The Open University | PolicyWISE

Wise in 5: GenAI in School Education

Wise in 5 is a snapshot comparative guide to a public policy issue across the nations of the UK and Ireland. It helps you be PolicyWISE (Wales, Ireland, Scotland, England) in 5 (it takes just five minutes to read).

This briefing was published in June 2026. It includes a summary of the latest policy developments across the nations, as well as related research from PolicyWISE, The Open University and PolicyWISE's university partners.

PolicyWISE creates neutral and constructive spaces for policy professionals and academics across the nations to develop relationships, respect and knowledge. We support and nurture a common culture of developing and sharing insight, knowledge, ideas and context from across the nations in a comparative and collaborative way.

	GenAI Guidelines	Research on Impacts	Users' Experience Report	Demands for Training
England	✚	✚	✚	✚
Northern Ireland	▲	✚	✚	✚
Republic of Ireland	✚	▲	✚	✚
Scotland	✚	▲	✚	✚
Wales	✚	✚	✚	✚
Key	✚ Yes		▲ Information not available	

Wise in 5: GenAI in School Education

Overview

UNESCO defines GenAI as technologies that generate content in response to prompts written in natural language. The contents can be in different formats such as texts, images, videos, music and software codes. There are widespread views that GenAI technologies have the potential to transform educational settings. They have the abilities to enhance teaching, learning, and administration tasks in schools. The European Commission (EC) stresses that these technologies are playing a vital role in classrooms. They support in lesson planning, curating digital education content, enabling interactive and experiential learning and encouraging student self-reflection. However, there are a range of concerns around the accuracy of AI-generated content and its authorship, data safeguarding, access to harmful content and the possibility of pupils' decreased social connections.

EC guidelines state that schools and teachers must use AI responsibly in teaching and assessment. Specifically, when deploying AI, they should consider the issues related to human agency, human oversight, transparency, privacy and data governance. Schools and teachers also need to equally factor in children's rights, diversity and inclusion, fairness and non-discrimination, societal and environmental wellbeing during the AI use.

UNESCO emphasises that AI should support developing human capabilities for inclusive, just and sustainable futures. They set out the regulation of GenAI in education that requires a number of steps and policy measures guided by a human-centered approach. UNESCO's steps include endorsing available data protection regulations or developing new ones, adopting or revising government strategies on AI and putting specific regulations on the ethics of AI in practice. UNESCO also suggests using copyright laws to regulate AI-generated content, extending regulatory frameworks, building capacity to use GenAI and discussing the implication of GenAI in education. These steps help government regulators ensure that the relevant educational stakeholders successfully capitalise on AI's potential.

In line with the EC, policy documents and guidelines related to AI in Education in the UK such as GenAI in Education (DfE England), Educational technology: Digital innovation and AI in Schools (House of Lords Library), and Use of AI in education delivery and assessment (UK Parliament Post) claim that AI tools help teachers draft curricular plans and create high quality learning resources. Furthermore, these documents underscore the role of AI tools in supporting teachers to reduce the time they spend on administration tasks.

Recently, there has been generous investment from the UK Government in AI technologies in English schools. For instance, £2 million was allocated to Oak National Academy to improve and expand AI tools for teachers in 2023. Further £1 million was allocated in 2025 to 16 ed tech companies to create an AI tool to grade work and generate detailed and tailored feedback to reduce teachers' workload.

However, a 2024 survey of 1,586 teachers in all nations of the UK and the Republic of Ireland revealed that only 3 per cent believed GenAI had 'greatly' reduced their workload and 57 per cent believed GenAI had 'somewhat' or 'slightly' reduced their workload.

Amongst wider potential support that AI technologies supply in a school context, content generation using GenAI tools is widely discussed (for instance, by Wales and Scotland and the Republic of Ireland). In 2023, in the UK, 53 per cent of children who go online aged 8-15 used GenAI to help with schoolwork.

The use of GenAI is becoming a prominent issue across the education agenda in all nations. This Wise in 5 comparative briefing sets out the use of GenAI in school settings considering the following key areas:

1. Guidance on the use of AI/GenAI;

2. The impacts of AI/GenAI in teaching and learning;

3. Users' experiences;

4. Demand for training

Amongst wider potential support that AI technologies supply in a school context, content generation using GenAI tools is widely discussed (for instance, by Wales and Scotland and the Republic of Ireland). In 2023, in the UK, 53 per cent of children who go online aged 8-15 used GenAI to help with schoolwork.

Nation by Nation

England

In England, schools can make choices about the most suitable use for GenAI tools and which AI tools to use. The guidelines state that pupils should use GenAI tools with appropriate safeguards in place, such as ensuring close supervision and using those tools with safety, filtering and monitoring features. Users should be aware of the data privacy implications and intellectual property (IP) implications while using GenAI tools. Schools are accountable as they need to continue taking reasonable steps to prevent malpractice guided by AI use in assessments published by The Joint Council for Qualifications.

The Department for Education posits that GenAI is effective in lesson and curriculum planning and to streamline administrative tasks, in order to free up teachers' time and enhance teaching. The Open Innovation Team and Department for Education claim that by using GenAI, teachers in England provided additional educational support, including for pupils and students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and pupils and students for whom English is an additional language (EAL). A 2024 survey of 1,250 teachers found that 45 per cent use AI for creating reports, letters to parents, lesson plans etc. As per the research report by the Responsible Technology Adoption Unit (RTA), pupils regard learning more fun and engaging when the lessons delivered by teachers include AI-generated visually engaging creative resources.

In England, teachers reported the over-reliance on GenAI tools among pupils and their academic misconduct. There were some concerns about variation in teachers' abilities to use AI to its full potential which demands comprehensive training. The most requested training topics were basic digital literacy, AI literacy, safe and ethical GenAI use and alignment of GenAI with good pedagogical practice.

Wales*

The Welsh Government emphasises that the use of GenAI in learning should support learners to become ambitious, capable learners; enterprising, creative contributors; ethical, responsible citizens; and healthy, confident individuals.

Schools should consult Keeping safe online for a range of support on emerging digital resilience issues, including the risks of GenAI. When needed, school leaders can refer to GenAI policy template in '360 Safe Cymru', the online safety self-review tool to create their own GenAI policy.

Estyn (the inspection agency) found that schools are independently exploring the potential of AI and how it might enhance teaching and learning, reduce workload and support pupils as they report not having received enough support for collaboration from local authorities.

Estyn's report shows that teachers in Wales found that AI helps them to produce better quality resources that are closely related to the needs of the learners. Teachers describe using AI to plan lessons, write reports and create learning materials. At secondary school level, pupils use AI for independent learning that included summarising revision notes and constructing personalized quiz questions. Estyn has noted that teachers stress the need to guide pupils in the critical and ethical use of these tools.

Estyn has recommended the development of national guidance on the strategic implementation of AI in education. As a response, the Welsh Government has planned to work collaboratively with local authorities and key stakeholders including Estyn, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and subject experts to co-design a strategic framework that supports the safe, ethical and effective use of AI.

As regards user experience, a 2024 survey of 62 teachers in Wales found that only 39 per cent use AI for creating reports, letters to parents and lesson plans. The Welsh government has ongoing conversations with practitioners and leaders through the National Network for Curriculum Implementation and Curriculum for Wales Policy Group to explore the opportunities to understand the potential of AI use.

The GenAI in education policy document states that schools should support practitioners in building competence and confidence with GenAI through ongoing professional learning opportunities. There is a professional learning area which offers materials to help practitioners develop their understanding of GenAI.

Scotland*

Education Scotland emphasises that schools need to help students understand limitations, reliability, and potential bias of GenAI. While schools are granted autonomy and therefore have greater responsibility in bringing AI into education, they are also expected to take reasonable steps, where applicable, to prevent malpractice involving the use of GenAI.

Education Scotland also accentuates that to ensure privacy of individuals, personal and sensitive data should not be entered into GenAI tools. Schools must ensure that children and young people are not accessing or creating harmful or inappropriate content, including through GenAI, which means school is the solely responsible institution to look after students' use of GenAI.

Nation by Nation

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has recently issued guidance on the use of GenAI in qualifications assessment, following engagement with teachers and learners across the nation. Similarly, the newly published comprehensive Scottish Guidelines and Guardrails for the use of AI in Schools outlines acceptable use of Gen AI for both groups. For pupils, this includes using GenAI to generate practice questions or quizzes, seek help to understand concepts, get feedback on a draft, explore different perspectives or styles. Pupils can also use it to explore ideas for creative writing, summarise complex texts, build vocabulary, create study timetables or organisation plans and images or artwork. For teachers, GenAI can be used to generate differentiated resources, create formative assessment tasks and personalised learning pathways, support English as an Additional language (EAL) pupils, analyse pupils progress data and aid administrative tasks.

The impacts of GenAI in teaching and learning have not been comprehensively explored yet. SQA's Generative AI Consultation Survey with practitioners including teachers indicated that 77 per cent of the 257 respondents use it for materials and activity design and 52 per cent use it for lesson planning. The GenAI Consultation Practitioner Focus Groups reports that GenAI supports teachers to reduce their workload by generating learning materials. The 2024 survey with 183 teachers found that only 37 per cent use AI for creating reports, letters to parents and lesson plans.

With respect to skills development training, there is a demonstrated need as the respondents of the GenAI Consultation Practitioner Focus Groups have emphasised the importance of practical and hands-on support to enable the effective use of GenAI in teaching and learning.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, there is no specific guideline or policy to help schools leverage GenAI in schools. There is currently no statutory requirement for teaching about AI in primary or secondary schools. The proof-of-concept study in schools in Northern Ireland reveals that only 1.1 per cent of the 94 respondents reported that their school has adopted a specific policy guidelines, which alludes to the missing status of formalised nation-specific GenAI guidelines.

In contrast to a 2024 survey, the proof-of-concept study indicates that GenAI helped reduce teachers workload with 85.3 per cent of the 94 participants reporting an improvement in workload after adopting GenAI. GenAI proved highly beneficial for Special Education Needs (SEN) learners as it was used for creating individual learning plans and adaptive assessment methods. The 2024 survey of 46 teachers reports that 33 per cent use AI for creating reports, letters to parents and lesson plans.

The proof-of-concept study also points out the lack of professional development opportunities to prepare teachers to use GenAI in their workplaces. However, it is still difficult to infer what areas such training should or can focus on to help teachers to deepen their understanding on GenAI use in teaching and learning.

Republic of Ireland

The AI Advisory Council Advice Paper in the Republic of Ireland accentuates that the use of AI in education should embrace two key principles: (a) AI tools must be private, secure, and freely accessible, and (b) data generated through GenAI tools must not be used to train AI models, eliminating any risk of data or document leakage. The paper underscores safety and inclusivity by emphasising the need for secure, no-cost AI tools.

The recently published Guidance on Artificial Intelligence in Schools provides teachers and school leaders with a clear overview of AI, its educational applications, and the principles for its responsible use, enabling informed decisions that prioritise safety and privacy. It has stressed the need to consider the issues that the EC has highlighted (stated above) to leverage AI technologies in an ethical, safe and responsible way.

There does not exist any comprehensive impact study to investigate if the use of GenAI has made any impact on teaching and learning. With regard to users' experiences, a 2024 survey of 45 teachers found that only 47 per cent use AI for creating reports, letters to parents, lesson plans etc.

The AI Advisory Council has noted inconsistencies across the education sector regarding the provision and nature of training for teachers and instructors in the use of GenAI in their teaching, highlighting a clear need for targeted teacher training. The Council also emphasises that the use of AI tools should be inclusive, designed for accessibility and thus usable by all instructors and learners.

**The references to Welsh and Scottish Government policies and guidance refer to publications issued by the previous administrations before the May elections.*

Wise up – 5 policy points to take away

Five key points from what we've learnt above, which could be considered as part of further policy development and delivery in any or all of the nations.

1. There is a substantial difference in the maturity of national guidelines to regulate or support GenAI use. England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales have more comprehensive guidelines than Northern Ireland. All governments should develop and update comprehensive 'AI in education' guidelines and make them publicly accessible. Such policy guidelines should be updated regularly given rapid AI changes.
2. Studies on the learning impact of GenAI in educational settings are lacking. To understand fully whether GenAI is making positive or negative impacts, all governments and national education agencies should prioritise research to investigate the use of GenAI in school settings, and seek comparative and cross-nation learning.
3. Teacher training and professional development should make further provision for 'the effective use of GenAI in teaching, learning and assessment'. Since AI tools can improve teaching and learning, upskilling teachers and leaders on AI use in education through regular training and free online courses must be enhanced.
4. Governments should invite the representatives of all educational stakeholders (such as teacher educators, teachers, educational technologists, students, researchers, tech company representatives) and conduct intensive cross-nation consultations to discuss the potential issues around GenAI use in education, design interventions and actionable policy guidelines.
5. Any policy related to GenAI in education in educational settings must prioritize keeping pupils safe online when using AI.

This briefing was written by Sagun Shrestha, PolicyWISE Research Associate, with support from Catherine May and the PolicyWISE team.

The Open University | PolicyWISE

Our focus and way of working makes us unique:

1. **Space:** We create and maintain neutral but constructive spaces for policy professionals and academics across the nations **to develop relationships, respect and** knowledge.
2. **Sharing:** We develop and support a common culture of sharing and developing insight, knowledge, ideas and context from across the nations in a comparative and collaborative way.
3. **Solutions:** We help governments focus on evidence-informed policy solutions for citizens and communities across the nations, informed by comparative and collaborative research and methods.

The Open University has been awarded £1m in funding from Dangoor Education to establish and run PolicyWISE. The funding has supported the launch of PolicyWISE in 2023 and our development over the following four years.

DANGOOR EDUCATION

Our offer

PolicyWISE works cross-nation on comparative research and knowledge exchange which will change and improve how governments and academics work together in and across nations to solve policy challenges.

Rapid Response Capability
We work at pace to support policy analysis, development, and consideration.

Comparative and Collaborative Analysis & Understanding
We are a partner of choice for collaborative and comparative projects, and we work across The Open University's four nations.

Wise in 5
The only regular snapshot comparative guide to public policy issues across the nations of the UK and Ireland.

Training
Utilising our distinct focus and skills we deliver impactful and dynamic training for any audience interested in learning how a comparative policy analysis and knowledge exchange can benefit their work.

Dewi Knight, Director

Get in Touch

www.policywise.org.uk

policywise@open.ac.uk

Follow us

policywise.bsky.social

PolicyWISE

Published June 2026