



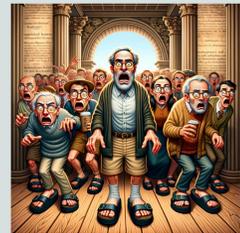
# Staff-student collaborative learning on Gen AI in teaching, learning, and assessment

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## Introduction

When ChatGPT was unleashed it caused immediate concerns about its potential impact on assessment in higher education. As the sector, and indeed the wider public, reacted to not just the technology itself but the unleashed hype across the media, students and lecturing staff sought guidance, conducted their own trial and error based learning, and scratched their heads about how to adapt mid-stream, their approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment. A naïve public narrative quickly established itself which essentially pitched students against staff: cheaters vs the police. Or rather, ‘judges’, since there were no comprehensive guidelines to shepherd any policing. Decisions had to be made on the basis of hunches wherever a student had been more subtle than simply copying and pasting the ubiquitous (soon to be cliched) “As a large language model, I am unable to...”. Tech evangelists and some of their journalist supporters appeared to relish the disruption, another opportunity to ridicule and feed their evident antipathy towards schools, teachers, and the ‘educational establishment’.



DALL-E2's interpretation of the quote below.

As Goodlad and Baker (2023) put it, such a narrative promoted “**the stereotype of academics as deer in the headlights, clutching their Birkenstocks as they witness the death of the essay and much else that the humanities holds dear.**” They also identified that the preconception of the educational enterprise that is often held by those who would ‘disrupt’ it through technological innovation is a flawed one that focuses on surface and superficial ideas based on the primacy of the accumulation of credit and credentials over learning and transformation (although, perhaps on this point there is a case for institutions to engage in some critical self-reflection?): “**..marketers of these systems encourage students to regard their writing as task-specific transactions, performed to earn a grade and disconnected from communication or learning. Reading the hype, one sometimes gets the impression that schools teach essay-writing because the world requires a fixed quota of essays.**”

**Human learning**, as distinct from machine learning, is about trying to identify and understand underlying concepts, theories, and ideas, and thinking differently as a consequence. Academic writing, in principle then, should assert the primacy of process over product, recognise the need to jot down ideas, map connections, re-arranging, writing drafts, critiquing, re-writing, and re-considering. It should not (and cannot) be assessed purely on the basis of a standardised, finished artefact with no clear provenance.

### Reference & Further Reading

Goodlad, L.M.E, Baker, S. (2023), 'Now the humanities can disrupt 'AI''. Public Books:  
<https://www.publicbooks.org/now-the-humanities-can-disrupt-ai/>

McDermott, J., Madden, M., MacLaren, I. (2023), 'As educators, we must step up our game in the face of ChatGPT', The Journal, 21st March:  
<https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/chatgpt-and-universities-6018109-Mar2023/>

## Collaborative Learning

Whilst guidelines and case study examples were quickly developed, and some with student input, such as the document produced by Ireland’s National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN), policy does not easily become practice without addressing the cultural and social context. Adhering to regulatory frameworks, whilst completely appropriate, is too mechanistic a rationale, and can reinforce the unhelpful characterisations of learners and teachers as **the untrusting confronting the untrustworthy**.

There is, within educational development circles at least, much discussion of ‘**students as partners**’, and ‘**co-creating the curriculum**’, but the extent to which such an ethos has been able to overcome the inherently antagonistic framing of assessment practice in the era of Gen AI is an open question. One example, however, might be seen in the approach taken in the University of Galway with its **Digital Champions** or ‘**DigiChamps**’ scheme in which open workshops, presentations, and similar events are held throughout the year on topics relating to technology. The aim of DigiChamps is to provide a friendly space and time in which all members of the university community can learn about and explore (usually with hands-on opportunities) various technologies and tools, whether for learning, teaching, creative endeavour, or just curiosity.

A workshop on exploring Gen AI was devised, incorporating the NAIN guidelines and with input from the Students’ Union, but also intended to provide a more general overview of the technologies and the various claims around them, before subjecting those to scrutiny and practical activities based around a series of fun tasks, followed by an open discussion around some key questions. As with other DigiChamps sessions, the event took place over a lunchtime, with pizza provided, and in a flat, flexible space with groups sitting around tables, ready with laptops, tablets, or mobile phones (and with spares provided for anyone who came without a device). For the first run of this particular workshop, around 20 students and 10 staff attended, and for the most part the staff and students tended to sit in peer groups, but that is to be expected and the role of the facilitator is crucial in enabling communication, bridging the gaps, and engendering an informal and non-judgemental atmosphere. When the emphasis is on ‘fun’ and creativity as well as learning, the participants soon relax and develop an understanding of trust within a ‘safe space’.

The workshop itself, started with a presentation, but one peppered with questions asked of, and by, the audience, and with amusing examples as well as setting the tone of healthy critique of claims and debunking of hype. Then, quickly, the groups worked through ‘tasks’ on printed cards distributed across the tables, doing them in whichever order they preferred. Rather than dealing with complexities of creating (free or paid) accounts on multiple Gen AI platforms, the tasks were undertaken using MS Copilot since it was available to all staff and students as part of the institutional Microsoft 365 licence. Since the session was about Gen AI in general Copilot was perfectly adequate for the illustrative tasks that were selected. At that stage, as revealed in a quick poll, few participants had much experience of Gen AI and most were unaware that Copilot was available to them. Indeed, much of their prior awareness of the technology was almost exclusively around the assessment integrity issue. The presentation content and the task cards are openly available under a CC-BY-NC licence.



The National Academic Integrity Network (NAIN) is a peer-driven network, established in November 2019 by QQI (Quality & Qualifications Ireland). The Network is focused on actively supporting higher education institutions to

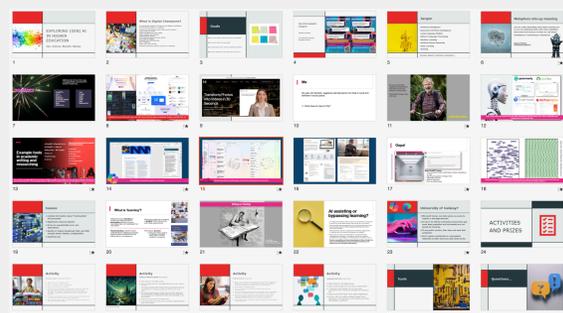
- effectively engage with the challenges presented by academic misconduct
- embed a culture of academic integrity among providers
- develop national resources and tools for providers to address the challenges presented by academic misconduct.

The Network comprises membership from all public higher education institutions universities and institutes of technology, as well as private independent providers, students and student representatives from the Union of Students Ireland. The work of the network is coordinated and supported by QQI.



The pilot session was lively, with lots of discussion, laughter (where appropriate), and some serious consideration about the core issue of the impact and potential roles for Gen AI in higher education. Some of the discussion around assessment showed shared concerns by students and staff alike and sought to explore practical ways forward to create not just a culture of integrity and trust, but also recognition of the fact that we are all learners when it comes to this new technology.

Based on feedback and reflection, as well as the constant development of Gen AI tools and capabilities, the workshop content and tasks are easily modified and updated and the approach itself has been shared with other institutions, including as part of a European (Erasmus+) project (CUTIE - Competences for Universities - using Technology in education and Institutional Empowerment; <https://cutie.unak.is/>).

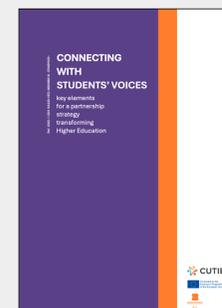


Workshop slides, activity cards, and a previous resource pack on organising 'Digital Champions' type activities are available at:

<https://tinyurl.com/ayxy6s2k>  
<https://www.allboardhe.ie/AAlessons/EngagementToolkit.pdf>

See also:

CONNECTING WITH STUDENTS' VOICES key elements for a partnership strategy transforming Ref. 2022 Higher Education  
<https://digitum.um.es/digitum/bitstream/10201/141840/4/OpenDeliverableA.pdf>



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<https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/>  
<https://cutie.unak.is>  
<https://www.allboardhe.ie/>  
<https://cute.ku.dk/>  
<https://www.qqi.ie/what-we-do/engagement-insights-and-knowledge-sharing/national-academic-integrity-network>