from important information
* A voice interface that struggles with certain accents may misinterpret requests
* Training data that lacks diversity may result in biased outputs

These issues are preventable. Inclusive design practices help ensure that AI systems are fair, reliable, and usable, across the population.

Key Takeaways

* Accessibility and inclusion must be integrated into every stage of the AI lifecycle
* Disabled people and diverse communities must be included in design and testing
* Following accessibility standards is necessary, but not always sufficient
* Inclusive AI systems help ensure that public services reach everyone they are meant to serve

Transparency and Explainability

People need to know when AI is involved and understand what it is doing. This section builds on the foundations discussed in Module 2. It focuses on what transparency and explainability look like in day-to-day system design, especially from the user’s perspective.

Transparency: Being Clear About What the System Is Doing

In the context of AI system design, transparency means letting people know:

* When AI is being used
* What the system is intended to do
* What it can and cannot do
* What data it uses, and how that data is handled

This information should be available to both staff and members of the public, in a way that is accessible, accurate, and easy to understand.

Examples might include:

* A clear statement that an AI system is generating a response, not a human
* Information about how the system makes decisions or classifications
* Links to a plain-language guide or help content
* An alternative channel for communication should further clarification be wanted

Explainability: Helping Users Understand Outcomes

Explainability focuses on making system behaviour understandable. This includes:

* Why a certain recommendation, output, or result was provided
* What information or rules influenced that result
* What a user can do to challenge or change it (if applicable)

The level of explanation should match the context. A frontline worker may need a detailed rationale to support a decision. A member of the public may need a short, clear explanation and reassurance that human oversight is in place. A model reviewer may need to be able to audit decision logic step-by-step.

Why Explainability and Transparency matters when thinking about implementing AI systems

If people do not understand how a system works, or what its limitations are, they may lose confidence in its use. In some cases, they may be unaware that AI is involved at all.

This can lead to:

* Misinformed decisions
* Reduced trust in public services
* Missed opportunities for challenge, improvement, or correction

Transparency and explainability help build trust, improve usability, and uphold the principles of fairness and accountability.

Key Takeaways

* People need to know when AI is used, and what role it is playing
* Explanations should be appropriate to the audience and context
* Making a system transparent and explainable is a design responsibility, not just a technical one

These expectations are set out in the Public Service AI Framework and the Responsible AI Guidance, and must be carried into system interfaces, workflows, and communications.

Concluding consideration:

1. You design a prototype by observing frontline staff and updating it based on their feedback.

Answer: Human-centred design

1. Your system works with screen readers and offers text alternatives for images.

Answer: Accessibility and inclusion

1. The interface clearly tells users when AI is making a recommendation, and links to more information.

Answer: Transparency

1. The system includes a plain-language explanation of why a document was flagged for review.

Answer: Explainability