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How can we empower teachers to use AI without undermining their professionalism or relationships with students?

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It should be noted that this report reflects a range of discussions and views, and not necessarily the views of the author.

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming increasingly embedded in our everyday lives. In their 'Generative AI in education' guidance, the Department for Education (DfE) committed to explore the safe use of new AI technology and maximise the benefits for education.[1]

AI is already being used across the sector. The Technology in Schools Survey 2024 to 2025, estimated that it is being used by two fifths of teachers.[2] The key uses of AI they identified were in lesson planning, administration, giving written feedback and marking, as well as in delivering live lessons.

Advocates of the use of AI in education argue that it has great potential to transform education through its capabilities to automate administrative tasks for teachers, deepen personalised learning and make education systems more accessible.[3] This also includes its potential to reduce teacher workload and alleviate pressures on teachers, both issues which are currently leading to poor wellbeing and poor teacher retention. Education Support's 2025 wellbeing index reported that 69 per cent of staff who have considered leaving education in the last academic year cited volume of workload as the main reason for considering leaving their jobs.[4]

Furthermore, the DfE used the Schools White Paper to announce their teacher retention programme, one feature of which is empowering teachers to harness the power of AI to "amplify their impact, streamline their workload, and preserve their irreplaceable role in shaping learning".[5]

However, an increase in efficiency effected by AI use does not necessarily decrease the workload of a teacher. The time saved by automating marking or lesson planning using AI tools may just translate to further responsibilities, rather than a reduction in overall workload.[6]

The speed at which new AI technology has been adopted by teachers has also outpaced many schools' ability to develop suitable policies. Of teachers surveyed by National Education Union (NEU) in February 2026, only half stated that their school had a policy on AI usage for staff and students.[7]

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[1] Department for Education, *Generative Artificial Intelligence in Education*, GOV.UK, 12 August 2025, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/generative-artificial-intelligence-in-education/generative-artificial-intelligence-ai-in-education#introduction.

[2] Department for Education, *Technology in Schools Survey: 2024 to 2025*, November 2025, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/692834a6ce50d215cae9610e/Technology_in_schools_survey_2024_to_2025_research_report.pdf.

[3] World Economic Forum, *How AI can accelerate students' holistic development and make teaching more fulfilling,* May 2023 https://www.weforum.org/stories/forum-institutional/ai-accelerate-students-holistic-development-teaching-fulfilling/.

[4] Education Support, *Teacher Wellbeing Index 2025*, https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/3qeajx41/teacher-wellbeing-index-2025.pdf.

[5] Department for Education, *Every child achieving and thriving,* February 2026, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-achieving-and-thriving.

[6] Professor Rebecca Eynon, *The Use of Artificial Intelligence and EdTech in Education: Call for evidence*, June 2026, https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/167446/pdf/.

[7] National Education Union, *State of education: AI,* April 2026, https://neu.org.uk/latest/press-releases/state-education-2026-ai?_locale=en.

Similarly, previous Education Policy Institute (EPI) research shows that the use of these tools varies across different school types and education settings.[8] And the DfE technology survey found that "teachers in academies were more likely to use any of the AI tools at least sometimes (46 per cent vs. 38 per cent of teachers in LA-maintained schools)."[9] This variation in approach and differing levels of preparedness raises concerns about the potential for AI use to exacerbate existing inequalities in the education system.[10]

In July 2026, the Education Policy Institute partnered with the NEU to convene a roundtable of sector experts, MATs and academics to discuss the ways in which we can empower teachers to use AI without undermining their professionalism or the ways in which they build relationships to their students. The roundtable discussion considered:

- How teachers are currently approaching AI and who is driving its use;
- Evidence of the effectiveness of AI and the risks its introduction poses;
- How teacher agency can be upheld during the introduction of AI tools into the education system; and
- How government policy can reflect the needs of teachers.

The discussion was framed by Carlos Vargas, the Chief of Section for Teacher Development at UNESCO, who shared insights from the Teacher Task Force's recently published report, *Promoting and protecting teacher agency in the age of artificial intelligence*.[11] "This report considers the important challenges and opportunities that AI poses for the education system. It also talks about the uncertainty about the role and authority of teachers in managing and moderating AI in the best interests of their students and their own professional agency.

Further UNESCO research also highlights that teachers need to have the confidence, autonomy and knowledge to enable them to use AI to effectively augment pedagogical concepts and remain the creative designers of learning experiences.[12]

Participants were invited to discuss how policy can uphold the important and irreplaceable role of teachers and ensure that AI tools and systems support, rather than replace, the core responsibilities and professional competencies of teachers as educators.

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[8] Lily Wielar and Jon Andrews, *AI in MATs*, January 2026, https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/exploring-multi-academy-trust-approaches-to-artificial-intelligence/.
[9] Department for Education, *Technology in Schools survey: 2024 to 2025*.
[10] Kevin Latham and Rebecca Montacute, *Artificial advantage?,* July 2025, https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Artificial-advantage.pdf.
[11] International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, *Promoting and protecting teacher agency in the age of artificial intelligence,* 2025, https://teachertaskforce.org/knowledge-hub/promoting-and-protecting-teacher-agency-age-artificial-intelligence.
[12] Fengchun Miao and Mutlu Cukurova, *UNESCO AI competency framework for teachers,* 2024, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000391104.locale=en.

The roundtable was concluded by participants considering what more is needed from the sector and from policy to ensure that the potential for AI to transform education is harnessed, and the risks and challenges are minimised.

Other participants at the roundtable will not be named in this summary paper, as the discussion was held under the Chatham House Rule.

We are grateful to the NEU for supporting this work and to all participants for their contributions. This report, including recommendations, reflects a range of discussions and views. It does not necessarily represent the views of any particular participant, the author of this report, the NEU or EPI.

Part 1: Current approaches to AI use by teachers and leaders: training, governance and effectiveness

Participants were asked to discuss how the teaching workforce is currently using AI, including identifying current popular uses of AI tools in and outside of the classroom, as well as examples of how Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) have created policies in relation to it.

Participants discussed the ways in which generative AI is being used by teachers not solely as a time-saving or workload reducing measure, but rather as a tool through which they could enhance teaching and learning, as well as improve their relationships with students. In particular, teachers that participants had consulted were positive about the potential of AI for inclusion, equity and adaptation of materials, but they were much less focused on saving workload.

For example, generative AI was described as a tool teachers could use to augment their teaching practices and speed up the process of adapting curricula to suit a particular cohort of pupils. One participant shared an example of Notebook LM being used by an experienced teacher to adapt a lesson plan or piece of content to meet the needs of a vulnerable student who had joined their GCSE class late. In this example, the generative AI tool enabled personalised learning that this teacher would not typically have been able to provide due to time and workload constraints. The tool enabled the teacher to enhance their relationship with their student and improve their teaching.

Teachers also used AI tools for creating flashcards in Notebook LM for a language class. The participant described that this was previously a manual task which either the teacher or student produced for themselves, but using AI to do this enabled the teacher to improve the resources students were using to reinforce learning.

In general, participants reported that teachers and teaching staff were positive about the potential of AI, especially in areas such as improving access to the curriculum for every learner, in particular for learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) or for those whom English is an additional language (EAL). However, this stood in tension with teachers' level of confidence in both government policy and the technology industry's ability to create both the tools and strategy needed to effect potential positive change.

How have school and MAT leaders engaged with their staff around the use of AI, and how is AI being governed?

Participants therefore discussed how school leaders have approached AI use by staff, including conversations they've had with them and whether they have AI policies.

Previous EPI research has shown that school leaders are approaching AI use in different ways across their schools.[13] At this roundtable, there were two differing approaches that leaders were taking in order to approach the use of AI specifically by teachers and teaching staff.

[13] Lily Wielar and Jon Andrews, *AI in MATs*.

Some MAT leaders argued that a structured approach to teacher use of AI, including a detailed AI policy, is necessary. They shared their approaches of centring AI and tech in their CPD programmes, appointing dedicated AI leads in each academy who oversee AI governance, and ensuring that AI and new tech is trialled in a controlled and effective way.

One participant felt that it was necessary to regulate which tools teachers are using because of data protection and security concerns. This participant mentioned ChatGPT as a generative AI tool which staff were instructed not to use, due to ethical and data concerns. It did not seem, however, that participants agreed on one particular AI tool which they instructed staff to use or that was embedded in their AI policy or training. In some schools, a particular AI tool or programme is recommended or prescribed, such as Microsoft Copilot or Notebook LM, which often depended on the rest of their technology suite.

Other participants argued that a more prescriptive approach requires more structured policies and training opportunities to support staff who are less comfortable with using technology more widely.

Teachers who had expressed anxieties over using AI, as they were concerned about being caught out for doing so incorrectly, also feared their pedagogy being constrained by being told to use specific tools at work.

One MAT representative explained that their approach to teaching staff use of AI was to create a culture of trust, giving staff autonomy over how and which tools they use, but ensuring they remained accountable for what happened in their classrooms and the quality of their teaching. This also enables staff to create their own relationship with using AI, giving decision and agency to teachers. Other participants expressed some concern about this accountability lever and emphasised the importance of clear training and guidance for staff in order to ensure quality of teaching and pedagogical integrity is upheld.

Another MAT leader described that they have taken the lead of teachers who are more experienced with or interested in AI to share their skills and expertise. This predicated a teacher-led approach, which participants agreed encourages a level of agency for teachers and may lead to more impactful practices being implemented across a school. Teachers with a specific interest and expertise in AI use were encouraged to create training materials to share their knowledge with other staff members. Creating a dedicated way, such as through INSET sessions, for teachers to share resources and ideas around AI use with their colleagues could have the effect of creating more agency in AI decision making for individuals.

Other logistical and technical questions were raised that schools and MATs need to address when preparing teachers for the use of generative AI tools. These include procurement questions around the purchase of specific tools and the training around these tools, and how to ensure tech teams within schools effectively set up AI tools for staff use. The level of confidence in addressing these technical aspects differs across different schools, which suggests a lack of consistency in AI training for both senior leaders and classroom teachers.

How are teachers currently being trained and upskilled in the use of AI?

In the DfE's 'The Safe and Effective Use of AI in Education' training materials, published in May 2026, the department sets out the FACTS framework.[14] The framework reminds users to Focus prompts, Analyse outputs, Check for bias, Tailor suitability and Strengthen prompts.

One participant said that they had rolled out guidance in their academies in order to ensure staff approached AI critically. For some schools and MATs, creating an AI policy was difficult because of how quickly technology and government guidance changes. This leader stated that using a framework such as FACTS enables staff to approach the use of AI with critical lens and protects teachers' pedagogies by not prescribing specific use or tools, and instead teaching staff "digital metacognition".

However, the government's School and College Voice survey, published in December 2025, found that of those surveyed, only 12 per cent of primary school leaders and 16 per cent of secondary school leaders said they knew "a lot" about the DfE's online resources for the safe and effective use of AI.[15]

Some trust leaders described research programmes they have undertaken across their schools around staff use of AI, the information from which they have used to inform their policies.

In one trust, feedback from staff has led to implementation of a subject-specific training approach. This means that AI training is positioned through the lens of the subject which the teacher is specialised in. This was because they found that general AI in education training, while necessary and important, often misses teachers who are perhaps more likely to feel a lack of agency in the AI adoption process.

Therefore, they recommended that in order for AI to be an effective way to improve inclusion in the classroom, impact teachers' workloads and enhance the quality of their teaching, AI training must be done through a subject-specific lens. This was seen to enable teachers to make decisions surrounding how and when to use AI tools to augment pedagogical theories which relate directly to their specialisms and teaching styles.

How effective are AI interventions for teaching and learning?

Much of the messaging around generative AI, from within the sector and the government, has been focussed on its potential to reduce teacher workload, including in the DfE's Generative AI in Education policy paper, published in August 2025.[16]

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[14] Department for Education, *The safe and effective use of AI in education,* May 2026, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a06cca7c0cc74b4523e4e6f/Leadership_transcript.pdf.
[15] Department for Education, *School and college voice: December 2025,* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-and-college-voice-omnibus-surveys-for-2025-to-2026/school-and-college-voice-december-2025#generative-artificial-intelligence-ai.
[16] Department for Education, *Generative Artificial Intelligence in Education*.

One participant shared insight from a research project, conducted with teachers across different schools, investigating teacher use of AI in lesson planning.[17] The study randomly assigned teachers to groups in order to compare the lesson preparation time of teachers who used ChatGPT (as much or as little as they'd like) and teachers that didn't.

The research concluded that while the group of teachers using ChatGPT overall experienced a reduction in the time taken to lesson plan, some teachers saved more time than others. Teachers who were more confident in their technology skills saw greater time savings, and teachers who were less confident in their subject knowledge also used AI more than teachers with more experience or confidence.

There was, however, a consensus amongst participants that it was important not to view reducing workload as generative AI's sole, or most important, purpose. This is not least because the introduction of new tools to a teacher's day to day work may not affect an immediate reduction in an individual's workload, as staff need to take the time to learn and be trained on using new tools. Previous EPI findings have also discussed that the effectiveness of AI interventions are dependent on schools' and teachers' ability to tailor tools to their own context,[18] and participants emphasised that teaching staff should be provided with the time, space and tools with which to evaluate effectiveness of different AI tools for different purposes.

Other drawbacks around AI's ability to reduce teacher's workloads were also discussed. These included the fact that using automation to produce content such as lesson plans and classroom resources in fact may mean teachers producing more than usual, rather than working less. Other participants also mentioned that using AI safely and effectively, including in both designing prompts and in reviewing produced work for errors, may not decrease workload dramatically for teachers.

Participants agreed that research on the potential effectiveness of AI use by teachers is limited and mainly focused on the workload issue. Some participants argued that more research into how effective AI tools can be in helping teachers to augment their pedagogical practices to be more inclusive is necessary.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The DfE should build on their AI in Education training materials and promote them more to ensure they're widely used. This could include more subject-specific guidance and use cases.

Recommendation 2: The purpose of AI tools should not be positioned solely for efficiency and timesaving and instead should be considered as a tool with which teachers can augment and adapt their teaching practices to support inclusion and effective learning.

[17] Education Endowment Foundation, *ChatGPT in lesson preparation – Teacher Choices trial,* September 2026, https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/choices-in-edtech-using-generative-ai-chatgpt-for-ks3-science-lesson-preparation-2024-teacher-choices-trial.
[18] Joni Kelly, Building an effective school system, March 2026, https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/building-an-effective-school-system/.

Part 2: Evaluating the risks of teachers using AI

Having considered the ways in which teachers were already using AI, the roundtable invited participants to consider the potential risks of teachers using AI.

The risk to professionalism and pedagogical practice

Participants considered the potential impacts of AI on teaching practice as a whole and on teachers' pedagogies, as well as the ethical considerations of introducing a new technology into their work.

One participant said that teachers felt that they had not engaged with lesson content as much as they normally would when they had used AI tools for lesson planning. They also reported that interactions in the classroom were affected by their own lack of in-depth engagement with lesson content beforehand.

The concept of cognitive offloading is an increasing area of research in educational psychology, and recently published studies have identified the impact of students using AI tools to think about, plan and produce their work, and therefore offloading cognitive effort.[19] Participants at the roundtable identified that cognitive offloading is a risk that teachers also experienced in relation to using AI to automate certain tasks, especially those relating to content preparation and interacting with students' work.

When teachers were not required to think in depth about specific elements of the curriculum, they felt they were losing their expertise and understanding of their own subject. Some teachers reported a loss of spontaneity related to lesson delivery because of a lack of familiarity with the content of the lesson plan, and also the element of pre-programming that sometimes comes with these tools. Therefore, participants emphasised cognitive offloading as risking the fundamental nature of teaching as a relational practice and highlighted that it was important for the design of AI tools and policy to address this risk.

These risks were considered as potentially greater for early career teachers, because they do not have the baseline experience or skills around lesson design. Early career or trainee teachers lacked some skills to critique content that the AI lesson planning tool was creating for them and missed out on the learning and development of pedagogical concepts which underpin teaching. Participants shared concerns that teachers were cognitively offloading to AI tools, which was affecting their ability to teach students effectively.

Participants discussed some of the risks around using AI to mark students' work. They discussed that, while adaptive systems and AI used for marking students' work may save some teachers time, they may also have the effect of reducing a teacher's understanding of their students. For example, a teacher not reading a student's work fully may lead to misunderstanding the real areas a student may be struggling with. Automation of marking may lead a teacher to believe a high performing

[19] Kamila Misiejuk, Sonsoles Lopez-Pernas, Rogers Kaliisa and Mohammed Saqr, *Cognitive offloading in student–AI collaboration: A longitudinal analysis of prompting strategies*, May 2026, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2451958826002046

student does not have many areas to improve in, but a closer look at their work may suggest further ways for that student to develop their capabilities.

Research conducted by the National Institute of Teaching in 2024 also showed that the teachers and students they spoke to had concerns about the impact on their relationships.[20] Participants discussed that automating marking might however free up teachers' time to be used for relationship building in different ways, though this was countered by the suggestion that teachers' reduced understanding of how their students are developing is a threat to student/teacher relationships.

Research also suggests that the pedagogical benefits that can be afforded by teacher use of AI to augment teaching practices relies on teacher competence and ability to use AI tools effectively, as well as the design and interface of the AI tool itself.[21]

Therefore, participants expressed concern that without regulation of which AI tools are being used in education settings or without embedded AI training, students may be experiencing the impact of AI use by teachers in unequal ways.

More broadly, some participants stated that because teaching is such a fundamentally relational practice, the risk of widespread use of AI across the profession is that of undermining the fundamentals of being a teacher.

In particular, without implementation being enacted in a considered and people-first way, some participants described a risk of de-professionalisation. These included the pedagogical concerns of cognitively offloading, as well as the perception of the profession in society.

One participant described that although workload pressures were a challenge in teaching, so was the perception of teachers and attitude towards them from society. This participant expressed that introducing AI use may lead to teachers being perceived as lazy or incapable, or indeed not subject matter experts. This was seconded by another participant who mentioned that they had been working with the parents of students in their MAT to explain how AI can be used to support learning in a way which ultimately requires teacher expertise at the forefront.

More positively, another participant shared experiences of speaking to students about how they viewed teaching and learning in the age of AI. Students described that while they were able to use AI tools at home and found them effective as learning tools, many of them understood that a teacher's value is a lot more than just delivering content. For example, students highlighted their teacher's ability to understand them and their weaknesses, as well as the ways in which they explained content to them, as something they didn't feel an AI tool could emulate.

However, it did reveal another tension. The participant described that some students expressed that they felt they had a greater understanding of how to work with AI tools than their teachers.

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[20] The Department for Education, *Use Cases for Generative AI in Education*, August 2024, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66cdb078f04c14b05511b322/Use_cases_for_generative_AI_in_education_user_research_report.pdf

[21] Mutlu Cukurova, *A conceptual framework for teacher-AI teaming in education*, OECD Digital Education Outlook 2026, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2026/01/oecd-digital-education-outlook-2026_940e0dd8/062a7394-en.pdf.

This suggested to the participant that there is also a risk of negative perception developing towards teachers who are not using AI tools, or indeed not using them effectively or correctly.

The risk of misuse of AI tools

Participants discussed the risk of AI tools either not being used in the correct and effective way, or without properly researched policy and structures to enable its safe use. They identified a few different possible risks involved with misunderstanding of AI.

There was firstly an ethical and safeguarding concern for participants. Teachers who have not had the correct training around using generative AI and other artificial technologies, may not have an understanding about the risks involved with using sensitive data.

Some MATs shared their approaches to the safe use of AI, but some participants suggested that teacher understanding around the dangers of misusing AI, especially in the context of sensitive pupil data, varies greatly across schools and the country as a whole.

Another risk identified by participants was teachers using technology which is either unsafe to be used within a school or educational environment due to data protection or ethical concerns, or does not suit the needs of teachers properly. One participant shared their experience as a governor of a local primary school, where the headteacher and leadership team at the school had found it very difficult to create a policy or access resources to help understand which AI tools they should be creating this policy around.

But there are also risks of going too far the other way. Overly stringent guidelines or prescribed tools or technology could alienate some teaching staff and erode trust and engagement.

Finally, participants identified a wider issue, which was the risk of AI being considered the sole solution for deeper structural problems in the education sector. Participants highlighted lack of funding, poor support for teachers' mental health and the widening responsibilities which are placed on teachers due to pressure on other public services. Therefore, they agreed that it was important for AI to not be used to solve the deeper problems facing the education system.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 3: The DfE should consider further developing their AI in education policy to create a nationwide strategy which focuses on evidence-informed research into the effectiveness and risks of teachers using AI. This research should be teacher and educator led.

Part 3: Harnessing AI to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning, while mitigating potential risks

Participants discussed how guidance on the use of AI in schools can strike the balance between clear government policy and strategy, whilst also allowing for teacher agency. Within this, participants identified some key ways the DfE, teacher training providers and schools can work together to ensure that some of the benefits are realised, and the risks are understood and minimised.

How can we ensure equitable access to resources?

Participants identified a lack of a clear AI policy and strategy in schools as the biggest risk when it comes to staff and students' use of AI, reflected also in Ofsted's research into early adopters in 2025,[22] but that there is a huge disparity in policies and access to resources across different school types.

Therefore, participants felt that to ensure teacher professionalism is maintained, schools and teaching staff must be provided with adequate toolkits, advice and resources to inform their internal AI policies. They recommended that future government policy acknowledges the varying access to resources and local support between different schools, and that government guidance on the use of AI in education is fair and appropriate to all schools.

This gap is also evident when you consider AI use by private and state schools. The Sutton Trust's 2025 study into teacher use of AI, which had a particular emphasis on inequalities in use between different types of schools, revealed that 27 per cent of private school teachers they polled said their school has a clear school-wide staff strategy on using AI, compared to 9 per cent of state school teachers.[23]

The participants also acknowledged that the government's 'Using AI in education' support materials, developed by Chiltern Learning Trust and the Chartered College of Teaching, is a positive step in setting a precedent for a larger trust sharing knowledge and experience.[24] Participants recommended that further knowledge sharing, especially focussed on the rich and varied experiences of teachers, should underpin updates to government guidance.

Examples of knowledge sharing platforms focused on AI and edtech more generally were given by one participant. These included Google's "AI in Education" online group, Computing at School, STEM Learning's community forum and the Good Future Foundation. However, other participants at the roundtable acknowledged that these resources or groups were not always well known.

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[22] Ofsted, *'The biggest risk is doing nothing': insights from early adopters of artificial intelligence in schools and further education colleges*, June 2025, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ai-in-schools-and-further-education-findings-from-early-adopters/the-biggest-risk-is-doing-nothing-insights-from-early-adopters-of-artificial-intelligence-in-schools-and-further-education-colleges.

[23] Kevin Latham and Rebecca Montecute, *Artificial Advantage?*

[24] Department for Education, *Using AI in education settings: support materials,* June 2025, https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/using-ai-in-education-settings-support-materials.

Participants agreed that the DfE could do more to ensure examples of best practice in AI use, decision making around procurement, and wider resources can be more easily shared between schools.

The discussion also acknowledged that AI policy is often difficult to both design and implement, due to the speed with which technology changes and new evidence emerges. Participants therefore emphasised the importance of policy being principle-based.

An example of this was the UNESCO AI Competency Framework for Teachers, which focuses on the principles of safe AI use in education, rather than a prescriptive framework of how it should be used.[25] The framework is designed as a guide for national AI competency frameworks and teacher training programmes, and promotes the key principles of ensuring inclusive digital futures; approaching AI in a human-centred way; ensuring that AI tools used in education are trustworthy and environmentally sustainable; and viewing interaction and collaboration between teachers and learners as indispensable to the teaching profession.

Alongside this, participants felt that it was important to remember the context in which schools and teachers are making decisions about their AI strategies, teacher training and procurement of technology. Given the strain on the current education system, alongside the programme of policy reform schools and educators will be expected to implement in the coming years, participants were concerned that government strategy will position AI as an efficiency tool, rather than an effective way in which teaching and learning can be enhanced.

How should teacher training be designed to support the safe and effective use of AI?

For most participants, redesigning teacher training, including both Initial Teacher Education and Continuous Professional Development, to include education around AI was a priority for policy in the short term. One participant emphasised that empowering practitioners to use AI ethically and effectively is essential to shaping the future of education to ensure it remains a human-centred practice. This was also positioned as a way to empower teachers to make judgements about AI in order to understand and manage the risks that inequalities are exacerbated.

This view was not universal. Other participants were wary about recommending that the government introduce AI tools into teacher education too early, due to the risks of cognitive offloading discussed previously. They suggested that teachers should undergo their ITT without specific intervention related to AI, as it is more important that teachers understand the key pedagogical principles that they are expected to emulate in their practice.

As when discussing school or MAT AI policies, participants acknowledged that it is difficult for training providers and the government to keep pace with new technologies which evolve so rapidly. Participants therefore emphasised that a focus on critical AI literacy, or "digital metacognition" would be essential to ensuring teacher training around AI stands the test of time.

One participant emphasised how critical literacy is a skill that can move with teachers, meaning that even if they are not exposed to AI-specific training within ITT, they are still able to critically

[25] Fengchun Miao and Mutlu Cukurova, *UNESCO AI competency framework for teachers.*

analyse AI outputs. The participant likened it to safeguarding, which is a core principle embedded as part of the teaching practice and stays with the teacher throughout their career.

Findings from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), released after this roundtable took place, found that while many (83 per cent of) students questioned reported that they do fact-check output from AI sources, fewer numbers of students understood the value of checking information against scientific evidence, instead prioritising common sense in their interpretation of AI material (37 per cent).[26] This emphasises the point made by participants that teachers having AI critical literacy skills means that they can model these to their students, in relation to student use of AI outside school for learning or leisure.

How can we ensure that AI tools used by teaching staff are suitable and safe?

Participants emphasised the importance of safe and education-specific tools. This was a theme that Andreas Schleicher highlighted at the launch of the PISA findings in London in September 2026; he recommended that governments needed education-specific AI tools, rather than general purpose AI tools.[27]

Similarly to the question of the actual effectiveness of AI tools in education, more research is needed when it comes to what is both safe and effective to use in education settings.

At the beginning of this year, ten trade unions signed a joint call to action to ensure that AI and edtech's procurement and subsequent roll out is done so with the input of teachers and educators.[28]

Overall, participants appreciated the DfE's product safety standards guidelines on generative AI, as well as the development of their new lesson planning tool in conjunction with Oak National Academy, Aila.[29] However, many felt that the government could go further with their intervention on the design and procurement of AI tools. The Ada Lovelace Institute and the Nuffield Foundation's 2025 review of AI and Education in the UK suggested that there is a long way to go for the Department for Education to ensure regulation and standardisation of edtech and AI products for use by schools and educators.[30]

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[26] Andreas Schleicher, *PISA 2025: Insights and Interpretations,* September 2026, https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/support-materials/2026/09/pisa-2025-results-volume-i_5265bfb1/PISA%202025%20Insights%20and%20Interpretations.pdf.
[27] Andreas Schleicher, *PISA 2025: Insights and Interpretations.*
[28] Trade Union Congress, *An urgent call for educator voice in AI and EdTech from 10 unions,* January 2026, https://www.tuc.org.uk/urgent-call-educator-voice-ai-and-edtech-10-unions.
[29] Department for Education, *Aila: A lesson Assistant,* May 2025, https://ai.gov.uk/knowledge-hub/tools/aila:-ai-lesson-assistant/
[30] Renate Samson and Kruakae Pothong, A learning curve? A landscape review of AI and education in the UK, January 2025, https://www.adalovelaceinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Ada-Lovelace-Institute-Nuffield-Foundation-A-learning-curve.pdf.

Participants also appreciated that the EdTech Evidence Board project, developed by the Chartered College of Teaching,[31] is still in its pilot stage so it is difficult to understand its potential or effectiveness yet, but they felt encouraged by the early stages of the project.

While there are lots of edtech and generative AI companies vying for an in to the market, the government has a duty to not only make recommendations on the best technology to use, but to ensure teachers and leaders are central to the development and design of these tools. As one participant said, the design of AI is not inevitable.

Participants highlighted that the procurement of technology itself should draw on the rich knowledge and experience of teachers, MAT leaders and other educators to build both regulations surrounding AI in education and ensure the effectiveness of subsequent tools.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 4: The DfE should consider introducing AI training as a compulsory requirement of Initial Teacher Training and Continuous Professional Development programmes, to avoid the misuse of AI tools.

Recommendation 5: Critical literacy regarding AI should be embedded from the earliest stage of teacher training and considered a core principle of the teaching practice, so that teachers are empowered to decide and determine how and when they use AI.

Recommendation 6: The DfE should ensure teachers are central to the design, and therefore procurement, of AI products to be used in education settings.

[31] Chartered College of Teaching, *EdTech Evidence Board Project*, June 2025, https://chartered.college/news-blogs/edtech-evidence-board-project-insights-from-phase-one/.

Conclusion

The views of participants at the roundtable and their recommendations for future policy highlighted the importance of AI in education policy reflecting the views and needs of teachers and teaching staff. In particular, a heavy emphasis was placed on both the need for schools and trusts to have the resources to develop clear AI policies and strategies, as well as the need for teacher training and development to be reconfigured in an age of AI.

Examples given by MAT leaders showed that AI is already being used by teachers to augment their teaching practices and support effective teaching and learning. Discussion regarding AI use by teachers and teaching staff, however, revealed that there is a variation of approaches being taken when it comes to AI governance within MATs.

Participants discussed the risks of AI use by educators, which included the threat to professionalisation and teachers' pedagogical practice, as well as the risks that come along with AI use not being governed properly and in a safe and effective way.

A main theme throughout the roundtable was that the introduction of AI tools into teaching practice and into the classroom has the potential to positively impact teaching and learning, but that using this technology comes with big responsibility to ensure that the core of teaching remains a relational practice and teachers retain agency in the process of AI introduction.

Therefore, participants made recommendations to ensure that future government policy addresses these risks and ensures that future use of AI tools in education and their embedding in teacher training is done so in a thoroughly researched manner and with a teacher-first approach. These recommendations reflect a range of discussions and views. These do not represent the views of any particular participant, the author of this report, the NEU or EPI.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The DfE should build on their AI in Education training materials and promote them more to ensure they're widely used. This could include more subject-specific guidance and use cases.

Recommendation 2: The purpose of AI tools should not be positioned solely for efficiency and timesaving and instead should be considered as a tool with which teachers can augment and adapt their teaching practices to support inclusion and effective learning.

Recommendation 3: The DfE should consider further developing their AI in education policy to create a nationwide strategy which focuses on evidence-informed research into the effectiveness and risks of teachers using AI. This research should be teacher and educator led.

Recommendation 4: The DfE should consider introducing AI training as a compulsory requirement of Initial Teacher Training and Continuous Professional Development programmes, to avoid the misuse of AI tools.

Recommendation 5: Critical literacy regarding AI should be embedded from the earliest stage of teacher training and considered a core principle of the teaching practice, so that teachers are empowered to decide and determine how and when they use AI.

Recommendation 6: The DfE should ensure teachers are central to the design, and therefore procurement, of AI products to be used in education settings.

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