



Building tomorrow's learning landscape through AI integration and development in higher education

Shivani Wilson-Rochford

Birmingham City University, UK

Alice May

Birmingham City University, UK

Presentation abstract

Birmingham City University (BCU) has responded proactively to the evolving landscape of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in higher education by creating written guidance and workshops for staff and students. This initiative addresses prevalent concerns surrounding AI in education and is rooted in a sector report assessing the positions of higher education institutions (HEIs) and offering guidance on effective integration of GenAI use in teaching and assessment.

Our project carries several impactful aspects, including written guidance and workshops for staff and students, which reflects BCU's dedication to addressing common concerns surrounding GenAI in education. Furthermore, the multi-agency collaborative approach brings diverse perspectives to the table. The different perspectives enable us to tailor our learner development offer through knowledge of curriculum and assessment in a particular discipline and whether that discipline is more susceptible to GenAI use than others.

Finally, the insights from learner developers in creating student guidelines ensure the project is attuned to the needs and concerns of the student body, promoting a student-centred approach.

This session focused on an institutional take on GenAI through the collaborative development of staff and student guidance at BCU. The presentation outlined the new AI staff and student guidance project and discussed how effective integration of GenAI education has been implemented at BCU. Furthermore, it also noted positive influences of GenAI through our new staff and student workshops which bring together existing and new

knowledge around academic integrity and assessment literacy. Finally, it highlighted next steps around AI integration for the Education Development Service at BCU.

Delegates can implement learnings from BCU's approach by initiating cross-departmental collaborations to develop GenAI guidelines. Furthermore, advocating for a proactive GenAI education through staff and student workshops is a key takeaway from this presentation with the aim of encouraging a future-focused mindset for learning development. We hope that the attendees gained insights into driving student-oriented and sector-informed GenAI integration in education. The presentation concluded by outlining next steps, focusing on core strategic initiatives like transforming assessment and the Access and Participation Plan.

Keywords: GenAI guidance; workshops; cross-departmental collaboration.

Community response

Participants were keen to hear about the guidelines and workshops created by colleagues at Birmingham City University. As one LD commented:

It was really good to see the range of staff guidelines and student guidelines developed at BCU, especially the combination of workshops, introductions to workshops and open drop-ins ... [T]he presenters acknowledged there is not one way to talk to students about AI and it can be challenging to address groups with diverse skills and base knowledge. So a lot of what we do now has to be necessarily trial and error.

What was evident in this session was the level of sharing of experiences and frustrations in relation to our response to developments in AI and the consequent impact on students and our practice as LDs. For example, there was lively discussion about the unfairness of AI detectors. As one LD said:

The presenters touched on the discussion around detection [...] This prompted a collective sharing of other stories by the session participants, especially around the seemingly despised tool developed by Turnitin, but also other platforms which promise high detectability, but often end up accusing [...] neurodiverse and international writers/learners.

One LD posed the question of whether – in light of the workloads and difficulties in undertaking AI training for so many staff – universities should consider having AI champions. The idea of AI champions is an interesting one, and it would need further thinking through; however, perhaps given the extent to which AI is developing, we need these types of radical questions and ideas from the community. As another LD wrote, perhaps there are no easy solutions and maybe it is about getting back to the ‘nuts and bolts’ of what writing is and what it is for:

What became clear is that solutions will be hard to come by but one thing we can all try is to approach writing as a process, rather than a product, which is what we have mostly done so far. Writing should not just be a form of assessment; indeed, we should write in class together, develop these skills collectively, experience them in the classroom. We should encourage students to engage with AI-generated outputs critically, to reflect and to learn to discern quality.

Overall, there was an overwhelming appreciation from the audience for the guidelines and workshops developed at Birmingham City University and a recognition that current approaches to AI in education are largely trial and error, given the rapidly evolving nature of the technology. The session facilitated valuable sharing of experiences and frustrations among Learning Developers regarding AI's impact on students and our educational practices.

At the same time, there was a significant concern about the fairness and accuracy of AI detection tools, particularly their potential to unfairly flag work by neurodiverse and international students. The idea of designating AI champions within universities was proposed as a potential solution to manage the complexities of AI integration. The suggestion to refocus on writing as a process rather than a product was seen as particularly promising when it comes to encouraging students to engage more deeply in writing and criticality when it comes to AI-generated content.

Next steps and additional questions

Given the level of flux and rapid advancements regarding GenAI technologies, the session provoked many questions about how we respond as an LD community:

- How can we develop more inclusive and accurate methods for distinguishing between AI-generated and human-written content?
- What conditions need to be met to successfully introduce AI champions in universities? What would their role and responsibilities be?
- How can we ensure that the focus on AI integration does not overshadow other important aspects of learning? Are process-oriented writing practices the answer, and, if so, how can we effectively integrate them into LD sessions across different disciplines?
- What support and resources do Learning Developers need to effectively navigate and lead in this new AI-integrated educational environment?

Authors' reflection

The attendee comments, and the acknowledgment of the trial-and-error nature of approaches to AI in HE, are highly appreciated. We are very encouraged by the positive remarks about BCU's early steps in integrating AI into HE, and felt most welcomed in such a supportive atmosphere, one in which we are all new to AI in education. We are pleased that so many LDs display an open-mindedness and willingness to try new things, in turn sharing successes and failures with colleagues. At BCU, we are working toward developing an AI student committee and have faculty representatives to champion developments, which was a much-appreciated suggestion. We hope this approach will help build a positive, rather than fearful, attitude towards AI, and allow more open dialogue across our institution. We aim to create a supportive environment in which staff feel safe to experiment with AI in their teaching and assessment, while guiding them to do so within the 'cyber secure' parameters of safe practice (in partnership with our IT and Legal and Compliance departments). We aim to share our next steps in subsequent conferences and will continue to communicate with and learn from other HEIs in sharing ideas and approaches.

Acknowledgements

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/or contributors used the following generative AI tools in the preparation of the conference slides (*not* this manuscript): Pi AI. The tasks performed by [Pi AI] include brainstorming initial ideas and structure for the presentation slides to create a skeleton outline. The authors have complied with the JLDHE's principles of AI use.

Author details

Shivani Wilson-Rochford is a Senior Learner Developer at Birmingham City University where she specialises in academic staff and student development with particular focus on feedback, assessment literacy and design, artificial intelligence in HE, and academic integrity. Shivani comes from an applied linguistics background and has a keen interest in the way language shapes learning and academic development. She has also published work around how language and discourse is presented in politics.

Alice May is a Learner Developer at Birmingham City University supporting both international and home students in academic writing and academic English. She also delivers staff training on a range of topics including supporting international students, student transitions into UK HE, and most recently the implications of AI for the HE sector. While by no means professing to be an AI expert, Alice has a curiosity to explore the potential learning benefits offered by AI, for both students and staff.

Licence

©2024 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE) is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE).