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Artificial intelligence: how have Learning Developers engaged?

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Presentation abstract

The ALDinHE Artificial Intelligence (AI) Community of Practice (CoP) was established in the summer of 2023. It has an international membership of over 200 Learning Developers. The CoP meets monthly to discuss an AI-related topic. Since its inception, topics have included organisational approaches to AI, AI in assessment, maths and statistics, and the use of AI in Learning Development tutorials. The group is keen to create an opportunity to share current projects, approaches, and thinking.

This wildcard session replicated a world café-style event on a smaller scale. It required a large room. Tables were hosted by colleagues from Abertay University, Bournemouth University, De Montfort University, the University of Manchester, the University of Northampton, and Spurgeon's College. Each host led a 15-minute session, sharing their AI-related project with delegates seated around the table, which included a short presentation followed by an opportunity for delegates to share their views and exchange

ideas. After 15 minutes, the delegates moved to another table. Within the hour, the delegates rotated around three tables.

It was hoped that delegates would attend the session to expand their understanding of AI. Delegates who use AI in their day-to-day work had an opportunity to share their experiences, while delegates who were less experienced could expand their understanding and discuss with their peers the challenges and opportunities that AI brings to Learning Development.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; Learning Development; academic integrity; student tutorials; grade grubbing.

Community response

This session was designated as a ‘wild card’. It was delivered as a world café-style event in which participants visited different tables for facilitated conversations around specific themes. From conception to delivery, this session was a collaborative endeavour with colleagues from universities from across the UK organising and participating in the discussions. For such a pervasive topic as generative AI (GenAI), this approach allowed for a multitude of different voices and perspectives to be shared.

One of the key benefits of this approach was its inclusivity, inviting participants with varying levels of knowledge to engage throughout the session. Often sessions on GenAI assume a certain level of knowledge, which can be isolating or limit their usefulness for participants. By providing a discursive space, participants could share, learn, challenge, and develop ideas in real-time. The community found this to be a refreshing approach.

This session was separated into five 15-minute discussion topics that participants moved through during the session. Each table was facilitated by a member of the presenting team and focused on different themes:

1. Where are we with all things GenAI? The good (practice), the bad, and the learning (creating guides to support policy).
2. Grade grubbing in a GenAI landscape: the early days.

3. Beyond Ctrl+C: exploring student behaviour with text generative AI.
4. Embedding AI support across academic skills: where do you start?
5. 3G AI (GenAI and the generation gap): are our mature students at a disadvantage?

Participants valued the facilitators' presentations, as these provided a foundation for discussion, and they were positive about the range of themes covered on each table. Specifically, participants responded positively to the discussion around experiences of using AI for different cohorts of students, including for learners who were mature, international, first-generation, or from arts or STEM backgrounds. From these discussions came an agreement on the need to reflect on teaching practices to find what each cohort may need in terms of their AI literacy development. When working with mature students, for example, Learning Developers may need to encourage them to 'play' with different tools and discuss how they could be applied to their learning. For younger students, however, it may be more necessary to focus on how to use AI as an additional learning tool to develop their critical engagement with a topic, rather than using it simply to write their assignments for them – shifting their perspective from output creation to deeper engagement.

Reflective themes emerged on some of the tables that emphasised the pace of change in this developing landscape. These discussions provided participants with the opportunity to reflect on the previous academic year and the significant developments not only in students' engagement with AI tools but also in their own practice and engagement. For those from outside Learning Development with an AI background, it was a chance to hear more about the emerging practice within the field of Learning Development and how colleagues are using and informing policy across the higher education sector. One participant commented on the positivity in the room and shared their excitement at the number of colleagues involved in HE policy and practice.

The practical approach of some themes was praised by participants, who appreciated the 'real world' ideas that were suggested by attendees. For some delegates, who admitted to finding AI a large and complex topic, the sharing of activities and reflection on their use with students was the highlight of the session and a key takeaway from this year's conference.

Next steps and additional questions

GenAI and its importance for Learning Development is an emerging and growing topic. The community felt there was a clear need to facilitate these types of conversations more frequently to provide a space to engage with this emerging field as individuals and as a Learning Development community. The question therefore becomes: how can we capture these discussions and subsequent actions to share with the community and monitor progress being made across the sector? The structure of this session emphasised discussion, which is an excellent tool for bringing the community together to discuss complex issues. How can we encourage more of this style of session and support colleagues who choose to deliver in this way?

Authors' reflections

Kate Coulson

It was wonderful to bring together a group of GenAI and Learning Development experts from across the UK to share their expertise as part of this session. It clearly enabled many delegates to not only discuss GenAI in generalities but also understand projects related to GenAI within and across five institutions. Often colleagues will comment that they understand what GenAI is, but they are unable to translate it into their day-to-day work. This session did exactly that through offering tangible examples to the community.

Kerith George-Briant

Where are we with all things GenAI? The good (practice), the bad, and the learning (creating guides to support policy).

Thank you to those who came to listen to Abertay University's journey with GenAI and how the Learner Development Service is engaging with and shaping the conversation at our university. As we develop further guidance related to staff and student use of GenAI, I will have in mind, and hope to act on, useful responses from conference delegates. This includes engaging with the university's legal team, considering information on the ethics of GenAI, and whether the institution's checklist for students to ensure they are adhering to local AI conventions should be integrated into the submission rather than existing as a

guide only. I am grateful to everyone who offered their thoughts, as these will help us to support our students more effectively.

Steph Allen

Grade Grubbing in a GenAI landscape: the early days.

This session offered an overview of the term ‘grade grubbing’ and how it manifested in higher education particularly from 2012 to 2017 (before the widespread availability of GenAI). Since GenAI has become available without clear guidelines or regulations institutionally, nationally, or globally, individuals have experimented with the software. In the education sector, staff are still learning what GenAI is and deciding on its role in their courses. They are doing this in a context where limited training is available (or at least funding to attend it), alongside mixed messages about GenAI from their institutions in terms of its usefulness and value.

Student GenAI activity over recent months – experimenting with these tools and submitting coursework as their own – has resulted in a significant increase in academic misconduct panels having to determine institutionally appropriate uses of GenAI. Potential problems could arise if a marker used GenAI to grade a student’s submission. Alternatively, if students use the software to predict a mark ahead of their submission, this could create a pathway for them to question their institutionally awarded grade in favour of a machine-generated one. This creates a conundrum for unpicking a student’s request for a review of their institutional grade without them understanding how the marker reached a grade, how to improve work for their next assessment, or accept that marker-awarded grades represent the institution award rather than the student choosing the grade they want.

Participants acknowledged that this behaviour was happening in their institutions. They were concerned this issue would likely increase, so wanted information on how to prevent such misconduct. The long-term picture was noted as confusing. We all wanted answers that are supported by policies and procedures – but without stifling innovation. Through sharing stories and experiences, we can perhaps develop useful policies and guidelines that are underpinned by appropriate pedagogical support for our students now and in the future.

Bev Hancock-Smith and Zara Hooley

Beyond Ctrl+C: exploring student behaviour with text generative AI

This session was our first opportunity to share qualitative research exploring current and emerging practice in students' use of text GenAI at De Montfort University. Initial thematic analysis of the interview transcripts identified three overarching categories:

1. Student drivers to engage with text GenAI.
2. The ways in which they are using it.
3. Students' metacognition around usage, including de-skilling, ethical considerations, and wider societal impact of AI for knowledge creation.

Focusing on theme one, we provided delegates with a snapshot of the data and invited them to get 'hands on' by carrying out a mini-coding exercise. The practical approach fostered rich discussion around emerging themes and provided delegates with the opportunity to reflect on student AI behaviours at their institutions. Conversations continued after the session where connections were made with several institutions who are developing work in this area, including Queen's University Belfast and Brunel University of London.

Many thanks to delegates for sharing valuable insight, ideas, and observations in our session. A broader perspective on student behaviour has been hugely beneficial in the development of this research, and it will help inform findings and recommendations in our subsequent paper that is due for publication later this year.

Carlene Barton

Embedding AI support across academic skills: where do you start?

The session was immensely useful in allowing us to share our approach to incorporating AI across our academic skills and other teaching programmes, alongside providing an opportunity to gain feedback and ideas from peers.

At the University of Manchester, we have worked with our students to develop a reflective questionnaire around ethics, purpose, and data when using GenAI as well as information

materials on some of the most popular applications according to our students. Our approach has aimed to have students conduct metacognitive reflection on their use of AI and other support and technologies where relevant to make informed and purposeful decisions.

We have produced creative commons licensed materials, which I shared during the session for feedback. The discussions at the conference have led to connections with other colleagues working in the same area, and it helped us consider how we might scale the offer. A standout for me was the work of Tim Worth at the University of Bristol in developing AI playgrounds (see Worth, 2024).

Jo Dowds

3G AI (Generative AI and the Generation Gap): are our mature students at a disadvantage?

It was stimulating to discuss with delegates how different generations of students interact with AI during their learning journeys. As educators, many of us could resonate with the differing experiences students across generations have with AI, so this became a useful self-reflective exercise as practitioners around our experiences of using AI. As a direct result of this reflection, we built on our understanding through discussing how not all students have the same experiences with AI. This means our approaches need tailoring to support students' learning journeys.

In discussing what each generation may need to support them with their use of AI, we developed practical applications such as encouraging older generations to 'play' with AI and supporting younger generations to use AI as a tool to facilitate their writing voice rather than a tool that will 'write for them'. It was great to learn during the session that Learning Developers at the University of Sheffield are undertaking a project focusing on the student experience of AI. This would be useful to contribute to the wider conversation. Maybe they could share their findings through the ALDinHE AI CoP? Thanks to all who were honest in their reflections and creative in coming up with relevant strategies to support students with AI.

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Thank you to all the contributors who shared their reflections and enriched our insight into this conference presentation and its impact on the audience.

The authors and contributors did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

Further reading

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Author details

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presented at national and international conferences. Kate is the Deputy Chair of the Association of Learning Developers in Higher Education (ALDinHE).

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Carlene Barton is an eLearning specialist at The University of Manchester Library. Her interests are in digital skills, AI, and accessibility. She has worked in higher education focusing on academic skills for ten years having previously spent eight years as a learning developer. Carlene is a member of the Association for Learning Technology, and she is currently working towards Senior Fellow of Advance HE and CMALT.

Bev Hancock-Smith is a Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Learning and Study Support at De Montfort University. She has taught in the further education and higher education sector for over 15 years. Bev is a Fellow of Advance HE.

Jo Dowds is a Study Skills Specialist and Tutor of Theology. She empowers UK university students across all disciplines and levels to succeed academically through enhanced study skills. She also supports university lecturers in unpacking the impact of neurodiversity on students' learning. Jo holds a variety of roles: teaching theology at Spurgeon's College and the Light College; working as a proofreader for PhD theses; and working at a further education arts academy in Poole as a Learning Specialist supporting students and teachers facilitating an accessible environment of learning. Jo is a Fellow of Advance HE.

Steph Allen is Principal Academic in Learning Development and Academic Integrity at Bournemouth University. She is a member of the QAA Academic Integrity Advisory Group, co-chair of the ALDinHE AI CoP, and hosts the Academic Integrity Speaker Series I and II. Steph is a Senior Fellow of Advance HE. She was awarded the ENAI Exemplary Activism Award in 2024.

Kerith George-Briant manages the Learner Development Service at Abertay University. She believes there is much to learn about engaging with GenAI. Kerith is a member of the

ALDinHE AI CoP, contributes to the Jisc AI and Accessibility workshops, and is a member of the Scottish Artificial Intelligence in Tertiary Education Network (ScAITEN).

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