Wise in 5: AI Literacy

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 August 2025. 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.

	AI strategy	AI literacy guidance	Body overseeing AI literacy	Sector specific AI literacy guidance
UK	➕	➕	💡	🔺
England	🔶	💡	💡	🔺
Northern Ireland	💡	💡	➕	🔺
Republic of Ireland	➕	➕	🔺	➕
Scotland	➕	➕	➕	➕
Wales	🔺	🔺	🔶	🔺
Key	➕ Implemented	🔺 Partially Implemented	💡 Planned	🔶 None

Wise in 5: AI Regulation

Overview

The emergence of Generative AI (GenAI) tools such as ChatGPT since 2022 has brought about intense discussions on how governments should regulate Artificial Intelligence (AI). The United Kingdom does not have a singular, nor comprehensive legislative framework that specifically regulates AI. The regulatory focus in the UK is based on a decentralised, pro-innovation approach that applies existing legal frameworks and empowers sector-specific regulators to oversee the use of AI technologies. This **approach** advocates for a flexible framework guided by five core principles:

- Safety
- Transparency
- Fairness
- Accountability
- Contestability

Rather than creating a standalone AI regulator or codified AI legislation akin to the European Union's AI Act, the UK strategy relies on contextual oversight. This leaves regulatory bodies such as the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), and the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to apply existing laws to identify and manage AI-related risks. In contrast, the EU has enacted the **EU AI Act** which regulates the use of AI across the EU and provides a comprehensive framework that aims to ensure AI systems used within the EU are 'safe, transparent, traceable, non-discriminatory and environmentally friendly.' The Act mandates a requirement for human oversight over AI systems.

Article 4 of the EU AI Act introduces a specific requirement for AI literacy across EU member states. Although within the UK there is no legal requirement yet for AI literacy, this has formed part of every AI Plan put forward since 2021. The previous UK government's AI Council's 2021 **UK AI Road map report** included as one of its four pillars: "literacy in AI across the population with enhanced AI-related skills at all levels of educational and lifelong attainment" and its **UK Government National AI Strategy** published in 2021 covered AI literacy within skills for jobs.

The current UK Government's **Artificial Intelligence Playbook** (published in February 2025) included ten principles, two of which align with AI literacy:

Principle 1: You know what AI is and what its limitations are and

Principle 9: You have the skills and expertise needed to implement and use AI.

Organisations within the UK therefore have a responsibility to ensure their staff have the required level of AI literacy to deploy, interact, and collaborate with AI systems. Beyond, the UK, in the Republic of Ireland (as an EU member state), there are mandatory legal requirements to comply with Article 4 of the EU AI Act. These requirements extend into the UK as well – any organisation in the UK that operates within the member states of the EU is also subject to the AI literacy obligations.

Although AI literacy is linked to digital literacy, it requires its own set of competencies because AI is considered a distinct technology. To ensure AI literacy, everyone should have a basic understanding of AI, how AI systems work, their limitations, and the opportunities and challenges presented by AI. AI literacy includes learning how to critically evaluate AI tools and AI outputs as well as using tools responsibly and ethically.

The **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Opportunities Action Plan** sets out a roadmap for the UK government to capture the opportunities of AI adoption and how it can create benefits for UK citizens. The **2025 Plan** includes action points around training students and existing employees. In addition the **Digital and Technologies Sector Plan** published in June 2025 sets out the government's approach to harnessing the benefits of digital technologies and the creation of '**TechFirst**' which is a funding programme designed to a create a national skills programme. In the Digital and Technologies Sector plan there is a commitment from the **UK government** to work with devolved nations on skills initiatives. The UK Government has committed to implementing the AI Action Plan, stating that "DSIT will work with DfE, DBT and UKRI to take forward the recommendations designed to attract and support top talent and ensure we continue to train world-class AI experts".

The focus of the UK government appears to be on the creation of AI skills programmes aimed at students and the workforce; there does not appear to be a comprehensive AI literacy strategy for the wider population. This leaves a significant gap in ensuring all citizens are equipped to engage with AI technologies confidently, responsibly and ethically.

Nation by Nation

England

There is no England specific AI strategy or guidance on AI literacy, with England being subject to the **UK National AI Strategy** published in 2021, the **AI Opportunities Action Plan**, and the **Digital and Technologies Sector Plan** published in 2025. Under 'Enabling AI foundations', the Action Plan highlighted the need to develop the next generation of AI talent with nine recommendations about AI skills development. Whilst this did not specifically address AI literacy, the new '**TechFirst**' scheme launched in June 2025 will provide £187 million funding for a national skills programme to support schools and communities to provide training for future tech careers. Skills England is to publish an analysis of sector skills and will be working with the Digital Skills Councils to create a joined-up skills strategy.

There have been a number of sector specific set of guidance issued on the use of AI in England, including for **the NHS**, and **education**.

Other guidance exists at a UK level for sectors operating across the UK, including **public bodies** and **business**. All of this guidance includes provision for improving AI literacy and skills development.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has not published any specific guidance on AI strategy or AI literacy. The Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended between 2017 and 2020, and again between 2022 and 2024. During this time, Northern Irish civil servants adopted the **Guidance to Civil Servants on the Use of Generative AI**, published in July 2023. This recommends the use of GenAI to improve efficiency and productivity but also highlights the importance of AI literacy in using GenAI "ethically and responsibly". **Research in 2024** into the ways in which individual departments were using GenAI in the Northern Ireland Executive Departments suggested that civil servants were conscious of the need to mitigate potential risks posed by GenAI: "Use of tools such as ChatGPT must be done in a way that protects against any bias in AI and complies with all data protection and security protocols".

A coalition formed of the Northern Ireland Executive, local authorities, academia and industry produced **a response to the AI Council's 2021 UK AI Roadmap report** which highlighted seven priorities for AI in Northern Ireland. These included a national strategy for AI and the establishment of a national framework for AI skills development. In 2024 the **Artificial Intelligence Collaboration Centre** was established to lead the development of AI skills and an AI strategy in Northern Ireland. A series of conversations started in 2025 to determine the implementation, adoption and governance of AI in Northern Ireland going forward.

Some limited sector specific guidance on AI literacy has been issued in Northern Ireland including for **business**.

Scotland

The Scottish Government published an **Artificial Intelligence strategy** in 2021 which "sets out a vision for AI in Scotland, the principles that will guide us, and the actions we'll take to develop and strengthen our AI ecosystem over the next five years." Following consultation with the public, organisations and academia they have published an **AI Playbook** which sets out how they plan to encourage the use of AI in Scotland. This contains five principles, including that AI systems should include appropriate safeguards to ensure a fair and just society, and potential risks should be assessed and managed. AI literacy is embedded into the Scottish Government strategy.

The **Scottish AI Alliance** was set up to implement the AI strategy and is a partnership between The Data Lab and the Scottish Government. Following a pilot in 2023, they re-launched a free AI literacy course '**Living with AI**' in 2025 which aims to educate the Scottish people about what AI is and how it works, so that they can use it more effectively.

Different organisations within Scotland have also published sector specific guidance on AI, including for **education**, **businesses**, **the voluntary sector** and the **health service**.

Nation by Nation

Republic of Ireland

The Republic of Ireland introduced a **National Artificial Intelligence Strategy** for Ireland in 2021, which set out a "a people-centred, ethical approach to its development, adoption and use". This was **refreshed in 2024** to take into account the developments in GenAI such as ChatGPT, and the EU AI Act. The refreshed strategy expanded the range of digital literacy and skills initiatives, while continuing to stress the importance of raising awareness among the public and businesses of the use of trustworthy AI.

In 2025 the AI Advisory Council released a report to the Irish Government: '**Helping to Shape Ireland's AI Future**'. One of its six recommendations focused on AI literacy and Education, emphasizing "the importance of AI literacy training for educators and ensuring equitable access to AI tools in education".

Further impetus to accelerate AI literacy initiatives originates from the obligations contained within the EU's AI Act. One of the first sections of the AI Act to come into force in 2025 is **Article 4**, which contains the legal obligations outlining the need to ensure the AI literacy of employees and other affected persons.

This has led to a number of sectors issuing specific guidance, such as those for **public bodies**, **businesses**, **education** and **ICT professionals**.

Wales

There is no overarching AI strategy or guidance on AI literacy issued by the Welsh Government. The UK's **AI Opportunities Plan** provides for Wales to benefit from the AI infrastructure plans, and the **Welsh government** has been working with US technology firm Vantage Data Centre to support the creation of data centres in Wales. The **Social Partnership Council** has asked its members to note the challenges of developing AI skills and competencies and the importance of developing an AI literate workforce to support the opportunities to capitalise on the potential of AI technologies.

There has been some sector specific guidance issued for Wales. In 2025, the Welsh Government published its **policy and strategy** on how AI can be used responsibly and ethically in the public sector, education, health and social care in Wales. The strategy recognises the potential benefits of AI for both the economy and the wider society in Wales. It sets out key principles to guide the ethical and responsible use of AI. As part of the strategy, the Welsh Government recognises the importance of AI awareness and literacy and is collaborating with the **Centre for Digital Public Services** to provide training to support knowledge and awareness of AI technologies. **Research** from the Centre suggests that although there has been an exploration of the use of AI tools within the public sector, a cautious approach is being taken to the implementation of AI tools. There is a recognised need to develop AI literacy for schools and educators. The Welsh Government has since provided **Generative AI for schools** guidance, including resources to support schools, upskilling educators, parents and carers about how GenAI is being integrated into existing technologies. **Estyn**, the education and training inspectorate is leading a review on how GenAI is currently being used in schools in Wales and exploring the potential benefits and opportunities of GenAI within educational environments.

Wise up – 5 policy points to take away

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

1. Advancing AI literacy should be a national development priority for all citizens. The development of AI literacy must be recognised as a strategic national priority across all parts of society including education, business, research & innovation and the voluntary sector. As AI technologies permeate all aspects of society and the economy, equipping all citizens with foundational and applied AI competencies is critical to ensuring the UK remains globally competitive and socially cohesive.

2. Nations without clear AI strategies should act now to train their populations to use AI ethically and responsibly, ensuring people can engage with AI ethically and responsibly while avoiding widening digital divides.

3. AI technologies are changing rapidly. Organisations must be supported with sector specific trusted resources to ensure they can support their staff to develop AI skills and capabilities while ensuring that training is skills focused and technology neutral.

4. In light of the plethora of policy documents for AI literacy and skills at cross nation and nation specific levels, there is significant scope for cross-nation learning to help develop resources that address AI literacy for all citizens. This would be supported by bringing together key stakeholders across the nations for collaboration and discussion.

5. Governments should work in partnership with academics, policymakers, industry stakeholders, voluntary sector and regulatory bodies to develop a centralised publicly accessible AI literacy portal. A trusted repository of resources, guidance and best practices to support organisations would facilitate knowledge sharing across nations.

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Liz Hardie is a is a Senior Lecturer in Law and Director of SCiLAB (Faculty of Business and Law's Scholarship centre) at The Open University in which role she encourages the production of high-quality research into learning and teaching across the faculty. Liz is also a solicitor and supervises students in the Open Justice Family Law Clinic. Her research interests include online learning and the use of technology in legal education, including the impact of generative AI on teaching and access to justice.

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Dr Kevin Waugh is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Computing and Communications at The Open University, with over three decades of experience in higher education. His work spans curriculum innovation, AI in education, and data management, with a strong focus on assessment design and student support. A Chartered IT Professional and Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, Kevin has delivered projects exploring the impact of generative AI on learning and assessment. He continues to shape

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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.

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Wise in 5
The only regular snapshot comparative guide to public policy issues across the nations of the UK and Ireland.
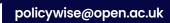
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Utilising our distinct focus and skills we deliver impactful and dynamic training for any audience interested in learning how a comparative policy analysis and knowledge exchange can benefit their work.

Dewi Knight, Director

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