Principles for use of artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) is an umbrella term for a range of technologies that often attempt to mimic tasks completed by humans, such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and decision-making. These systems may rely on large amounts of data to function effectively. UCU believes that the following high-level principles should be applied when considering implementing an AI system in educational settings including teaching, research, human resource and organisational processes and they should serve as a basis for risk and impact assessments. The introduction of AI technologies in education and research must be subject to consultation and agreement through recognised collective bargaining processes prior to implementation to assess the potential impact on working conditions, academic practice, and staff roles.

1 The use of AI in education must uphold academic freedom, maintain the integrity of assessments, and protect the fundamental values of student learning. AI should not be used to automate grading, assessment design, or feedback in a way that diminishes the professional role of educators or undermines trust in decision-making.

2 Human interaction and trust built between educators and students is fundamental to education and central to positive outcomes for students. It must be actively safeguarded in the implementation of AI-driven technologies.

3 Employers should ensure the AI systems they use are auditable and regularly impact assessed to ensure fairness and accessibility for all irrespective of class, race, age, ability, gender, sexual orientation, contract type and other protected and marginalised characteristics.

4 AI should enhance employment conditions, workload sustainability, and career progression for educators and researchers, with clear protections against its misuse in performance monitoring. AI technologies must never be used to undermine staff and student wellbeing, erode job security, deskill academic roles, making hiring decisions or enable intrusive surveillance of staff or students.

5 Educators and researchers are skilled professionals whose intellectual, creative, and pedagogical autonomy must be recognised and respected. The use of AI technologies in the sector should enhance professional judgement, not replace or diminish it. The sector must establish clear governance frameworks to ensure AI remains an assistive tool under human control.

6 Institutional decisions should be explained and justified factually with no decision affecting students or staff taken without meaningful human oversight and accountability. The origin, quality and governance of data used in any AI-driven technologies must be transparent, auditable, and aligned with ethical and legal standards.

7 Education on technologies, their uses, social benefits, advantages, costs, biases and limitations should be a core part of professional development provided to all education workers, as well as education provided to students. Training must be developed in collaboration with trade unions.

8 Employers must justify and strictly limit the collection of data for AI systems, ensuring compliance with data protection regulations, ethical safeguards, and principles of academic freedom. Data collected should not be repurposed beyond its original intent, and robust governance must prevent its misuse.

9 Copyright generated by educators, researchers, professional services staff and students must be protected and must not be used to train AI systems without consent. The academic community and copyright holders must defend Intellectual Property rights, ensuring educational content is used to enhance human learning and understanding and not exploited by AI-driven platforms without fair compensation.

10 Procurement of AI tools must be justified, transparent and guided by ethical standards which prioritise open access, data protection, and public good. It should also align with sustainability commitments demonstrated by conducting an environmental impact assessment. Partnerships with commercial vendors must not compromise of student or staff data.