# AI reshapes higher education as students seek skills for an evolving workplace



Like it or not, artificial intelligence (AI) has become an integral part of the modern higher education experience. Recent data shows that a vast majority of students are already using AI tools—particularly large language models (LLMs)—as part of their academic routines. A 2024 global survey by the Digital Education Council found that 86% of students use AI in their studies, with over half engaging with these technologies weekly. ChatGPT remains the most popular tool, cited by around two-thirds of students.

This broad adoption reflects more than convenience—it signals a significant shift in how students learn and prepare for their careers. Today’s learners are tomorrow’s workforce, and employers increasingly expect graduates to possess at least basic AI literacy. Those with advanced skills in using AI tools, particularly LLMs, are likely to have an edge in a rapidly evolving job market.

While AI use in education provokes mixed reactions, many experts argue that teaching students to use it responsibly is essential. They compare AI literacy to learning traditional academic tools, such as lab equipment or artistic materials. However, unlike static tools, AI evolves constantly, requiring regular updates to teaching methods and curricula to keep pace with technological advances.

Despite AI’s widespread use, many students feel unprepared. More than half of those surveyed reported lacking sufficient AI-related knowledge and skills, and nearly half did not feel ready to enter an AI-powered workplace. This highlights the need for structured AI literacy programmes that go beyond basic functionality to cover areas such as prompt engineering and ethical considerations. Building these competencies is key to helping students engage with AI thoughtfully, critically and effectively.

UK research confirms these global trends. A study by the Higher Education Policy Institute found that more than 90% of UK university students now use AI at least occasionally, up sharply from two-thirds just a year earlier. Students most often use AI to save time and improve the quality of their work. However, a notable minority remain cautious about submitting AI-generated content without modification, reflecting growing awareness of academic integrity issues in the AI era. The study also reveals disparities in AI use, with socioeconomic status and gender influencing both frequency and effectiveness.

The rapid spread of AI in education presents significant challenges. Educators now face the dual responsibility of encouraging innovative learning while addressing concerns over academic dishonesty. Many find themselves both facilitating AI-driven learning and monitoring adherence to academic standards. This has fuelled calls for clear policies and guidance around AI use in academic settings.

Beyond practical concerns, the future of AI in education raises broader societal questions. Responsible AI implementation requires comprehensive teacher training and curriculum redesign to reflect changing ethical and societal needs. AI literacy must go beyond technical skills to include a wider understanding of how these technologies operate and their impact on society, ensuring students can approach AI with both competence and critical awareness.

To support this transition, the Digital Education Council has developed the DEC AI Readiness Framework, designed to help universities assess their preparedness for AI integration and guide strategic planning for responsible AI innovation.

Ultimately, AI’s presence in higher education is not just inevitable—it is an opportunity. By equipping students with the tools and knowledge to use AI ethically and effectively, universities can position the UK as a leader in the AI-driven future of work and society. The challenge ahead lies in embracing AI’s potential while addressing its risks, ensuring that graduates emerge not only as proficient users but as responsible innovators.

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## Bibliography

1. <https://edtechmagazine.com/higher/article/2025/07/advantages-equipping-students-leading-ai-tools> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.digitaleducationcouncil.com/post/what-students-want-key-results-from-dec-global-ai-student-survey-2024> - A 2024 survey by the Digital Education Council found that 86% of students globally use AI in their studies, with 54% using it weekly. ChatGPT is the most widely used AI tool, with 66% of students using it. Despite high usage, 58% of students feel they lack sufficient AI knowledge and skills, and 48% feel unprepared for an AI-enabled workplace. The survey included over 3,800 students from 16 countries.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/d591fb1a-9f6c-4345-b5fc-781e091ae3f8> - A study by the Higher Education Policy Institute revealed that over 90% of UK university students use AI, up from two-thirds the previous year. The primary reasons for using AI are time-saving and improving work quality. However, only a minority consider it acceptable to use AI-generated content without editing. The study also highlighted digital divides in AI competency, with men and wealthier students being more frequent users.
4. <https://campustechnology.com/Articles/2024/08/28/Survey-86-of-Students-Already-Use-AI-in-Their-Studies.aspx> - A 2024 survey by the Digital Education Council found that 86% of students use AI in their studies, with 24% using it daily and 54% weekly. ChatGPT is the most common tool used, cited by 66% of respondents. Despite widespread use, 58% of students feel they lack sufficient AI knowledge and skills, and 48% feel unprepared for an AI-enabled workforce. The survey included 3,839 students from 16 countries.
5. <https://www.axios.com/2025/05/26/ai-chatgpt-cheating-college-teachers> - The widespread use of generative AI in education is creating significant challenges for high schools and colleges, as students increasingly rely on tools like ChatGPT to complete assignments, often crossing into cheating. A survey from January 2023 revealed that around 90% of college students had already used AI for schoolwork, highlighting how embedded these technologies have become in academia. Educators are struggling to adapt, with many assuming dual roles as both teachers and AI detectors.
6. <https://educationaltechnologyjournal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41239-024-00448-3> - This article examines the transformative impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in educational settings, focusing on the necessity for AI literacy, prompt engineering proficiency, and enhanced critical thinking skills. The integration of AI into education offers personalized learning and support for diverse educational requirements. However, it presents challenges, including the need for comprehensive educator training and curriculum adaptation to align with societal structures. AI literacy is identified as crucial, encompassing an understanding of AI technologies and their broader societal impacts.
7. <https://www.linkedin.com/posts/digital-education-council_how-students-use-ai-the-evolving-relationship-activity-7237372607048687616-Lnoz> - According to the Digital Education Council’s 2024 Global AI Student Survey, 86% of students already incorporate AI into their studies, with 54% of students utilizing AI on a weekly basis. To help higher education institutions stay ahead, the Digital Education Council offers the DEC AI Readiness Framework, enabling evaluation of an institution's AI readiness or maturity.