



Higher Education Policy Institute

Student Generative AI Survey 2025

Kortext

Josh Freeman

HEPI Policy Note 61

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Foreword

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It is a pleasure to introduce this 2025 study, a welcome repeat of the 2024 AI survey of how full-time undergraduate students are currently using AI tools. It shows that use has soared over the past year, demonstrating that AI tools are used in varied ways in learning and assessment.

It is a positive sign overall: many students have learned more about using tools effectively and ethically and there is little evidence here that AI tools are being misused to cheat and play the system. Students see a range of benefits of using AI tools, from saving time to improving the quality of their work in ways they consider to be personalised, especially outside study hours.

And yet, there are quite a lot of signs that will pose serious challenges for learners, teachers and institutions and these will need to be addressed as higher education transforms. Policies on AI use for assessment are generally clear but, at the same time, students are uncertain about what acceptable AI use looks like, with less than a third stating that their institution encourages them to use it and nearly a third reporting that their institution bans its use. Some students report that they are 'being warned about the potential risks of AI, but [staff] are actively incorporating AI as a creative tool into some of their modules'.

Students want more of the latter. They want more support in their courses to increase their skills in using and managing AI tools, and they also perceive that while more staff are well-equipped to support them than previously, this needs to improve substantially. Peppered through the study is clear evidence of a digital divide, whether women are using AI tools less and for less confident reasons or those with greater means are more able to access premium products.

There are gaps then for higher education institutions: how AI tools are used effectively to support students' learning and engagement, how students become better skilled, how staff are trained to have a deeper working understanding of AI tools and how divides in the use of AI are not allowed to develop and persist. I urge you not only to mull through the data presented here but also to take time to reflect on the conclusions and policy recommendations. I look forward to seeing what happens in the 2026 report.

Executive summary

Building on our 2024 AI Survey, we surveyed 1,041 full-time undergraduate students through Savanta about their use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools.

In 2025, we find that the student use of AI has surged in the last year, with almost all students (92%) now using AI in some form, up from 66% in 2024, and some 88% having used GenAI for assessments, up from 53% in 2024. The main uses of GenAI are explaining concepts, summarising articles and suggesting research ideas, but a significant number of students – 18% – have included AI-generated text directly in their work.

When asked why they use AI, students most often find it saves them time and improves the quality of their work. The main factors putting them off using AI are the risk of being accused of academic misconduct and the fear of getting false or biased results. Women are more worried about these factors than men, and men report more enthusiasm for AI throughout the survey, as do wealthier students and those on STEM courses. The digital divide we identified in 2024 appears to have widened.

Institutions have maintained a good record on protecting the integrity of assessments, with 80% agreeing their institution has a clear AI policy and 76% saying their institution would spot the use of AI in assessed work – both increases from the 2024 Survey. However, while students overwhelmingly believe it is essential to have good AI skills, only 36% have received support from their institution to develop them. The gap has grown between the number saying they want AI tools to be provided and the number saying AI tools currently are provided. However, staff literacy has increased, with 42% of students suggesting staff are ‘well-equipped’ to help them with AI, compared with just 18% in 2024.

In new questions for 2025, we found that just under half (45%) of students had used AI while at school, and more students agree AI-generated content would get a good grade in their subject (40%) than disagree (34%). But they are lukewarm about the possibility of exams assessed by AI: 34% would put in more effort against 29% who would put in less effort and 27% whose effort would not change.

Based on these findings, we recommend that institutions keep their assessment practices under constant review, particularly as AI becomes more powerful and students become more proficient with AI tools, requiring staff to be supported to improve their AI literacy. However, institutions should not adopt a mainly punitive approach; instead, their AI policies should reflect that AI use by students is inevitable and often beneficial. Institutions should share best practice and work together to design effective teaching and learning strategies.

Introduction

This is the second edition of the HEPI / Kortext AI Student Survey. The first, published in February 2024, was among the first attempts to survey students systematically on their use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools to support their studies.¹

One year later, this Policy Note seeks to establish how much has changed. The UK Government has recently announced its AI Opportunities Action Plan, a strategy to use AI to boost economic growth.² In education, the time saved is forecast to help teachers ‘get their Sunday evening back’.³ Higher education staff are widely adopting AI but fear students are becoming too reliant on AI tools, crowding out critical thinking.⁴ Meanwhile, AI-related academic misconduct cases have soared.⁵

AI is frequently used to refer to software that employs machine learning, the process by which computers learn without explicit programming. We are interested in all the AI tools students use, but we focus on generative AI (GenAI) which generates text, images, audio or video content. ChatGPT, launched in November 2022, is the most well-known tool but there is now a rich ecosystem of GenAI tools for purposes as varied as coding, accessing textbooks, composing music, translating languages and providing feedback on written work.

This Policy Note seeks to answer the following three questions:

1. How are students using AI tools, particularly generative AI tools?
2. What are their attitudes to these tools?
3. How do they evaluate their institution’s response to the wider availability of these tools?

Methodology

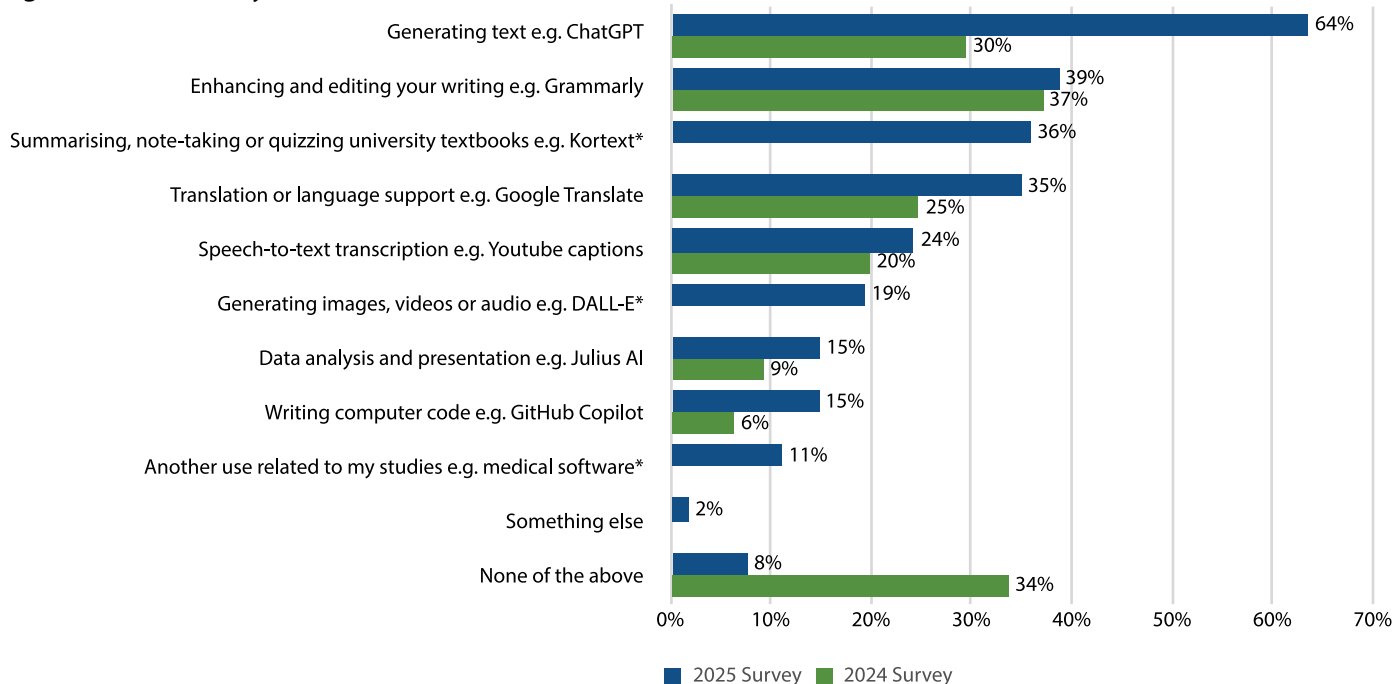
To collect the data for this survey, we polled 1,041 full-time undergraduate students through Savanta in December 2024. The responses were weighted on demographics such as gender, institution type and year of study to ensure the results are representative of the wider student population and comparable with the previous survey. The margin of error is approximately 3%.

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Minor grammatical edits, which do not change the meaning, have been made to some free-text responses. The order the questions are presented here is different from the order they were originally put to students. The full results are available on the HEPI website.

How students are using AI

Our first question asked students if and how they use AI tools. The results show that the reported use of AI has increased in every area. Most strikingly, the proportion of students who have used AI in at least one way has jumped from 66% to 92%. The proportion of students using AI to generate text with tools such as ChatGPT has more than doubled from less than a third (30%) to nearly two-thirds (64%) and this is now by far the most popular use of AI. Tools for editing work such as Grammarly and for working with university textbooks such as Kortext are the second and third most popular.

Figure 1 What have you used AI for?



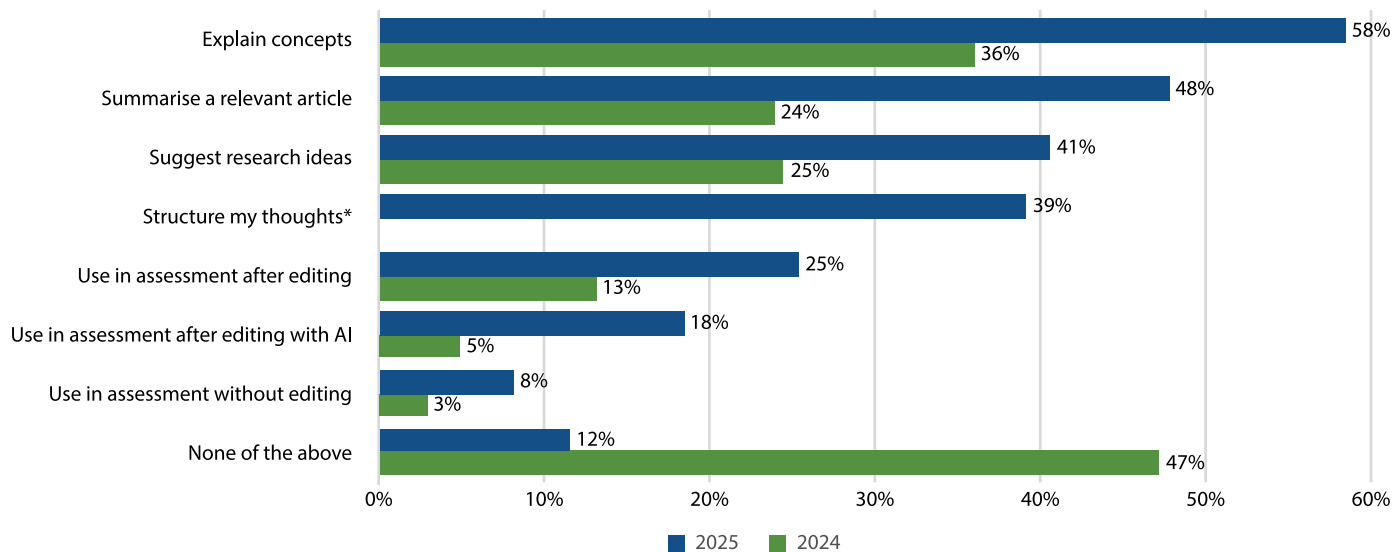
'Which of the following have you used artificial intelligence (AI) for this academic year? (Include AI used for any purpose, including your studies, employment, hobbies and so on.)' * indicates the option is new in 2025. Some options have been updated in small ways to reflect technological developments

Those putting 'something else' mentioned Microsoft Copilot (a GenAI tool with a range of functions), using AI to compile references for essays and using it just to have a conversation with – and AI chatbots have been touted as one potential solution to high rates of loneliness among young people.⁶

In the next question, we defined Generative AI ('Generative AI tools generate text, images and other content in response to prompts. Examples include ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Microsoft Copilot') and asked students whether they have used it for assessments.

Every area has seen significant increases. The proportion using generative AI for assessments has jumped from 53% to 88%, the vast majority of students. To 'explain concepts' remains the most popular function, with 58% of students using it for this purpose, up from 36% in 2024. The largest increase has been in the use of AI to summarise articles and this is now the second most popular use of GenAI, up from a third in 2024. One-quarter of students use AI-generated text to help them draft assessments and nearly a fifth of students (18%) use AI-generated and edited text in their assessments. Overall, some 88% of students have used generative AI to help in some way with their assessments.

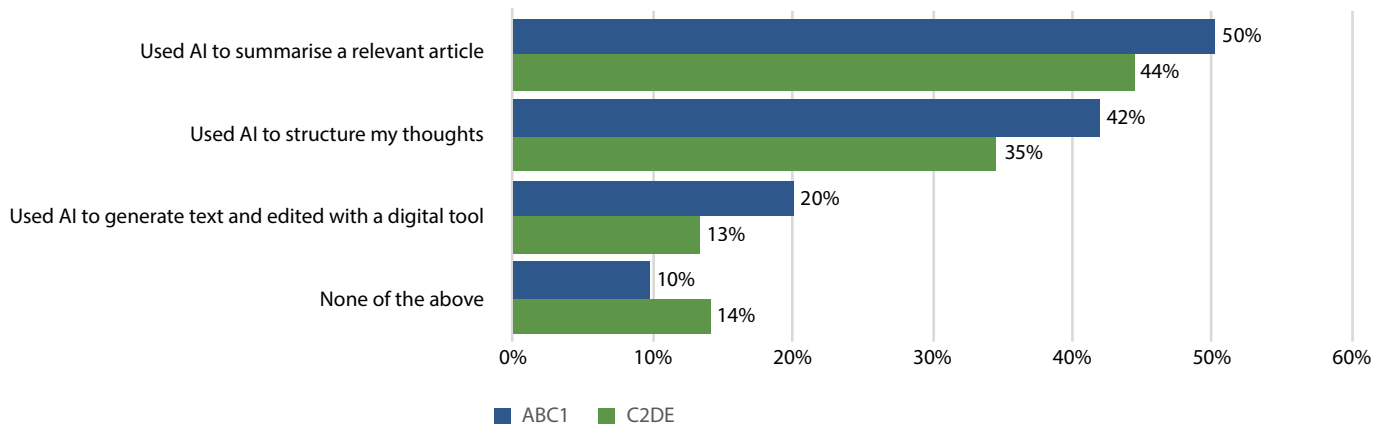
Figure 2 How have you used generative AI for assessments?



'When thinking about using generative AI to prepare assessed work, which of the following have you ever done? Please select all that apply.' * indicates the option is new in 2025. Those putting 'I don't know' (1% of responses in 2025) are excluded

There is still a digital divide based on socio-economic grade. Some functions are used much more by students from higher socio-economic groups (A, B and C1), including summarising articles, structuring thoughts and using AI-edited text in assessments. By contrast, those from lower socio-economic groups (C2, D and E) are more likely to say they have used AI for 'None of the above'.

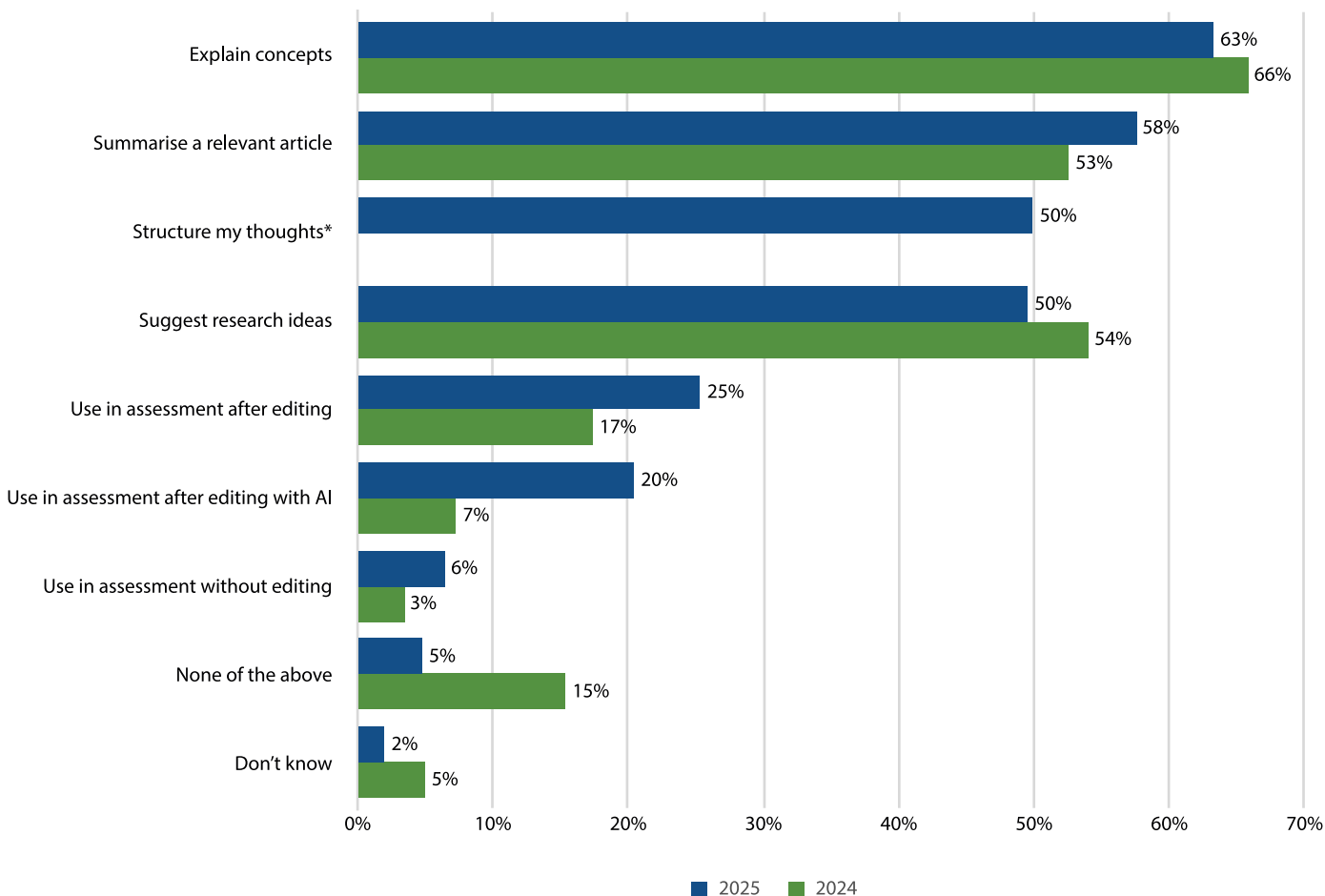
Figure 3 Select uses of generative AI, by socio-economic group



All respondents, broken down by socio-economic group

While the use of GenAI has increased, attitudes to it are more mixed. In some areas, students are more hesitant about AI use than in the 2024 Survey. The proportion that considers it acceptable to include AI text in assignments after editing has grown sharply from 17% to 25%.

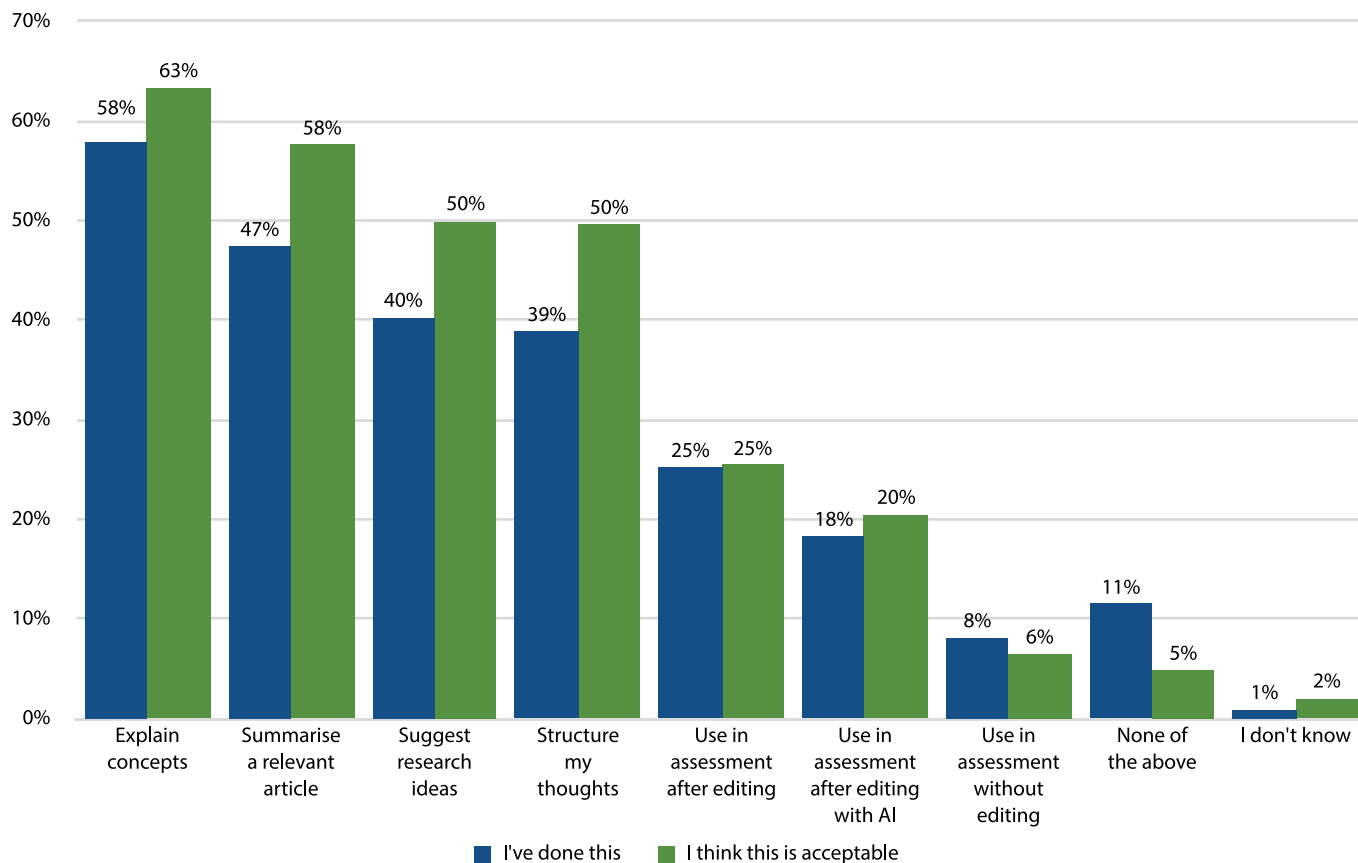
Figure 4 Which of these are acceptable uses of generative AI for assessments?



'Which of the following would you typically consider an acceptable use of generative AI for assessed work?' * indicates the option is new in 2025

We can compare the proportion who admit to using GenAI in each way with the proportion finding it acceptable to do so. Strikingly, more students are using AI text directly in assessments than consider it acceptable – suggesting a small proportion do so without being comfortable they are doing the right thing.

Figure 5 What students have done themselves versus what they consider acceptable

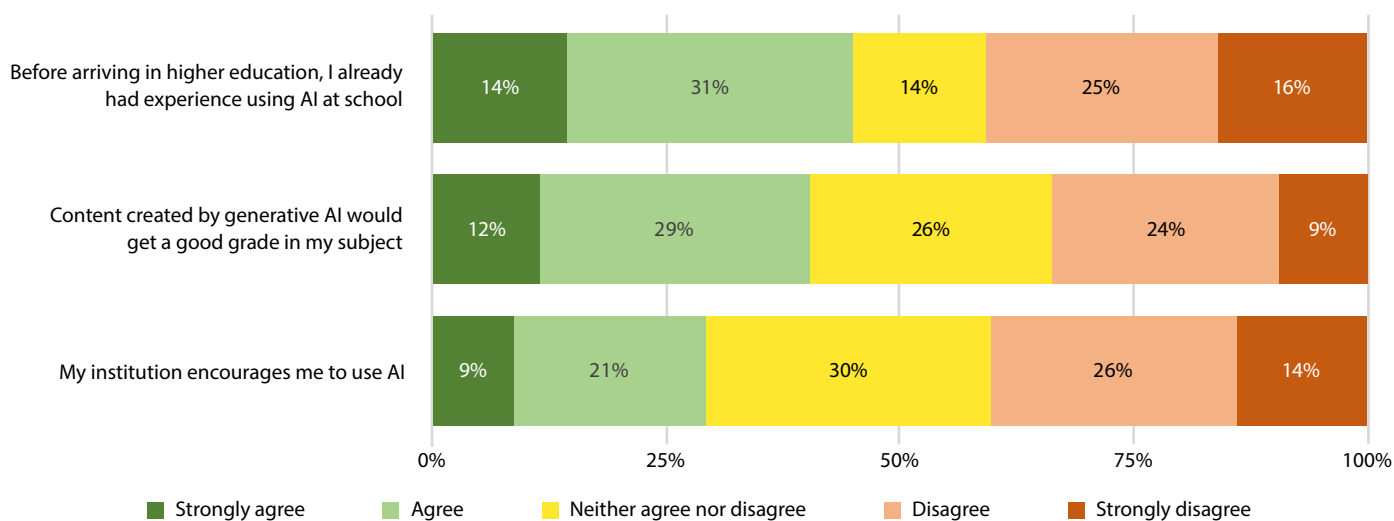


2025 results from Figures 3 and 4

None of these uses of AI receives more than two-thirds support, suggesting there is still major scepticism and uncertainty about what acceptable AI use looks like.

We asked several other questions about students' use of AI and general attitudes to it. Slightly more students agree they have experience using AI at school than disagree (45% to 41%). Similarly, more students agree AI-created content would get a good grade in their subject than disagree (40% to 34%). But only 29% feel 'encouraged' by their institution to use AI against 40% who disagree.

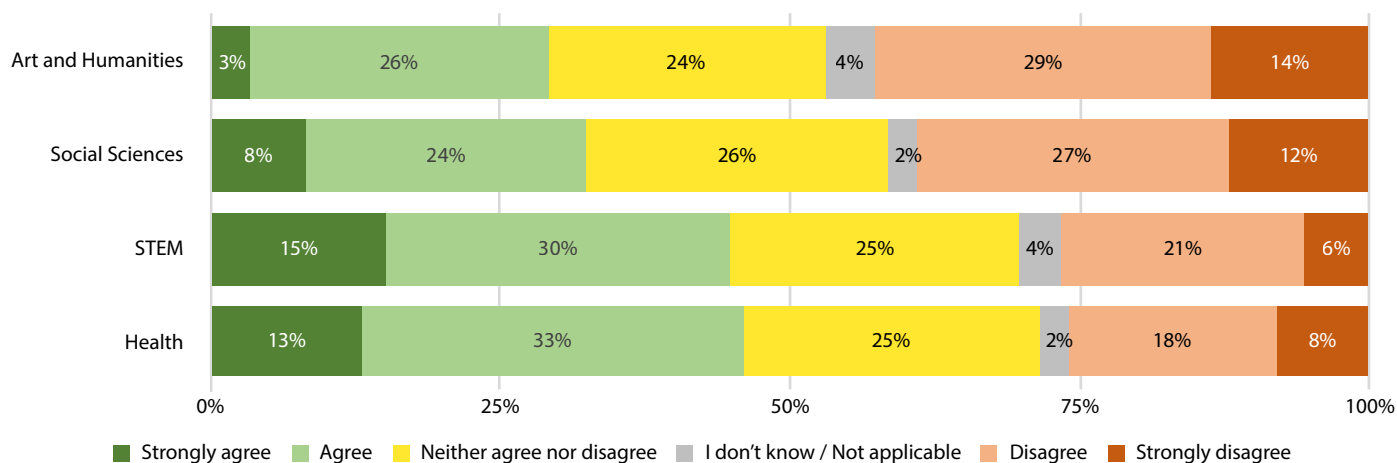
Figure 6 How far do you agree or disagree that...



Those putting 'I don't know / Not applicable' are excluded

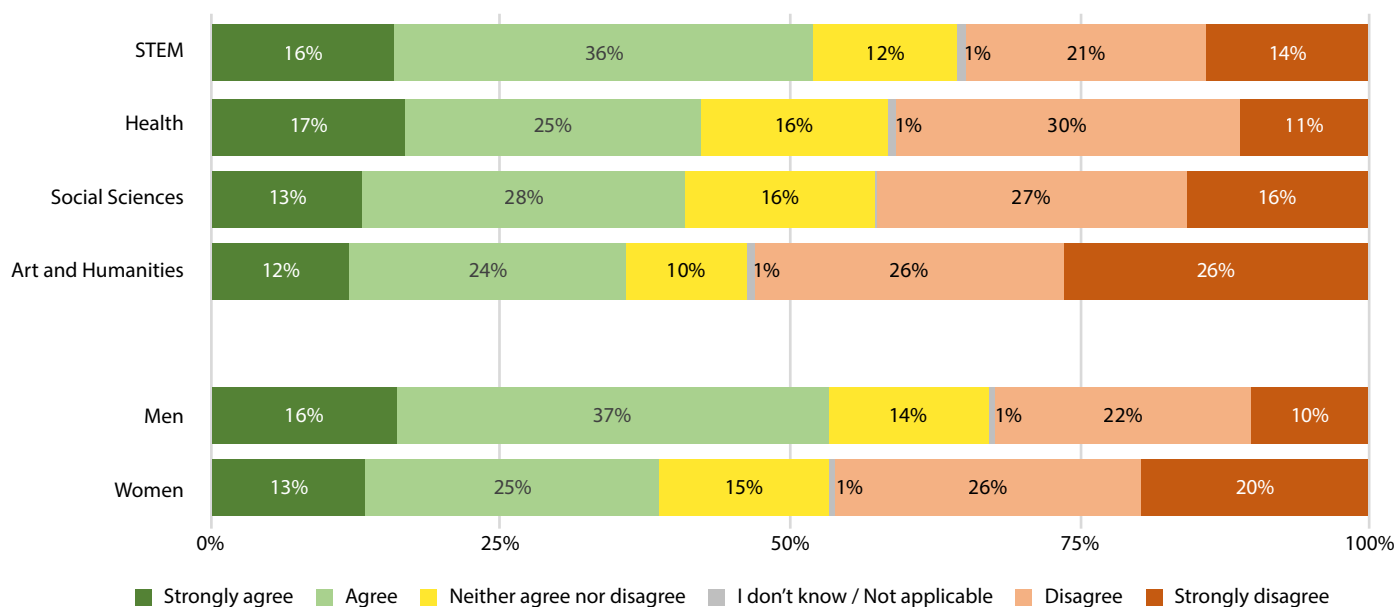
Health and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) are the subject areas students feel AI performs best in. Those taking subjects with a less quantitative focus, particularly Arts and Humanities, are much more sceptical that AI can perform well.

Figure 7 'Content created by generative AI would get a good grade in my subject'



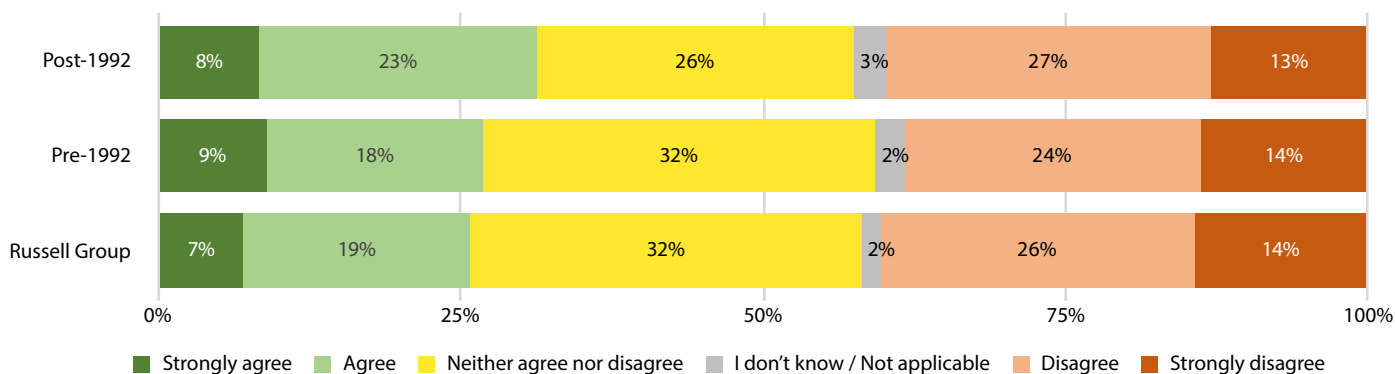
Similarly, it is STEM students (and, to a lesser extent, those on health-related courses) who have experience using AI in school. As in the 2024 Survey, there is also a substantial gender divide in use, with men some 14 percentage points more likely to have experience of using AI at school.

Figure 8 'Before arriving in higher education, I already had experience using AI at school'



Separately, we also looked at which kinds of institutions 'encourage' their students to use AI. Despite the Russell Group issuing its widely cited *Principles on the use of generative AI tools in education* in 2023, slightly fewer students studying at a Russell Group university feel 'encouraged' to use AI than students at institutions that became universities in or since 1992 ('post-92s').⁷

Figure 9 'My institution encourages me to use AI'



Attitudes to generative AI

In two new questions included in the 2025 Survey, we asked students about the factors that encourage or discourage them from using generative AI tools. The findings confirm our findings in the 2024 HEPI / Advance HE *Student Academic Experience Survey* that many students use AI to save time.⁸ Similar numbers use AI to improve the quality of their work, particularly younger students.

Table 1 'Which of the below, if any, are reasons which make you more likely to use AI tools for your studies?'

Why do you use AI?	All	Men	Women
To save me time	51%	56%	48%
To improve the quality of my work	50%	50%	50%
To get instant support	40%	41%	40%
To get personalised support	32%	33%	31%
To get support outside of traditional study hours	29%	26%	30%
To improve my AI skills	28%	36%	22%
I learn more if I use AI than if I don't	20%	24%	17%
Because other students use AI	15%	17%	14%
My institution encourages me to use AI	13%	16%	11%
Nothing: I have no interest in using AI tools	7%	4%	7%

When men use AI, it tends to be more to improve their AI skills or to help them learn more. Women are more likely to use AI to access support outside of traditional study hours. Part of the difference is explained by the differences in course choices between men and women: men are more likely to study STEM subjects like computing, where AI will play a greater role.

The factors pushing students away from using AI – each chosen by more than half of students – are the risks of being accused of cheating and getting false results or 'hallucinations', made-up facts, statistics and citations. Nearly a third (31%) say their institution bans AI or discourages its use. Few students are discouraged by the high environmental impact of generative AI or concerns about the use of data without authors' consent.⁹

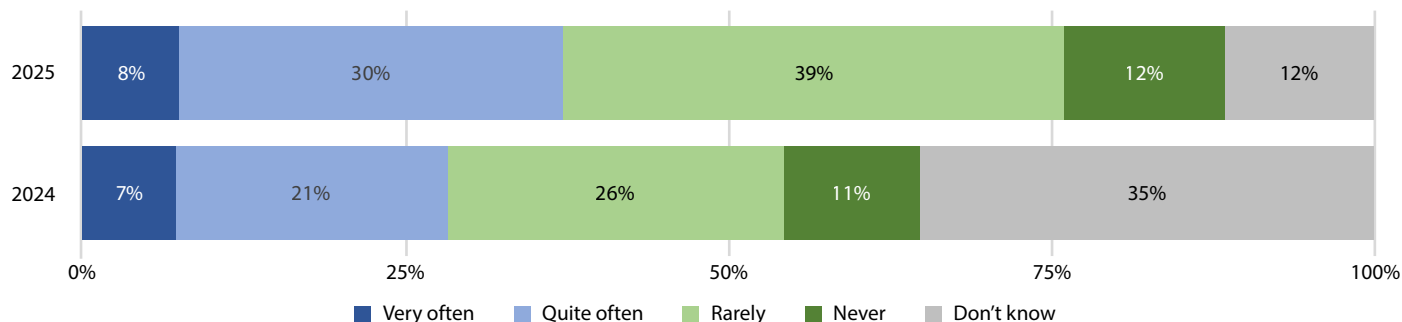
Table 2 'Which of the below, if any, are reasons which make you less likely to use AI tools for your studies?'

What puts you off using AI?	All	Men	Women
Being accused of cheating by my institution	53%	45%	59%
Getting false results / hallucinations	51%	48%	53%
Getting biased results	37%	37%	37%
My institution discourages or bans the use of AI	31%	26%	36%
Not enough is done to protect my data privacy	23%	24%	22%
It is not fair to other students who do not use AI	21%	20%	20%
Tools are too expensive	20%	22%	18%
I will learn more if I do not use AI	18%	17%	18%
The use of data to train AI models without the authors' consent	16%	17%	14%
The environmental impact	15%	16%	13%
Nothing: I am fully comfortable using AI tools	4%	4%	3%

Women tend to have greater concerns about AI use than men. Women are significantly more likely to worry about being accused of cheating and AI hallucinations, as are younger students. Women are also more likely to report their institution bans or discourages AI, which may also reflect the differences in the courses they take.

As in the 2024 Survey, we defined hallucinations and asked about students' experiences of them. As before, most students answered cautiously, with 39% saying 'Rarely' and 30% saying 'Quite often'. But the sharpest change here is the proportion saying 'Don't know', which has dropped from 35% to just 12% in the 2025 edition. This suggests students now have a much greater understanding of the AI tools they use and the reliability of the content the tools produce.

Figure 10 How often do the AI tools you use produce hallucinations?

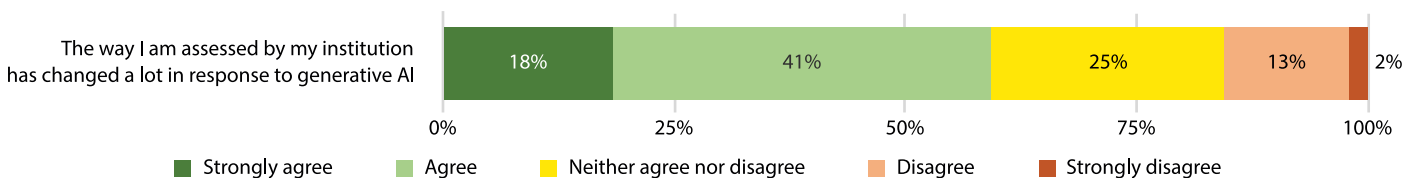


Of those students who have used generative AI (64% in 2024, 93% in 2025). 'Hallucinations' defined as getting false results

Assessment

In the 2024 Survey, we asked students whether the wider availability of AI tools has led to changes in how their institutions assess them. Only a third (32%) said it had, including 23% of students who said it had only changed 'a little'. Similarly, this year, we asked whether students agreed the way they were assessed has changed a lot. Some 59%, or three-fifths, now agree, showing the extent to which assessment has been transformed in just the last 12 months.

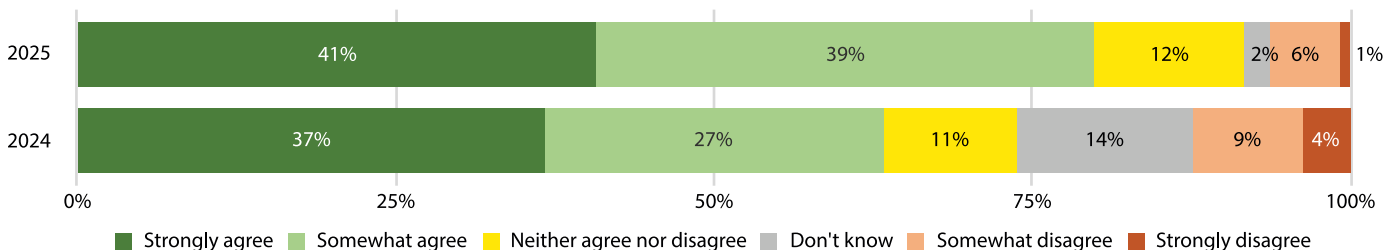
Figure 11 How far do you agree or disagree that...



'I don't know / Not applicable' are excluded

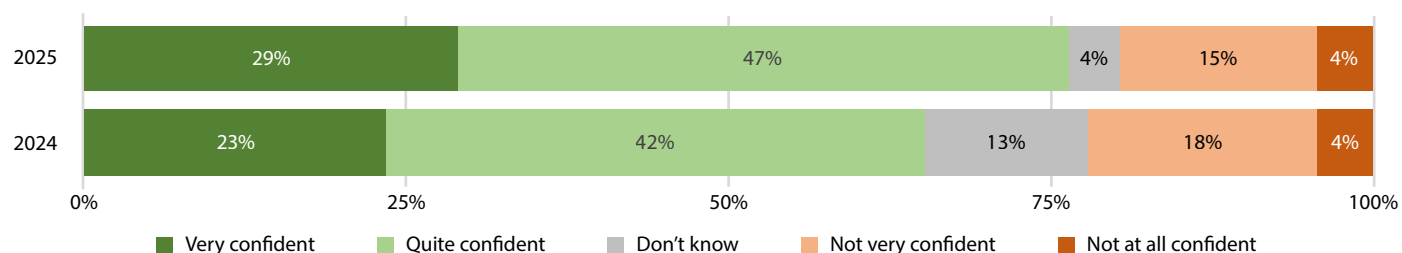
In 2024 we were surprised to find that, only a year after the launch of ChatGPT, most students felt their institution had a 'clear' policy on generative AI and assessments. Institutions have continued to clarify their policies and now the overwhelming majority (80%) agree their institution's policy is clear.

Figure 12 How far do you agree or disagree that your institution has a clear policy on GenAI use in assessments?



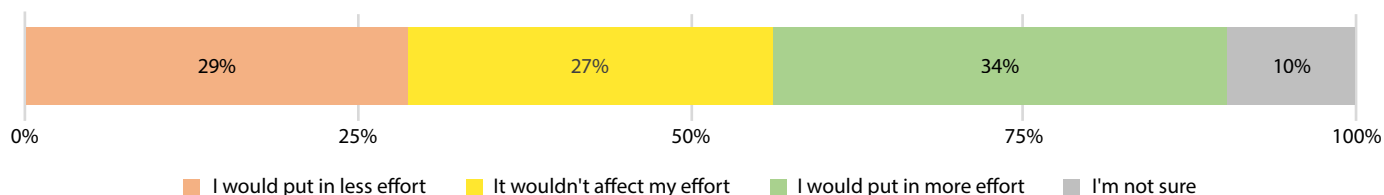
We pointed out in the 2024 Survey that the tools available to detect AI use in assessments are unreliable and frequently generate false positives. Despite this, students are even more confident than last year that their institution could determine whether AI was used in an assessment, with three-quarters (76%) saying their institution would spot it compared with just 20% saying they would not. Last year, 65% said their institution would spot AI use and 22% said they would not.

Figure 13 How confident are you that your institution could spot AI use in assessed work?



Some have suggested that AI could be involved in marking assessments, either as the sole marker or to assist a human examiner.¹⁰ We asked students whether, were that to happen, it would affect the amount of effort they put into their work. This question proved to be very divisive. A slight plurality (34%) say they would put in more effort but large numbers of students say they would put in less (29%) or the same amount as today (27%). Students at Russell Group institutions were most likely to say they would work less hard for AI assessors.

Figure 14 Would you put in more or less effort for AI-assessed exams?

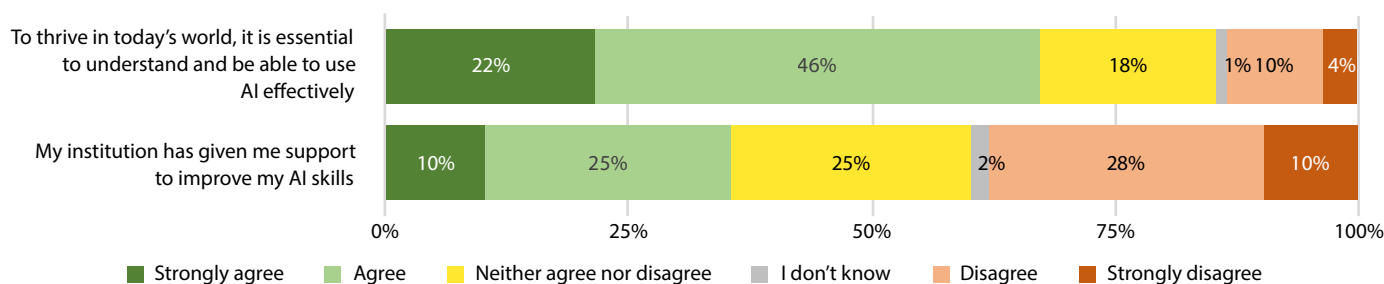


AI skills

Alongside the impact of AI on assessment, there has also been debate about how far institutions can and should support students to develop AI skills while in higher education.

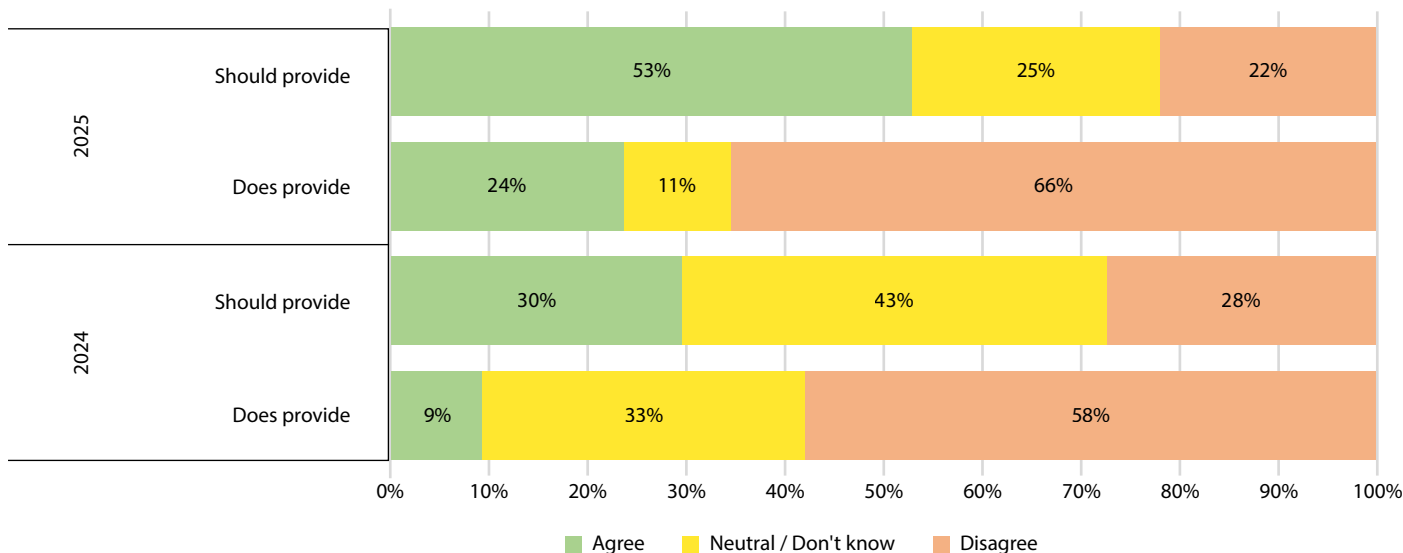
Figure 15 shows students overwhelmingly see AI skills, the knowledge and abilities required to manage and use AI tools, as vital. Some two-thirds of students (67%) believe it is essential to understand and be able to use AI effectively in today's world, including a majority in each subject area. Yet only 36% agree they have received support from their institution with their AI skills.

Figure 15 How far do you agree or disagree that...



One way institutions could support students with their AI skills is by providing AI tools (for example, the Pro version of GitHub Copilot, an AI tool for coding, or Kortext study+). In the 2024 Survey, I argued the provision of such tools might help to close digital divides between those who can afford them (or afford the paid-for versions) and those who cannot. Some 53% of students now agree institutions should provide AI tools, up from 30% last year. Just a quarter of students (26%) say their institution currently does so, up from 9% last year.

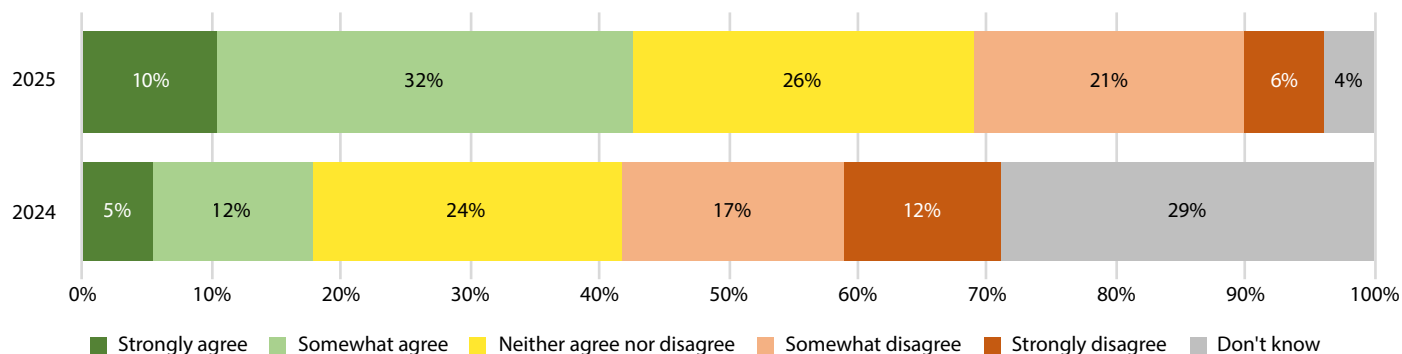
Figure 16 Should your institution provide AI tools / does it do so currently?



When asked what tools their institution provides, the top answer by far is ChatGPT. It is not clear whether students mean their institution pays for the premium version or whether they are referring to the free version and getting the question mixed up with being allowed to use it. The second most frequently made available is Microsoft's Copilot tool, which will now come with the subscriptions to Microsoft Office many institutions have. Also mentioned were Grammarly, the grammar and spellchecker, and Turnitin, which has a tool for detecting AI use (though AI detectors have struggled with 'false positives', labelling text as AI-generated when it was in fact written by a human) and which many students use to submit assignments.¹¹ Other mentioned tools were Google Gemini, Adobe AI Assistant and large language models developed in-house by higher education institutions.

The digital literacy of staff has also improved in the last year. In the 2024 Survey, just 18% of students said staff were well-equipped to support them with generative AI. That has jumped to 42% of students in 2025.

Figure 17 Staff at my institution are well-equipped to support me to work with generative AI



Written responses

In the final question, we asked students whether, overall, they were satisfied with their institution's approach to AI. We collected these answers as open text. Students tended to discuss either their institution's policy or the merits and limits of AI tools in general. When they viewed institutions positively, they tended to say the policy was clear and they had been taught how to use AI tools effectively.

We have been told what the boundaries are for the usage of AI.

I like the amount of support the university offers me, particularly in teaching me how to use AI ethically.

Not only are they warning us about the potential risks of AI, but they are actively incorporating AI as a creative tool into some of their modules.

I feel like they understand how big of an impact AI is having and is being supportive enough of it but not so much that we let it do work for us. We still have to work hard.

Where students were critical of institutions, they tended to criticise a lack of support or resistance to AI by their institution.

All we've been told is not to use it.

I haven't really learnt how to use AI effectively so that I won't be discredited. I am mostly afraid to use it.

Simply banning it and not understanding how most students use it or providing resources on AI literacy is more likely to lead to poor and inappropriate use of AI in an assessed context.

It's still all very vague and up on the air if / when it can be used and why. It seems to be discouraged without the recognition that it will form an integral part of our working lives.

[There is] not a lot of education / clear outlining of the institution's stance on AI, especially considering I am in the technology department.

They dance around the subject. It's not banned but not advised, it's academic misconduct if you use it but lecturers tell us they use it. Very mixed messages.

They have not adequately considered the differences in the application of AI in different disciplines, leading to a one-size-fits-all policy that limits our learning.

My institution hasn't given a clear policy on AI use but they say it is academic misconduct but there are also posters around campus encouraging its use so it is confusing – I can't tell whether I'm ok to use it or not.

Others had mixed feelings:

I am satisfied with the support from members of staff in using certain types of AI. However I believe the university should provide subscriptions to these services to make them more accessible to everyone.

I enjoy working with AI as it makes life easier when doing assignments however I do get scared I'll get caught.

Other responses emphasised what they felt to be the benefits of AI more generally:

One of the benefits of AI is faster output which has greatly helped me as a student. I now generate ideas faster and get work done in much less time.

It helps me break down articles to retrieve the relevant information quicker, making my research more efficient.

Because the productivity of work since has been off the chain. Absolutely brilliant.

Others raised challenges with the use of AI:

It will completely ruin what actual work will look like.

Still hesitant on using AI for educational purposes. Feels like I'm cheating.

I feel like AI is good but just gives me the answers.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

This Policy Note confirms what many lecturers and teachers already know: the time of widespread use of generative AI in higher education is not just inevitable but has already arrived. In just two years, generative AI tools have become embedded. Students understand AI better and also have a better sense of how far it can be trusted. Teaching staff, too, have a greater understanding of generative AI and how to handle it, while institutions are adopting clearer and fairer processes to manage it. I suggest four further conclusions:

1. On the whole, higher education institutions remain more sceptical of AI for teaching and learning than they are supportive. At least for the time being, institutions appear to find concerns about cheating more pressing than the need to support students to develop AI skills. As a result, efforts to safeguard assessments are more advanced than efforts to boost students' AI literacy. Students want access to more tools and more help using them than they currently receive.
2. Students like AI because it saves them time and they feel it improves their work, but many are put off by the risk of being accused of cheating.
3. There are persistent digital divides in AI competency, not just in gender (with men the more frequent users) and socio-economic group (favouring wealthier students), but also by subject: Arts and Humanities students are much less familiar with, and willing to use, AI tools than STEM students.
4. The ethics and norms of AI use are still in flux. Students are deeply divided on what AI can legitimately be used for, particularly regarding the use of AI-generated text in assessments.

I therefore recommend the following:

1. **Every institution should continually review all its assessments and assessment procedures to keep up with the growing power of AI tools and students' competency in using them.** Every assessment should be stress-tested using the most powerful publicly available AI tools (such as the paid-for version of ChatGPT). Exams which are easy for someone to achieve a high grade in if they have good AI skills, but without engaging deeply with the course, should be immediately rewritten. Closed-book examinations where the questions are predictable (and therefore can be prepared in advance using AI tools) are not immune.
2. The point above requires that **every member of staff involved in setting exams should have a deep working understanding of AI tools.** Institutions should provide ongoing training in AI tools and robust assessment design. Staff should familiarise themselves with AI tools and use them regularly.

3. **Institutions should adopt a nuanced policy which reflects the fact that student use of AI is inevitable and often beneficial.** If their assessments are robust, institutions need not fear educating students on the responsible use of AI, where it can genuinely aid learning and productivity. A failure to teach AI actively risks widening digital divides between those willing to try AI tools and those too timid or lacking the digital skills to do so. It would also risk students failing to develop a deep understanding of issues of bias, hallucinations, the environmental impact and the use of students' personal data associated with AI tools.
4. **Institutions should keep AI policies under constant review as the capabilities of AI technologies develop.**
5. To achieve the above goals, **institutions should seek opportunities to cooperate.** Alone, no one institution can make the great strides required to adapt to AI fully. The mission groups and Universities UK should share best practice and create forums for institutions to collaborate on mutual problems.

Endnotes

- 1 Josh Freeman, *Provide or punish? Students' views on generative AI in higher education*, HEPI Policy Note 51, February 2024 <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2024/02/01/provide-or-punish-students-views-on-generative-ai-in-higher-education/>
- 2 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, *AI Opportunities Action Plan: government response*, Gov.uk, 13 January 2025 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-opportunities-action-plan-government-response/ai-opportunities-action-plan-government-response>
- 3 Liv McMahon et al, 'PM plans to 'unleash AI' across UK to boost growth', *BBC News*, 12 January 2025 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crr05jygzkxo>
- 4 Juliette Rowsell, "Academics 'fear students becoming too reliant on AI tools'", *Times Higher Education*, 17 January 2025 <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/academics-fear-students-becoming-too-reliant-ai-tools>
- 5 Jack Grove, 'Student AI cheating cases soar at UK universities', *Times Higher Education*, 1 November 2024 <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/student-ai-cheating-cases-soar-uk-universities>
- 6 The University of Law, *Lonely millennials choose AI over a loved one to share their problems*, 2 November 2023 <https://www.law.ac.uk/about/press-releases/millennials-share-problems-with-ai/>
- 7 Russell Group, *New principles on use of AI in education*, July 2023 <https://russellgroup.ac.uk/news/new-principles-on-use-of-ai-in-education/>
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