

The Problem with Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use in Undergraduate Degrees, and a Proposal for Mitigation

Olivia Speed

Faculty of Science and Technology Undergraduate Representative

15/03/2026

Foreword

This paper has been written by Olivia Speed, the Undergraduate Representative for the Faculty of Science and Technology (FST). This document is the first draft of the proposal. Once distributed to both staff and students, multiple consultation discussions will be held with both groups and additional work will take place after any amendments to ensure maximum satisfaction. This document is also just the framework for the exercises that will be devised if the proposal is actioned upon.

The Problem

The Prominence of AI in Academia

There is a worrying increase in student over-reliance on generative-AI and its impact on cognitive abilities: some students increasingly favour fast and optimal solutions over slow ones that require more practicality (Zhai, et al.). A study conducted by Moşoi et al. supports that students are more likely to turn to AI when their reflective thinking and task satisfaction are lower which negatively impacts their learning. From a student's perspective, it is felt that the line of breaking academic integrity is becoming blurrier as AI tools continuously improve, especially when university guidelines and attitude towards AI are not clear (O'Dea, et al.). To gather an 'in-house' perspective on this, a small survey was conducted.

Student Feedback

On 9th February 2026, a survey via Mentimeter was conducted in the FST Faculty Forum for academic representatives by Olivia Speed. The cohort of students were asked a multitude of questions including "How do you feel about the university's AI policy (in relation to last term)?" Out of the 33 students in attendance: three had a positive outlook of the University's stance and use of AI, 25 do not believe that the university is managing AI well and policy is unclear, and 12 students confided that they have noticed a lack of training or feel uninformed. Quotes from this include:

- "The staff don't educate students on the consequences on the environment and cognitive development".
- "AI makes my course mates lazy and it translates into group projects and submissions. Ban AI - it's more worthy of the degree than they are"
- "Quite a lot of Amber AI assignments, which shows that the (...) department are struggling to police AI".
- "It's confusing. I have assistive technology given to me by DSA that uses AI (like scholarcy and speechify) and I'm unclear on whether I am allowed to use my assistive tech to do my coursework."

It is clear that students think that the university is not managing the new era of AI to a satisfactory degree. One student confided that "there needs to be more information on how AI affects both the environment and a person's own brain health" and "I'm hearing from the staff lead for reps that a lot of first years are misusing AI". After analysing this feedback from the FST representatives, a potential preventative measure has been devised.

Undergraduate Faculty Representative Feedback

The role of faculty student representative requires both student and staff consultation. Throughout the year, a pattern has been noticed in a variety of different meetings with both cohorts. Staff worry about the increase in malpractice cases with the surge of AI usage. Many lecturers feel that there is no alternative to purely ‘giving in’ and allowing the use of AI without much guidance. On the other hand, students complain of the lack of action in group work, concerns that work written with no AI is being detected otherwise, and that staff appear to be panicking about what to do with AI.

Assessing this pattern, it has become clear that:

- Students feel that they are not being supported with how to navigate AI and academia.
- Students feel that they do not know what to do if a group member uses AI.
- Staff do not know how to reduce AI malpractice.
- Staff convey a major concern about grade skewing and malpractice surgency rather than the detriment that AI malpractice has to the quality of learning for students.

Suggestion for Problem Prevention

AI can seem like a scapegoat out of difficult university work, and therefore there will always be a student who misuses it. Therefore, it is paramount to implement preventative measures to reduce this number. After holding discussions with both staff and students, a potential lab/workshop exercise by Olivia Speed was devised.

Lab/ Workshop Exercise

- Suggested Lab/ Workshop Time: One to two hours
- Suggested Departments: All
- Suggested Assessment Method: Written Analysis/ Presentation
- Suggested Mark Weighting: TBD, suggestions from staff required
- Suggested Year of Completion: First

The class of students are asked to open a generative AI tool – they should be promoted to use the university’s SAIL for security reasons provided that the number of credits available suffices for the exercise. The premise of the exercise is the same for all departments with finer details being customised.

The Task

Students ask questions to a generative-AI tool. They should assess the ability of the AI to answer queries through a series of questions. These may include how the AI reacts to being told it is incorrect and how effective it is at correcting itself, caveats in the AI’s abilities, and how ‘human’ it conveys itself. Furthermore, students should analyse the ethics and environmental effects of generative-AI. Results should be either written up as an essay or explored through a presentation. The task itself can be customised in any way a department sees fit. For example, the Psychology department may wish to have students purely use generative-AI to write an essay including citations. Here, it is important for students not only to analyse the English and ‘human’ sentiment added to the writing, but also the legitimacy of the citations. In comparison, Engineering may use generative-AI to write some difficult code in C or C++. Students should be encouraged to share the different code they are given, check

if it is concise, and test to see if it works as desired. It is also important that students are asked if they can explain the code without the help of AI to show how this may be detrimental to their learning.

Conclusion

It is clear that students feel unsure about how to navigate academia alongside the rise of generative-AI. Furthermore, there is an overwhelming feeling that students desire better communication and training on how to properly use or avoid it as a tool. Therefore, this document discusses a potential exercise that can be used university-wide for first year students to set a precedent early into student's academic careers. This mitigation proposition hopes to reduce the number of academic malpractice cases, and boost student's confidence for both identifying when AI may be useful as well as prioritising learning in their degree.

References

1. Zhai, C., Wibowo, S. and Li, L.D. (2024) 'The effects of over-reliance on AI dialogue systems on students' cognitive abilities: a systematic review', *Smart Learning Environments*, 11(1), available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s40561-024-00316-7> [accessed 15 Mar 2026].
2. Moşoi, A.A., Maican, C.I., Cazan, A.-M. and Sumedrea, S. (2025). Do students need to think hard? The interplay of AI and cognitive abilities in solving problems. *Education and Information Technologies*. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-025-13738-8> [accessed 15 Mar 2026].
3. Xianghan O'Dea, Bale, R., Chiu, Y.-L.T., Kamilya Suleymenova, Tinker, A. and Stoker, R. (2025). Ethical Uses of Generative AI in Assessment: Student Perceptions in UK Contexts. *Evaluation Review*, pp.193841X251399712–193841X251399712. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0193841x251399712> [accessed 15 Mar 2026].