Fogarty Foundation Excellence in Education

GENERATIONAI: YOUTH INSIGHTS PAPER

What young Western Australians think about AI in education



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Foreword

Alex Jenkins
Director
WA Data Science Innovation Hub



Reading this report, I was struck by the gap between how often young Western Australians use AI and how worried they are about it. They have questions about their education and future employment that those of us working with the technology need to answer.

More than 300 young Western Australians, led by eight Youth Ambassadors, contributed to GenerationAI. They shared their experiences, concerns and ideas for how AI should be used in education. I congratulate the Fogarty Foundation, Paris McNeil and the Youth Ambassadors on the care and effort behind this initiative and report.

Some of the findings are confronting. More than half of those surveyed use AI at least weekly, yet most respondents who expressed a view were pessimistic about its impact on jobs. Nine in ten agreed that AI risks reducing young people's ability to think for themselves. Working in AI, I find that last result particularly hard to ignore.

The recommendations in this report give the WA ecosystem plenty to think about. Students want clear guidance on the appropriate use of AI within their education and how to evaluate its outputs. Students also want schools to rethink assessment. They want companies to take greater responsibility for the AI systems they build. I agree with these outcomes - we cannot expect students to work all of this out for themselves.

Many are having to do just that. Almost half of respondents had picked up what they knew about AI informally or through their own efforts, often on social media. More than one in five had received no opportunity to learn about AI through guided training. In a state as large and diverse as Western Australia, we cannot leave that opportunity to chance. Where a student lives or which school they attend should not determine whether they get a sound introduction to a technology that will affect their working life.

At the WA Data Science Innovation Hub, this is a priority for us. Through *AI Liftoff*, we have now reached more than 1,000 students in Western Australian schools. AI Liftoff is helping teachers develop AI learning tools for their own classrooms and helping students gain an understanding on how the technology works. When students use AI to make something, they have to decide whether the result is high quality, identify mistakes and work out what needs changing. That experience can help students develop the judgement they need to use it well. There has never been a more important time for students to leave school with strong critical thinking skills, and these are the very skills at risk if we use AI blindly or without consideration.

There is plenty at stake for Western Australia. AI has applications across mining, agriculture, health and energy, and could create opportunities in industries we are only beginning to imagine. We need to prepare young people for that work. Their education should also give them the confidence to challenge an AI result or question a decision to use it.

The report sets out specific changes to teaching, assessment and teacher training, alongside expectations for technology companies. Some will take time and coordination across the education system. Others can inform what happens in classrooms now.

I encourage readers to consider which recommendations they can help put into practice. The young people who contributed have put considerable thought into them. We owe them the same care in our response, and a continuing role in the work that follows.



About GenerationAI

GenerationAI is a youth-led initiative delivered by the Fogarty Foundation, and facilitated by Paris McNeil. The initiative was created to better understand young people's ideas, priorities and perspectives on the role of AI in education.

GenerationAI created a platform where young people could explore complex issues, contribute to research, engage with decision-makers, and co-design solutions surrounding how AI is approached in education.

Why This Research Was Conducted

Too often, decisions about young people are made without meaningfully involving them in the process. Young people have strong views about the role AI should play in their education, but many lack the platform, connections and opportunities to communicate those views directly to the people making the decisions.

This peer research was designed to help bridge that gap. Through the GenerationAI initiative, consultations were held with groups of young people across Western Australia, alongside a survey of 15 to 25-year-olds. Together, these activities engaged more than 300 young people about their experiences with AI, their concerns, and their ideas for the future.

The research aimed to better understand what young people think about AI, the impact it is already having on their education, and what they want the future to look like. It also aims to give their views a stronger platform and a clearer pathway to decision-makers, researchers and system leaders, so that young people's perspectives can help inform future policy, practice and program design.

The research was conducted by Paris McNeil of Thriving Futures Co and the GenerationAI Youth Ambassadors, supported by the Fogarty Foundation.

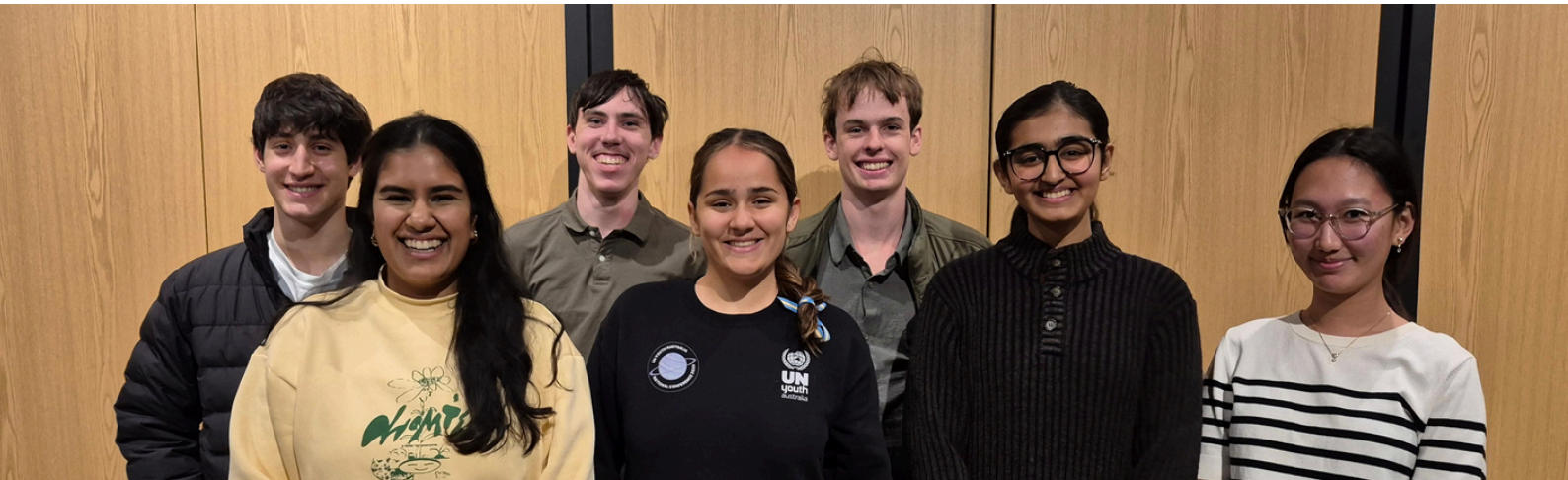
The GenerationAI Youth Ambassadors

GenerationAI was led by eight Youth Ambassadors aged between 15 and 25. They shaped the direction of the project and brought perspectives from their own experiences and networks.

The Youth Ambassadors identified the themes explored through the consultations and survey and helped to co-facilitate these conversations.

The Youth Ambassadors presented their perspectives to decision-makers at roundtables and stakeholder events, and ideated solutions including by drafting the recommendations contained in this report.

A big thank you goes to the Youth Ambassadors for the time, ideas and energy they contributed to the initiative.



About the Collaborators

The Fogarty Foundation is a social venturer, advancing change through education. Founded in 2000 by Brett and Annie Fogarty, it creates opportunities by partnering with purpose-driven organisations and supporting individuals' talents and aspirations. Its work currently spans three focus areas: empowering high-potential young people through initiatives such as the UWA Fogarty Scholarship and the Fogarty Ripple leadership program, investing in teachers and school leaders so every WA student receives a quality education, and sparking innovation by blending STEM, creativity and strong community connections. Committed to excellence, leadership and innovation, the Foundation believes education is society's most powerful lever for lasting impact.

Paris McNeil, the facilitator of GenerationAI, is the Founder and CEO of Thriving Futures Co and a 2026 Churchill Fellow. Paris helps people build the human skills needed to thrive in a tech-driven world. Her work focuses on empowering people to think well, communicate effectively and act deliberately, with a focus on helping young people develop critical thinking and practical AI literacy skills.

A passionate advocate for the youth voice, Paris is committed to equipping young people with the skills, confidence and opportunities to influence decisions about technology and become agents of change in shaping their futures.

Fogarty Foundation
Creating opportunity, realising potential.

PARIS MCNEIL

Paris McNeil



A Message from the Youth Ambassadors

We joined GenerationAI because other young people around us were worried about what AI means for their futures, and almost no one making decisions was asking us. We wanted to be heard, and to put our ideas in front of the people who could act on them.

So we listened to even more young people. We ran in-person consultations with the UWA AI Club, Youth Futures students, regional students in Bunbury and more groups. The opinions differed a lot from room to room.

We then took those insights to a roundtable with Dr Sara Ratner, Principal Investigator of the AI in Education at Oxford University initiative, where youth, academics, researchers and industry each had a seat at the table. We also gave a short speech to a room full of decision-makers on the future of work, data privacy and critical thinking. What we learned is that when young people are given a real voice, what they offer is specific and useful.

What surprised us most was how worried and negative so many young people were about AI. We also expected jobs and the future of work to dominate the conversation, but young people we spoke to were far more concerned about AI's impact on critical thinking, learning and the environment.

The change we will push hardest for is a standardised, nationwide K-12 AI literacy curriculum, covering the ethics, the rules and how AI actually works. AI is increasing productivity in every sector, and we are the students about to enter that job market. Alongside this, we want strict regulation of AI companies, especially on their environmental impact, because responsibility shouldn't sit with students alone.

As Youth Ambassadors, we are asking decision-makers to involve young people in the laws made about AI in education, at a much higher level than this. Our recommendations are clear and specific, and it's time to move from talking about the problem to solving it. Many students are struggling right now, and they shouldn't have to wait.

Written by Alina on behalf of the GenerationAI Youth Ambassadors



Aayushi



Aedan



Alina



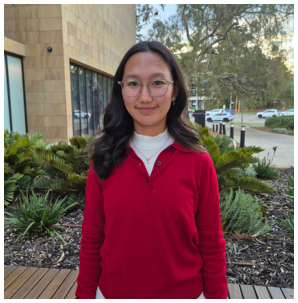
Shree



Colin



Elizabeth (Elly)



Enkhmisheel (Michelle)



Athanasios (Thanos)

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Introduce a standardised AI literacy curriculum for K-12 students

This could look like:

- Teach students how AI works, its limitations, risks and ethical considerations, alongside critical thinking and decision-making about when and how to use it.
- Include age-appropriate content on emerging risks such as deepfakes, AI companions, misinformation and image generation.
- Implement a flexible national curriculum that can adapt as the technology changes.

Recommendation 2: Assess the learning process, not just the final output

This could look like:

- Design assessments that make students' thinking, reasoning and learning processes visible.
- Use more practical, oral, portfolio, project-based and supervised assessments.
- Where AI is used, assess how students question, check and refine its outputs.

Recommendation 3: Keep AI-use optional in schoolwork and assessments

This could look like:

- Every student learns about AI, but students are not required to use generative AI tools.
- Frameworks such as "don't, may, must" or traffic-light systems should preserve the option to complete work without AI.

Recommendation 4: Prioritise education-specific AI tools over general-purpose chatbots

This could look like:

- Implement AI tools which are purpose-built EdTech products that support specific learning goals, such as Socratic questioning or guided problem-solving.
- Design tools to support students' thinking rather than simply providing answers.
- Limit the use of general-purpose tools such as ChatGPT, Claude and Copilot in schoolwork.

Recommendation 5: Introduce an AI licence for students

This could look like:

- An age-appropriate "AI licence", similar to a Pen Licence or Bunsen Burner licence, completed before students gain access to particular AI tools or use cases.
- Students should learn about AI and demonstrate that they understand how to use it safely and appropriately before using it independently in schoolwork.

Recommendation 6: Create a trusted source of information about AI

This could look like:

- A government-backed resource or website explaining common AI platforms, their features, risks and data practices.
- An up-to-date fact-checking resource to verify claims about AI or AI products circulating online.

Recommendation 7: Provide AI literacy training for teachers

This could look like:

- Train educators in the limitations, risks, data protection requirements and appropriate classroom use cases for AI.
- Give teachers clear examples of appropriate student and teacher AI use.
- Require teachers to be transparent with students about when they have used AI.

Recommendation 8: Create youth-led AI changemaking opportunities

This could look like:

- Youth forums and roundtables connecting young people with decision-makers, researchers and industry.
- Leadership and advocacy programs that help young people develop and champion solutions.
- Resources that support young people to facilitate youth-led AI changemaking projects in their schools and communities.

Recommendation 9: Introduce clear standards, specific data protections and transparent reporting requirements for AI products used in schools

This could look like:

- Similar to the UK's Generative AI product safety standards, require any AI products used in schools to meet strict requirements, including:
  - Protections for students' data.
  - Transparency about the sourcing of training data.
  - Transparent reporting and compliance requirements.
  - AI products should not be anthropomorphised.

Recommendation 10: Introduce strict regulation for AI companies to account for their environmental impact

This could look like:

- Set environmental standards for data centres, including cooling systems, location and their impact on surrounding communities.
- Require transparent reporting of energy, water and other environmental impacts.
- Require companies to invest in innovative solutions to reduce or offset their environmental footprint.

Recommendation 11: Improve regulation & guardrails for AI image generation

This could look like:

- Restrict access to AI image generators, particularly for people under 18.
- Require clear labelling or watermarking of AI-generated images.
- Introduce stronger safeguards against non-consensual and deepfake image generation.

Methodology and Limitations

The evidence presented in this report comes from two sources: the Youth AI Survey and seven face-to-face youth consultations conducted across Western Australia.

The Survey

The Youth AI Survey was an anonymous online survey completed by 236 eligible young people aged between 15 and 25 in Western Australia. It combined closed-response questions with three open-text questions.

As the open-text questions were optional, some questions received fewer than 236 responses. Where this occurs, the relevant sample size is provided alongside the finding.

The survey sample was weighted towards younger participants, with 78% of respondents aged 17 or under and 79% who were in high school. The majority of respondents (55.5%) identified as female with 34.3% identifying as male and 6.4% as non-binary or gender diverse.

Age	n	%
15-17	184	78.0%
18-20	30	12.7%
21-25	20	8.5%
Age not stated	2	0.8%
Total	**236**	**100%**

Location	n	%
Perth Metropolitan Area	163	69.1%
Regional WA	51	21.6%
Remote WA	11	4.7%
Prefer not to say	11	4.7%
Total	**236**	**100%**

The Consultations

Seven youth consultations were conducted as a part of this peer research. These were face-to-face facilitated group discussions which gave young people an opportunity to discuss their experiences with AI, and explore their concerns, priorities and ideas in greater detail.

Consultations were conducted with:

- *GenerationAI* Youth Ambassadors
- Mandurah Coder Dojo
- Bob Hawke College students
- UWA Artificial Intelligence Club
- Youth Futures students
- Manea Senior College students
- Bunbury Youth Advisory Council

How the Evidence Was Analysed

Closed-response survey questions were analysed using counts and percentages. Open-text responses were grouped into recurring themes. In total, 195 respondents provided at least one open-text response. Theme percentages are based on these 195 respondents, with each person counted once within each theme.

Consultation notes were analysed by consultation group and by theme. Because the consultations were qualitative group discussions, the findings are described in terms such as “raised across several consultations” or “raised by some participants”, rather than being converted into percentages.

The survey and consultation evidence were then considered together. The survey provides an indication of how commonly particular views appeared among respondents, while the consultations provide greater depth about why young people held those views, the experiences behind them and the solutions they proposed.

Quotes throughout this report come from survey open-text responses and consultation notes. Some quotes have been shortened to the most relevant passage or lightly edited for spelling and punctuation, without changing their meaning.



Limitations

This project conducted peer research. Its purpose was to capture young people’s perspectives, identify recurring concerns and priorities, and provide a platform for young people to contribute to conversations about the role of AI in education.

The survey received 236 valid responses, a fairly small sample size and is therefore not intended to represent the views of all young people in Western Australia. Participation was voluntary, meaning young people with a greater interest in AI or stronger views about the issue may have been more likely to participate. The sample was also weighted towards high school-aged respondents.

The consultations provide rich qualitative insights, but each should be understood within the context of the particular group involved. The groups differed considerably in their demographics, experiences, and existing knowledge of AI.

An issue that dominated one consultation may therefore have been discussed very differently, or not raised at all, in another.

For these reasons, the findings should be read as insights into what participating young people think, why they hold those views and the patterns that emerged across the research.

The findings have intentionally been presented as an insights paper, rather than a comprehensive research report. It’s designed to showcase the high-level findings, recurring themes and solutions emerging from the data, while keeping young people’s voices at the centre of the report.

Use of Generative AI

Generative AI tools were used to assist with organising and analysing data and preparing this report. All findings, interpretations and outputs were reviewed and verified by Paris McNeil from Thriving Futures Co on behalf of the Fogarty Foundation.

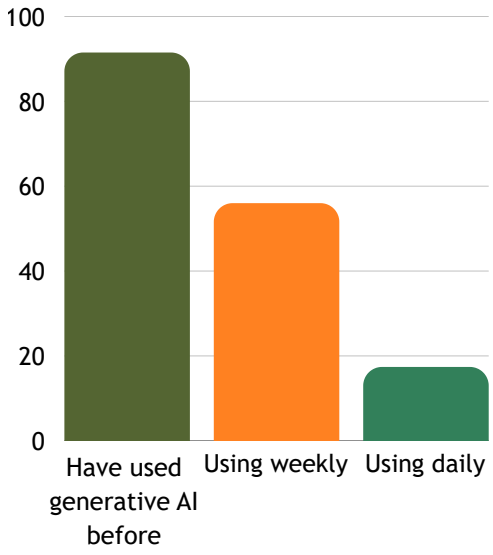
Findings

1. Worried, But Using It Anyway: Attitudes Towards AI

1.1 Young people are worried about AI, but that isn't stopping them from using it

Most respondents expressed concern or pessimism about AI and its broader impacts, while also reporting frequent use of the technology themselves. Among respondents who expressed a view, **70.4%** of survey respondents were **pessimistic** about AI's impact on jobs and the future of work, compared with only **13.5%** who were **optimistic**.

FIGURE 1: Respondents' use of AI tools



Concern was even stronger when young people were asked about AI's impact on their ability to think for themselves. **90.1% agreed or strongly agreed that AI risks reducing young people's ability to think for themselves. (n=210)**

This was one of the clearest findings across the project. Concerns about critical thinking, cognitive offloading and becoming too reliant on AI came up repeatedly in both the survey and consultations.

Despite this, AI use was widespread. **91.5% had used generative AI before (n=216), and 56% reported using it at least weekly, including 17.4% who used it daily (n=236)**

Many young people are worried about AI and its effects, but are using it anyway. For some, this is because they feel they risk being left behind if they don't use generative AI tools.

1.2 Regular users were less negative about AI

How often young people used AI was linked to how they felt about it.

Those who choose not to use generative AI (n=45) were especially negative, with **95.6% of non-users describing themselves as pessimistic about AI's impact on jobs and the future of work**. More frequent users, particularly daily users, were more likely to be optimistic.

But using AI more often did not mean young people were broadly positive about it. Pessimism still outweighed optimism, even among frequent users.

Many young people could see the benefits of AI and use it regularly, while still having serious concerns about its broader impacts.

1.3 Critical thinking is the #1 concern

Critical thinking was the issue that dominated young people's concerns across both the survey and consultations.

In **five of the seven consultations,** participants chose critical thinking as the first issue they wanted to discuss. Concerns about young people outsourcing thinking, becoming reliant on AI or losing foundational skills also came up repeatedly in the survey's open-text responses.

76.8% of open text respondents raised critical thinking, independent thinking, or cognitive offloading as an issue **unprompted.**

These concerns were not limited to young people who were generally pessimistic about AI. Many who recognised its benefits also worried about a decline in critical thinking skills and what could be lost if AI becomes the default response to difficult tasks.

1.4 They are using it, but they don't trust it

Using AI regularly does not mean young people trust it.

73.7% of respondents stated that they were uncomfortable or very uncomfortable with how AI tools collect, store, use or share their data.

Similarly, across the consultations, participants repeatedly raised concerns about the tech companies who are building and controlling AI. Their distrust was often directed less at the technology itself and more at how major technology companies collect data, make decisions and make profit from these systems.

Young people questioned whether these companies could be trusted to protect personal information, act in users' interests and make responsible decisions about how AI is developed and used. It painted a picture of high AI use coupled with significant concern and low trust.

1.5 Young people want stronger boundaries

Young people said they want more rules and clear boundaries when it comes to AI use in education.

Nearly one quarter (23.7%) of survey respondents proposed a complete or near-complete ban on AI in education. Others supported clearer rules and guardrails around when and how AI should be used.

The consistent message was that even though young people are currently using AI, they don't want it to be a free-for-all. They want clear, transparent boundaries around when AI use is appropriate, how it should be used, and where human thinking and learning need to be protected.

> "AI should be used as a learning tool, not a replacement for students' own thinking. Students should be allowed to use AI with clear guidelines, transparency, and a focus on developing critical thinking and practical skills."
>
> ***21-year-old male***

2. Critical Thinking and Cognitive Offloading

Concern about AI's impact on independent thinking and learning was the most consistent theme that emerged from both the survey and consultations.

90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that AI risks reducing young people's ability to think for themselves. 76.7% were concerned about students relying on AI before developing basic knowledge and skills, and 76.3% were concerned about students accepting AI-generated answers without fact checking.

Young people also raised this issue repeatedly without being prompted. **76.8% of respondents who provided open-text answers raised critical thinking, independent thinking or cognitive offloading in at least one response.** The issue also came up across all seven consultations.

Young people were worried that AI was becoming the automatic first step, with students turning to AI before they had tried to think, learn, problem-solve or check something for themselves.

Many described a fear that this reliance could become habitual. When outsourcing a difficult task is so easy, they worried young people may begin turning to AI reflexively rather than working through the problem themselves. Many respondents reported seeing this habitual outsourcing already happening with their friends and peers.

This concern was strongest among respondents who did not use generative AI. Every respondent in this group raised concerns about critical thinking.

Interestingly, respondents who had received formal AI education at school were also more likely to agree that AI could reduce independent thinking.

96% of respondents who had learned about AI through school, or through both school and self-directed learning, agreed with this concern, compared with 87.7% of those who were only self-taught and 86.5% of those who reported no opportunity to learn about AI.

It was clear across both the survey and consultations that young people were very concerned about this issue.

Youth Ambassador Perspective

I don't want to forget how to think. I don't want to forget how to do maths, how to analyse a book, how to write an email, or an essay to someone I love. I got through an undergraduate degree not knowing what AI was, and then saw education and the world shift when models were made public during my Masters. What I do want is AI for impact. AI that accelerates human ingenuity and amplifies our ability to change the world to become fairer, more sustainable and just based on the complexity of the world outside collected data.

I don't want a future career where my AI talks to your AI, summarising the work of hundreds of others on the internet, replicating the same bias and structures that don't leave room for innovation.

I believe preserving our critical thinking skills means rebelling in a world of automation.

Having thought provoking conversations, challenging our perspectives, reading whole papers to research, learning recipes that take time, and doing things for the sake of enjoyment.

By creating space in our lives which isn't ruled by automation and outsourcing our thinking, I really believe the way we rely upon, and choose to use artificial intelligence will shift for good and improve critical thinking skills.

Aayushi



2.1 What young people mean by “Critical Thinking”

1. Thinking for yourself

The strongest concern was that students are becoming reflexively reliant on AI and turning to it out of habit before attempting a task independently. They worried that the outcome of using AI habitually would lead to our “brain[s] shrinking” and AI “rotting our brains”.

Interestingly, they usually described this happening to other people, particularly peers and younger students, rather than themselves.

> I personally have witnessed this through peers who have become reliant on AI for schoolwork and now have adopted this habit in their day to day lives, as AI dictates decisions such as what they'll eat, where they should visit when travelling, and even what to write in a card for a loved one.
> ***16 year old female***

2. Questioning and checking AI outputs

Critical thinking means you question what AI produces rather than accepting an answer because it sounds confident. They repeatedly raised the need to check information, recognise when AI may be wrong and maintain some scepticism.

Young people stated that being able to use AI effectively means knowing how to generate a useful response as well as knowing when an answer should be questioned and how to independently determine whether it could be trusted.

3. Practising difficult thinking and problem-solving

Young people were worried about how AI makes it easy to skip the difficult part of learning. Struggling with a problem, getting something wrong and having to work out what to try next are all part of learning. Respondents worried that if AI steps in too early, young people miss the chance to develop those skills for themselves.

Some respondents argued that outsourcing simpler tasks could free people to focus on more complex work or that AI had made learning more accessible and enjoyable.

Many respondents noted the difference between **using AI to help you work through a difficult problem, versus using it to do the thinking for you.**

4. Creativity and coming up with your own ideas

Young people were also worried about what happens when we are encouraged to use AI as the starting point for ideas.

> When you use AI to brainstorm, you are limiting yourself to what already exists in its training data.
> ***Bob Hawke College Consultation***

If the first response to a blank page or difficult question is to ask AI what to say, write or create, respondents worried that young people get fewer chances to develop ideas of their own.

Creativity isn’t just about coming up with something original, it also means learning how to generate ideas, develop them and express them in your own words.

2.2 The hard part is knowing what to outsource

Young people broadly understood that AI should be used as a tool to **support learning rather than do the learning for you.** But the tricky part is knowing when AI is helping versus when it is doing too much of the thinking for you.

Respondents often described AI as something that should be used as a "study tool" rather than a shortcut or cheat code.

> "I hope AI can help students study more efficiently, such as making palm cards for them based on their own notes as a study tool rather than doing the work for them"
> ***20 year old female***

But even that example shows how blurry the line can be. Asking AI to create palm cards might feel like a more efficient use of time, but this respondent hasn't recognised that making the palm cards itself is also part of the learning: deciding what matters, organising the information and putting it into your own words.

Young people need guidance to understand **specific use cases for when outsourcing to AI is helpful, and what tasks they need to do themselves in order to learn effectively.**



2.3 Assessment design can encourage cognitive offloading

Young people's concerns about cognitive offloading cannot be separated from how they are being taught and assessed.

Several participants pointed out that if an assessment mainly rewards the quality of the final product, rather than the thinking and learning that went into producing it, using AI can become the obvious shortcut.

> **"The lazy effort has always existed, but that lazy standard has improved so much with AI."**
> UWA AI Club Consultation

AI now makes it possible to produce a much better piece of work with very little effort. That creates a problem for assessments that are focused on the finished product.

It also helps explain why young people may worry about outsourcing their thinking while still doing it themselves. Some described feeling that they have to use AI because their peers are using it, and choosing not to use it means they will fall behind.

Telling young people simply not to outsource their thinking to AI misses a big part of the problem. Many respondents recognised the need to do the learning themselves, but schools also need to look at whether assessment design is encouraging the very behaviour they are asking students to avoid.

3. Teaching, Assessment and AI Use

Young people told us that AI is already entrenched in how students are learning, whether it's allowed in their classroom or not. Some reported that AI was an invaluable tool for supporting their learning, especially when completing homework. Others explained that they are witnessing students outsource all of the thinking and effort to a large language model.

Many young people were frustrated with how schools are responding to AI, particularly when it comes to assessment, rules around student use, and the way teachers themselves are using the technology. Many students expressed that they didn't like that most of their AI education was about cheating, and that teachers would often try to catch them out, for example, with hidden text in assessment briefs or by using unreliable AI detection tools.

A major teaching and learning concern for respondents was that most assessments are focused on the final product, which is becoming quicker and easier to outsource to AI. Many respondents called for changes to assessments, so they focus on assessing the learning process rather than the outcome, to protect the integrity of their learning and not to disadvantage students who are putting in the work.

3.1 AI is already part of how students learn

AI is already part of how many young people do schoolwork. 67.8% of respondents reported using generative AI for homework, making it the most common use case reported in the survey.

It was encouraging to see most young people drew a firm line between using AI to help you learn and using it to do the work for you.

Appropriate Uses of AI

Many respondents saw value in using AI to:

- explain a difficult concept in a different way;
- ask questions and work through a problem step by step rather than just be given the answer;
- brainstorm ideas before developing them independently;
- generate revision questions or additional examples; and
- give feedback on work they had already produced.

For some young people, this kind of AI use was an invaluable learning support, particularly when they were stuck, studying outside school hours or needed a concept explained in a different way.

> "I wouldn't be able to do my degree without AI."
> **UWA AI Club female participant.**

One participant explained that if a teacher had already explained something five different ways and they still did not understand it, AI could explain it a sixth time.

Some participants also described feeling more comfortable asking questions of AI than asking a teacher. They liked being able to ask questions at any time, repeat questions, request further explanations and admit that they did not understand something without feeling embarrassed.

During one consultation, a participant was asked whether they would still choose AI if their teacher was available whenever they needed help. They said yes, because "AI doesn't judge you." They did not feel as though they were disappointing someone, wasting their time or asking a stupid question.

This is really important for teaching and learning. For some students, AI can also provide a psychologically easier environment for learning where they can admit that they don't understand.

When AI crosses the line

Young people generally described AI use as inappropriate when it does all of the work for you.

Examples included:

- writing an assessment or essay in full
- providing final homework answers rather than helping the student work towards them
- completing the thinking or problem-solving that the student was supposed to practise.

Students also expected the same level of effort from teachers. Participants were frustrated by teachers using AI to generate worksheets, posters and classroom resources that students felt were poor quality or had involved very little teacher input. **Many students see this as a double standard.**

"AI-generated resources and worksheets are actually pretty poor quality. It's lazy and we don't learn anything." **15 year old female**

"No double standards. If students aren't allowed to use AI, then neither should teachers."
17 year old non-binary student

This does not necessarily mean young people believed teachers should never use AI. Rather, what they were seeing is students being told not to outsource their effort to AI, while watching teachers do exactly that. If students are expected to put genuine thought and effort into their work, many wanted to see the same principle modelled by the adults teaching them.

3.2 Did the learning actually happen?

While a lot of the AI in education conversation to date has been about academic integrity and using AI to cheat, the survey respondents were more concerned about AI's impact on whether students are actually learning.

Respondents particularly worried about younger students turning to AI too early. That students were reaching for these tools before they have built the basic knowledge and skills needed to know what to ask, recognise when an answer is wrong or work through a difficult problem themselves.

77%

were concerned about students relying on AI before developing basic knowledge and skills

57%

worried that students would get less practice with difficult thinking and problem-solving.



3.3 Assessment design is part of the problem

For lots of young people, assessments were also a big part of this problem. If an assessment mainly rewards the quality of the final product, and AI can produce a strong final product quickly and easily, it's obvious why students are using it.

Given that AI can now produce a strong piece of work with very little effort from the student, we need to shift to assessing the learning process rather than the output.

> "If AI can do it, why would I do it?"
> **UWA AI Club Consultation**

Rather than trying to make existing assessments harder to complete with AI, they suggested designing assessments that are complex, open-ended and time-intensive enough that asking AI to complete the task isn't automatically the easiest option. That means designing assessments so that the student's reasoning, decisions and learning process are part of what is being assessed, not just the output.

Participants' suggestions for how assessments could be reimagined included:

- rewarding different approaches and well-justified answers rather than one "correct" response;
- if AI is used, assessing how students question and refine AI outputs, not just the final product;
- portfolios, supervised assessment or project-based work;
- using more oral presentations or in-person demonstrations where students have to explain their decisions and show what they understand; and
- assigning tasks that make students' thinking visible, including by assessing their planning and reflection on the process.

Youth Ambassador Perspective

I think we aren't talking enough about how much agency we are willing to give AI, and what parts of being human we need to protect. We are increasingly using it to remove the uncomfortable parts of learning because we have become accustomed to optimising everything.

But as we hand over more of the learning and thinking process, we also risk handing over parts of how we understand the world.

We are beginning to rely on AI to make sense of information, often accepting its answers because they sound confident and authoritative. This creates a bigger question: are we choosing what AI does for us, or are we slowly allowing it to choose for us? We need safeguards that allow AI to expand how young people learn and explore, making sure that convenience doesn't come at the cost of our independence.

Shree



4. AI Literacy and What Young People Want to Learn

> "I think AI literacy should be taught and students should know why AI is not infallible and how to fact check AI when it needs to be used."
> ***19 year old female***

Young people want AI literacy education, and they want it to go well beyond just learning how to prompt a particular tool.

They want to understand how to use AI as a tool, when it shouldn't be used, what risks to look for and how to question what it produces.

> "Schools should teach students how to use it properly instead of banning it."
> ***15-year-old male***

Across the open-text responses, **42.1% of respondents explicitly raised the need for more AI literacy education without being prompted to do so.** When they explained what that education should cover, young people wanted to learn about appropriate versus inappropriate use cases in education, AI's limitations, critical thinking skills, fact-checking and verification, and understanding how AI actually works. Only 3 participants talked about prompting or learning how to operate specific AI tools.

> "Schools should better teach students how to responsibly and ethically use AI, including environmental factors and the need for students to think and problem-solve for themselves."
> ***20 year old female***

They also wanted to understand the bigger picture, including data and privacy, cybersecurity, ethics and AI's environmental impact.

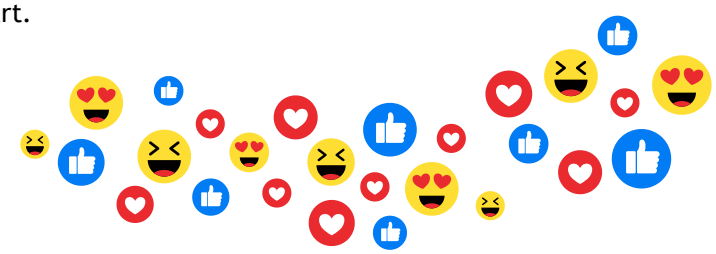
AI literacy has to mean more than just teaching students how to use AI tools. Students want to learn the skills to be able to make informed decisions about when and how to use it.

4.1 Social media is filling the AI education gap

Most young people are learning about AI outside of the classroom.

44.1% said they had learned about AI informally or by themselves, compared with 20.8% through school, TAFE or university. Another 10.6% had learned through both, while 22.5% said they had not had an opportunity to learn about AI at all.

In the consultations, young people described learning about AI through social media, videos, headlines and online commentary. That means a lot of their understanding is being shaped in spaces where facts, opinions and speculation are hard to tell apart.



Many participants had strong views about AI, but couldn't always explain the evidence or reasoning behind them.

This shows the gap that AI literacy needs to fill: students need enough foundational knowledge from credible sources to then be able to form their own views and question what they see online.

> "Students should be taught how to use AI as a tool, shown how it can be misleading and dangerous, teach students to recognise AI generated material, how to critically think about the answer. Teach them how to fact check AI."
>
> ***20 year old female***

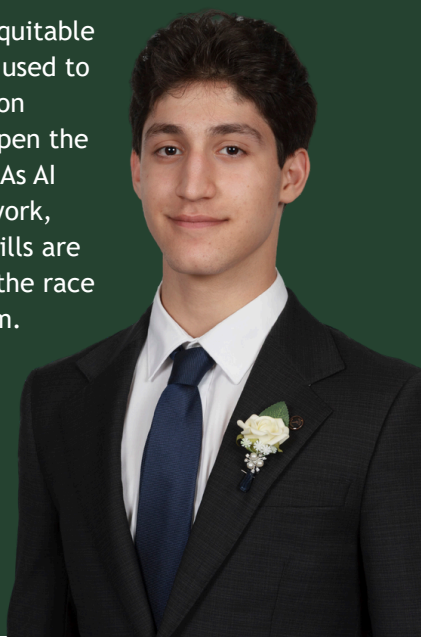
Youth Ambassador perspective

I have seen first hand that the students who stand to gain the most from understanding generative AI are the ones currently getting the least. The education system is failing to set clear standards for AI literacy, leaving access to depend on the ability and resources of individual teachers and schools.

Without structure and equitable access, AI that could be used to close the gap in education quality may instead deepen the one that already exists. As AI reshapes the future of work, those without critical skills are essentially left starting the race from outside the stadium.

A reactive mindset will not be what makes our students thrive.

Athanasios



4.2 Young people know there's a line, but not where it is

Young people frequently identified that there is a difference between using AI to support their learning and using it to replace the thinking they need to do themselves. Similarly, they noted that there may be some assessment tasks where using AI is helpful and permitted, and others where it is not.

The problem is that for many young people, they don't know where that line actually sits.



They wanted clearer guidance about when AI is useful, when it should be avoided, how much help is too much, when its answers need to be checked, and the risks that come with using different tools. Students are asking for specific examples and clear expectations about how much AI use is appropriate for different tasks and subjects.

Schools could do this through something as simple as a traffic-light system, or through a more detailed framework. Whatever method is chosen, it needs to be implemented consistently so that students can learn when AI is allowed, what they can use it for, and what thinking they still need to do themselves.

4.3 AI literacy needs to start early

Young people repeatedly said that AI literacy education needs to begin early. Respondents were very concerned about primary school children interacting with AI as a normal part of their lives.

Several participants suggested that AI education could be staggered by year level. Primary students would learn about AI before they are allowed to use it, while high school students receive age-appropriate guidance around how to use AI in their learning.

Young people were also very clear: there is a difference between learning about AI and being required to use it.

Some argued that banning AI was unrealistic:

> "AI isn't going away, so I think schools should focus on teaching students how to use it properly instead of trying to ban it."
> ***17 year old male***

Seven respondents specifically described feeling forced or pressured to use AI despite not wanting to.

The consensus was that AI literacy should be universal, but students shouldn't be forced to use it.

> "If people don't want to use it, they should have that option. We can have compulsory classes, but we shouldn't be forced to use it in assessments."
> ***GenerationAI Youth Ambassadors Consultation***

> "Many students don't feel comfortable using generative AI, so it would be ideal if the use of it was not forced."
> ***17 year old female***

Every student needs enough understanding of AI to navigate the technology they encounter in their everyday life.

That means learning about critical thinking, appropriate use, limitations, fact-checking, privacy, cybersecurity, ethics and environmental impacts.

Whether students use it in school should depend on their preferences, the task they are completing, and what they are actually meant to be learning.

> "We need a blanket AI literacy program. It's so obvious and it's never been done or properly implemented."
> ***GenerationAI Youth Ambassadors Consultation***

5. Environmental Impact of AI

Young people were very concerned about AI's environmental impact, and they did not mince their words, for example: **"Conserve water for humans, not data centres." - Manea Senior College Student**

60.2% of respondents rated the environmental impact of AI as very or extremely important to them personally.

> "We were already concerned about the environment, then AI got big, now we have 100x'ed our concerns."
> **17 year old female**

5.1 High concern, low understanding

Most participants knew that AI uses significant amounts of water and electricity, but many struggled to explain how or why. Other environmental impacts, such as electronic waste, mining for materials, and land use for data centres were rarely discussed.

> "Everyone knows that AI is taking up a water bottle to write an essay."
> **15 year old female**

This kind of claim was common and demonstrates that while many students hold strong views about AI and the environment, many also lack depth of understanding about this topic. Participants often spoke about concerning water use statistics, but were rarely able to articulate the scale of the issue with any specificity.

Water use and electricity consumption by data centres dominated the discussion. But while concern was high, most young people's understanding of AI's environmental impacts was superficial.

Youth Ambassador perspective

From my experience as a young person, conversations about AI and its environmental impacts often seem to follow a similar pattern. Many young people are concerned about AI's water and energy consumption, yet much of the information they see comes from social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. Some young people use claims they have seen online as evidence that AI is actively "destroying" the environment. While the underlying concern is valid, the evidence is not always reliable. Environmental impacts can be reduced to shocking statistics or simplified claims without the context needed to understand them.

At the same time, AI does have its environmental impacts, including energy and water consumption, resource use and electronic waste. What concerns me, however, is that exaggerating these issues can make it harder to have a meaningful conversation about them.

If young people are presented with inaccurate information, they may develop strong opinions without understanding the complexity of the issue.

I hope young people can access reliable information that allows them to understand AI's environmental costs, their significance, and how they can be reduced, rather than relying on whichever claim happens to go viral.

Enkhmisheel (Michelle)



How to put AI claims into perspective

When young people encounter alarming claims about AI, encourage them to ask:

- **Where did this information come from?** Is it based on credible research, or is someone repeating a statistic they saw on TikTok?
- **What do the numbers actually mean?** If someone claims AI uses a certain amount of water, is that per question, per data centre or across an entire industry? Is it relevant to Australia?
- **How does it compare?** How is this similar or different to other industries or technologies?
- **What can be done about it?** What could AI companies and governments do to reduce these impacts, and what evidence is there that those solutions would work?

Helping young people question claims, understand the bigger picture and identify realistic solutions gives them the tools to form informed opinions and advocate for meaningful change.

5.2 Young people want stronger rules for AI companies

When young people talked about solutions, particularly around the environmental issues, they mostly looked to the companies building and operating AI rather than individual users.

They called for stronger regulation, greater transparency and clearer environmental standards for AI companies. They generally saw AI's environmental impact as a **system-level problem,** not something that can be solved by asking individual students to use ChatGPT less.

But stronger views on regulation also need to be backed by stronger understanding.

Young people need enough information to judge which environmental impacts matter most, what trade-offs are involved and which solutions are actually likely to make a difference.

"We should ensure AI companies take responsibility for environmental damages, infringement on copyright and other ethical issues through legislation and the public holding them accountable for their actions."
18-year-old female

UWA Artificial Intelligence Club Consultation



6. Data, Privacy and Trust

Young people expressed significant concern about how their data is handled by AI companies.

73.7% of respondents said they were uncomfortable or very uncomfortable with how AI tools collect, store, use or share their data. Despite this high level of concern, only **14.2% raised privacy concerns without being prompted** in their open-text responses.

Privacy clearly matters when young people are asked about it, but it is not always front of mind, and many did not appear to have enough understanding to discuss their concerns in detail.

6.1 Young people don't trust tech companies

Much of the distrust was directed at the companies behind AI, rather than AI itself. Young people questioned whether tech companies could be trusted to use their data responsibly, particularly when making money was part of the equation.

When asked to choose the single most important way to protect student data, 48.1% chose stronger laws controlling how companies can use it, more than three times the next most popular option.

> "Legislation is the only way companies will implement AI responsibly. We've already seen how social media companies treat children."
> ***21 year old female***

> "Tech companies do not respect privacy laws and the fines they pay are nothing compared to the profit they generate from stolen data."
> ***23 year old male***

These responses reflect a broader perception that young people have limited control over what happens to their data once it is collected, and that the current penalties may not be sufficient to change corporate behaviour.

The gap between **73.7% feeling uncomfortable with AI data practices** and only **14.2% raising privacy concerns in the open-text questions** is an interesting data point.

This research cannot tell us exactly why that gap exists. However, the consultations suggest several possible explanations. Some young people may recognise privacy as a concern at a headline level without having enough knowledge about data collection, model training, storage or regulation to articulate the issue in greater detail. Others saw the issue as largely outside their control.

That lack of transparency about what happens to their data also feeds into distrust. Young people wanted clearer information about **what is being collected, where it goes, how long it is kept, whether it is used to train AI and who can access it**.

And yet, many are still using these tools regularly. This means that many young people are using AI while feeling uncomfortable about what happens to their data and not knowing how much control they really have over it.



6.2 Regulate the Tech Companies

Although relatively few respondents raised privacy concerns in their open-text responses, those who did often raised specific concerns and targeted solutions.

> "I work full time in IT/cyber security - I am yet to see a good corporate use case of AI which would need to be taught in a school or that outweighs the other risks. Schools should be very wary of partnerships with any tech companies - these are not unbiased agreements or neutral tools."
> ***25 year old female***

> "Ensuring data collected on Australian citizens remains in the country and is deleted within a specific date of collection."
> ***16 year old female.***

> "A law that all AI platforms cannot use data from users under 18 to help train the model."
> ***17 year old male.***

These responses indicate that a smaller sub-group of young people are highly engaged with privacy issues and already thinking in policy terms about AI regulation. Their ideas included stronger legislation, restrictions on using young people's data to train AI, consent requirements, data localisation and limits on how long information can be kept.

Youth Ambassador perspective

The data we generate every day is valuable, and without clear protections, we risk handing it over without even realising it. The AI industry is data-hungry, and with models having already consumed most of the internet, these companies are now turning to alternate sources of data, with students standing as attractive candidates.

If we are to implement AI into education, we must ensure students' data is protected and that students' IP remains theirs. There is a clear power imbalance in companies profiting from student-generated data while students have no insight into how it is used, who accesses it, or what it will be used for in the future.

When schools adopt platforms as mandatory tools, students often have no choice but to comply. Platforms can change their terms overnight, claiming rights over student data without warning; with students powerless to object.

Privacy isn't a static right; it is something that must be actively defended and continually adapted. We are facing a new form of data harvesting that goes beyond personal information and now targets the very work we produce.

The responsibility to prevent this should not fall on students alone. Institutions, students, and policymakers must come together to establish clear and enforceable data protections for both students' and educators' work.



While most people are asking how AI should be implemented in education, we must also ask how we protect students once it is. Young people already feel their future is threatened by AI, we cannot force them to train their own replacements.

Aedan

7. Jobs and the Future of Work

There is no doubt that young people are worried about what AI could mean for their future.

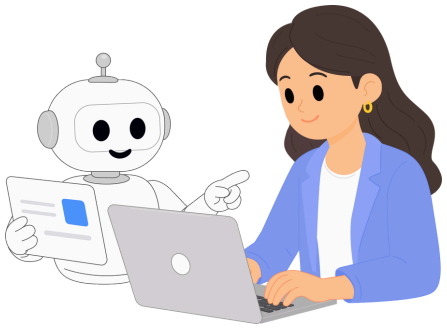
Among respondents who expressed a view, **70.4% were pessimistic about AI's impact on jobs and the future of work, compared with 13.5% who were optimistic.**

Their biggest concern was AI replacing jobs they want to go into, selected by 65.3% of respondents. 60.2% worried that important human skills would become less valued, while 48.3% were unsure which careers would still exist in the future.

It wasn't just fear of job losses that worried respondents, but the overwhelming uncertainty about whether the careers they are currently working towards will still be available to them. Young people described AI as something that could directly disrupt the future they had imagined for themselves.

> "I want to be an artist when I grow up however, the recent rise of AI videos and art is making it harder for me to get a job in the future."
> ***15 year old male.***

Interestingly, jobs and the future of work was raised less than the Youth Ambassadors predicted. This may partly reflect the age of the respondents, with most still in secondary school.



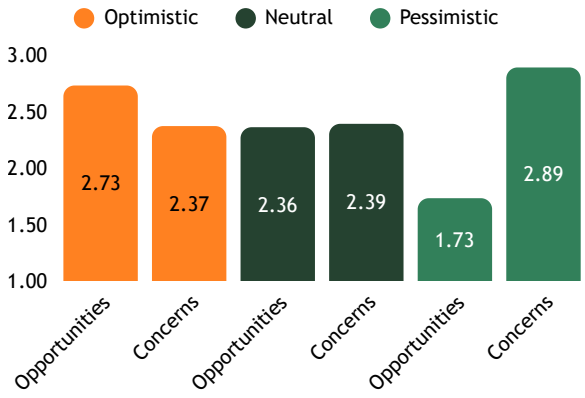
7.1 Young people can also see opportunities

Respondents were also asked about possible benefits AI could create in the workplace. The biggest opportunities they saw were practical: **44.5% thought AI could help people work faster and more effectively,** while **43.6% saw value in AI taking over repetitive or boring tasks.** Any optimism about jobs was often about making existing work easier, rather than creating entirely new careers.

There was also a clear difference between optimistic and pessimistic respondents.

Optimistic young people identified more potential opportunities, while pessimistic respondents identified close to the maximum number of concerns.

FIGURE 2: Number of Concerns and Opportunities Selected (Max of 3)



Optimistic respondents identified a wider range of potential opportunities from AI, while still recognising its risks. Pessimistic respondents saw far fewer opportunities and identified close to the maximum number of concerns.

7.2 Human skills matter the most

When asked how young people should prepare for the future of work, respondents prioritised human skills over technical AI competence.

What is the most important way to prepare young people for the future of work?

- **28.8% chose building human skills**
- **27.1% chose developing critical thinking and problem-solving.**
- **Only 9.3% chose practical AI skills.**

Some young people thought AI would make distinctly human skills more valuable. Others worried that AI would do the opposite, particularly in creative and professional careers.

They were also concerned about whether using AI would remain a choice. 24.6% selected employers expecting young people to use AI as a major job-related concern. Some worried that even if they had ethical, environmental or personal reasons for avoiding AI, choosing not to use it would disadvantage them.

The way young people talked about work was different to how they discussed critical thinking. With critical thinking, they often worried about what AI was doing to other students, whereas when discussing careers, the questions became personal:

- Will my job still exist?
- Will my skills still matter?
- And will I have a choice about using AI?

"Mandated codes of conduct in the workforce, and legislation concerning accepted usage of AI in high-stakes services by professionals (think medical, financial, legal advice) so that AI doesn't replace the ethical judgement humans have in these jobs."

18 year old female

Youth Ambassador perspective

I think we are asking the wrong question about AI and jobs. Everyone asks which jobs AI will replace. I am more interested in what happens if intelligence itself stops being scarce.

For most of history, writing, analysing, coding, researching or solving difficult problems made you economically valuable because those capabilities were scarce. We have built education, careers and much of our identity around that scarcity.

AI starts to break that model.

The immediate problem for young people is obvious. If AI can do the junior work, how do you get the experience required to become senior? We could remove the first rung of the career ladder while still expecting people to reach the second.

But there is a bigger question underneath that. If machines eventually become better than us at most economically useful tasks, does that make people less valuable?

I don't think it does. I think it exposes something we should have realised already: a person's value was never the same thing as their productivity.

If machines can eventually meet our material needs and replace the things we once believed made us useful, the question stops being what work is left for humans.

It becomes something much harder: why are we here at all?

Colin,
UWA Fogarty Scholar



8. Ethics, Equity and Access

Ethical and equity concerns came up across a wide range of issues, from accessibility and regional disadvantage to copyright, deepfakes, AI companions and corporate responsibility.

Young people had mixed views about AI's impact on equity. Some saw it widening existing gaps, while others saw huge potential for AI to make learning and opportunities more accessible.

34.7% of respondents raised an ethics or equity concern in their open-text responses.

8.1 AI Could Make Learning More Accessible

One of the strongest benefits young people identified was AI's potential to support students who learn differently. Participants discussed tools such as voice-to-text, text-to-speech, personalised explanations, additional examples and adapting information into formats that are easier to understand.

For these students, AI could provide a level of personalisation and support that may otherwise be difficult to access consistently.

This was also one reason some participants rejected blanket bans on AI in education. They were concerned that broad restrictions could remove tools that provide substantial benefits for particular groups of students.

> "AI should also be used to provide personalized learning and support students who need additional assistance."
> ***15-year-old female***

8.2 Regional Students Could Be Left Behind

Regional equity came through particularly strongly in the Manea Senior College consultation. Some students were worried that if better-resourced metropolitan schools could access the best AI tools, infrastructure and AI literacy education earlier, this could create another gap between metro and regional students.



They also wanted AI education to make sense in a regional context, including examples connected to industries such as agriculture and farming. Equitable AI education therefore means more than giving every school access to the same technology. Students said they need access to the education, infrastructure and locally relevant opportunities in order to use it well.

8.3 Does AI make ATAR inherently unfair?

Young people also questioned whether AI could create an unfair advantage between students who use it to produce schoolwork and those doing the work themselves.

This was particularly relevant to assessments and ranking systems such as ATAR. If AI can help one student produce a strong final product with significantly less effort, is an ATAR ranking still a fair and equitable way to compare students? Is this still the best way to determine which courses you can apply for at university?

When so much is riding on an ATAR ranking system, there were calls for much stricter boundaries on AI use in the education setting so that some students don't get an unfair advantage.

8.4 Copyright and the value of human-made work

The use of copyright material in AI training data sets was another major ethical concern.

Young people questioned whether AI companies should be able to train models on copyrighted material without gaining the author's permission or providing compensation.

Participants expressed strong concerns that this is already happening on a large scale. This was particularly important to young people interested in creative careers, who also worried that AI-generated content could reduce the value of human-made work.

They were also asking who benefits financially from AI, whose work helped build it (and whether they were compensated) as well as whether people are being treated fairly by big tech.



8.5 Cyber Safety and AI Harms

Deepfakes, non-consensual image generation and AI companions were some of the biggest safety concerns amongst participants.

Participants talked about how AI tools are being used to create harmful or intimate images without consent, and called for these AI image-generation tools to be banned, or have significantly stronger safeguards against misuse.

They also raised concerns about AI companions and chatbots used by vulnerable young people, particularly where these systems simulate relationships, emotional support or advice.

In both cases, young people pushed back against the idea that safety should depend entirely on users making good choices. They wanted the companies building these technologies to take greater responsibility for the harms their products can enable.

8.6 Young people want greater corporate accountability

Corporate responsibility connected many of the ethical concerns raised throughout the research.

Whether discussing copyright, deepfakes, chatbot safety, accessibility or data use, young people repeatedly argued that responsibility should not sit with individual users alone.

They supported education about responsible AI use, but also wanted stronger guardrails, clearer standards and greater accountability from the companies behind these systems.

For young people, how equitable or harmful AI becomes will depend heavily on how it is designed, who can access it and what protections are built around it.

> "Legislation restricting the uses and abilities of AI"
> ***15 year old***

> "Heavy regulation by the government. Investigations into illegally sourcing data and heavy fines for stealing others' work."
> ***22 year old female***

> "Government having stricter regulation and guide lines around AI use"
> ***16 year old female***

Youth Ambassador perspective

Something that has been incredibly important to me in discussions about AI is its impact on people living with disabilities. Although this was not a major theme in the data we collected, it is an issue I felt should not go unmentioned in this report.

As a young person living with hypermobile Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, AI-powered tools have fundamentally changed my ability to engage with education. Features such as speech-to-text allow me to avoid excessive writing, reducing the risk of dislocations and making school sustainable. For many young people with disabilities, tools like live captions, text-to-speech, and AI learning supports make education accessible where it otherwise would not be.

However, AI also poses significant risks. People with disabilities are already more vulnerable to scams, fraud, and online impersonation, and AI has the potential to amplify these harms through deepfakes, voice cloning, and increasingly sophisticated scams.

As these technologies become more convincing and accessible, there is a real risk that those who already face barriers may become easier targets for exploitation.

As both a young person with a disability and a Youth Ambassador for this project, I believe that there is a fine line between increasing accessibility and increasing exploitation and ensuring we get that balance **right should be a priority for all of us.**

Elizabeth (Elly)



9. Solutions, Regulation and Responsibility

9 in 10 young people surveyed want some form of guardrail, restriction, education or regulation around AI use.

38.4% supported restricted use, 28.9% supported AI literacy education plus regulation, and 23.7% supported a full or near-total ban on AI in education. Only 2.6% supported AI being available without limits or proposed rules.

Many of the young people calling for stronger boundaries are also regular AI users themselves. 91% of survey respondents had used generative AI before, and 56% were using it at least weekly. That means that their support for regulation comes from direct experience with currently under-regulated technology.

For some students, choosing to opt out of AI didn't feel realistic. If other students are using AI to work faster or improve their outputs, choosing not to use it felt like choosing to fall behind. Young people wanted schools, companies and policymakers to set clearer boundaries around what is acceptable, and what's not. At the same time, some recognised that rules alone would not be enough.

> "I know AI rules in schools will probably be dodged. Kids seem to spend more time, more effort evading authority to play video games when it's forbidden. Education on what AI does to the brains of chronic users would be more effective."
> ***17 year old male***

9.1 Responsibility shouldn't just sit with young people

Respondents consistently looked beyond individual users when talking about solutions.

They called for stronger school policies, clearer expectations, assessment redesign, AI literacy education and greater accountability for the companies developing AI systems.

For example, 48.1% selected stronger laws controlling how companies use student data as the most important data protection measure.

Across topics including privacy, environmental impact, image generation and chatbot safety, young people saw responsibility as shared between schools, companies and policymakers, rather than something that could be solved by simply telling young people to "use AI responsibly".

9.2 We want action now!

A strong sense of urgency ran through the responses. Young people saw the decisions that are being made right now directly affecting their education, careers and future.

> "Older people won't be here in 30 years, but we have to live here."
> ***Mandurah CoderDojo Consultation***

They want clearer rules, stronger corporate accountability, better assessment and better AI education. Their big message was that adults and institutions need to collaborate to set the conditions for responsible AI use, rather than leaving young people to navigate it alone.

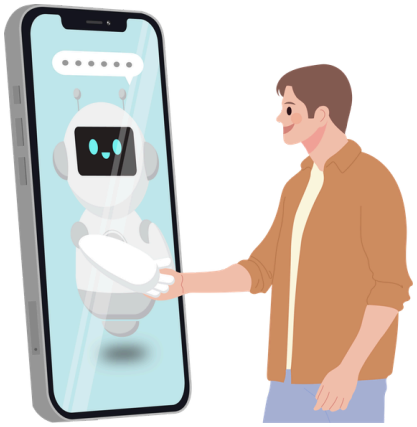
10. What Young People Are Not Talking About

Some issues that feature heavily in public debate about AI barely made an appearance in the young people's responses.

There was almost no discussion of the geopolitics of AI, including competition between the United States and China, national AI strategies, international regulation or the global race for AI capability. More speculative issues such as superintelligence, existential risk and quantum computing were also largely absent.

Young people also rarely discussed the broader positive applications of AI, such as medical research, healthcare, scientific discovery or climate modelling. When they talked about benefits, they tended to focus on things they were already experiencing themselves, including learning support, accessibility and efficiency.

Jobs and the future of work also came up less often than expected. Young people were pessimistic when asked directly about employment, but it did not dominate the open discussions in the same way as critical thinking and learning.



Youth Ambassador perspective

The debate around AI in education is stalled on a flawed premise: that we can simply ban it. This reveals a fundamental blind spot regarding how the technology actually operates. Blocking platforms like ChatGPT on a school network is useless when students can download software like LM Studio or Ollama to run open-weight models locally, completely offline and untraceable.

We are still treating AI like a simple chatbot used for cheating - it is far more. With recent developments like GPT-6 Astra's "Computer Use," AI can autonomously move a cursor, click buttons, and execute multi-step workflows across a desktop.

What is entirely missing from the conversation is the permanent baseline shift in student work. AI has universally raised the floor.

Consequently, a student who submits purely human work is now at a severe disadvantage against an artificially inflated cohort standard.

Because this cohort has a new average, avoiding AI is no longer an option.

To actually stand out, the best students must move beyond mere cognitive offloading; they must master these tools and inject unique human insight to elevate their work above the new automated baseline.

Alina



11. Conclusion:

This peer research provided an account of the priorities, perspectives and ideas that more than 300 young Western Australians hold about AI's role in education. Young people are already living with AI. They are using it for schoolwork, seeing it in their feeds, thinking about what it means for their future careers, and trying to work out where it fits in their lives.

Young people can see the benefits of AI, particularly when it helps them learn, access information or work more efficiently. But they are also deeply concerned about what happens when AI replaces thinking, weakens learning, collects their data, and creates new safety risks.

Overwhelmingly, these young people expressed that they want **clearer boundaries and more education.**

They want to understand how AI works, when it should be used, when it should not, what risks to look for and how to question what it produces. They want assessment to reflect actual learning. They want stronger protections around privacy, safety and the environment. And they want companies, schools and policymakers to take responsibility for creating the conditions in which AI is used, rather than leaving young people to navigate these decisions alone.

Young people also want a genuine say in what happens next. The decisions being made now about AI in education will shape how this generation learns, works and participates in society for decades to come, and they want a seat at the table.

> I don't want AI to be a part of education in the future. But it will be, and I think we need to teach students how to use AI and how to value human creativity and empathy.
> **16 year old female**

> AI is changing education quickly, so decision-makers should create clear and flexible policies that encourage responsible AI use while protecting academic integrity, privacy, and equal access to technology.
> **21 year old male**

The young people involved with this research have spoken: **the time to act is now.**

They called for comprehensive AI literacy education, clearer expectations for AI use in classrooms and stronger guardrails, including strict regulation on AI companies.

The recommendations contained within this report are realistic and actionable and are a clear expression of the steps that more than 300 Western Australian young people would like to see implemented. **Young people hold strong views on this topic; any reforms or policy positions should be informed by their lived experiences and hopes for the future.**



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