

London students' use of AI

– a briefing note

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Introduction

In August 2023, [London Higher responded](#) to the Department for Education (DfE's) call for evidence on the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in education. Conversations with our membership found that individual and institutional use of generative AI is varied. For some institutions, it is still in its infancy, with tools such as ChatGPT being used to familiarise students and staff with the technology. In other institutions, generative AI has been used by educators and learners to assist with various tasks such as:

- assessments for generative music and computational arts subjects;
- creating subject handouts, meeting notes, quizzes or strategy documents;
- explaining concepts, drafting essay structures, improving grammar and readability;
- coding blockchain with Python or other programming languages; and
- patient and environmental simulations for under-/postgraduate health and care courses.

Several tools have been used in educational settings, such as OpenAI's [ChatGPT](#), [PCS Spark](#) (for health/care simulation environments), Anthropic's [Claude 2](#), Google's [Bard](#) and Microsoft's [Bing Chat](#).

As a rapidly evolving field of technology, increased use of AI by educators and learners improves their knowledge of the tools, as well as the practical challenges and ethical implications of using them. Moreover, several areas have been identified in which the use of AI could potentially enhance a student's learning experience, such as:

- generating materials that are able to account for individual learning styles;
- using different techniques to convey key concepts and facilitating further research; and
- Use by students (including neurodiverse students and alongside assistive technology) to help with spelling, grammar, and structuring/planning written work.

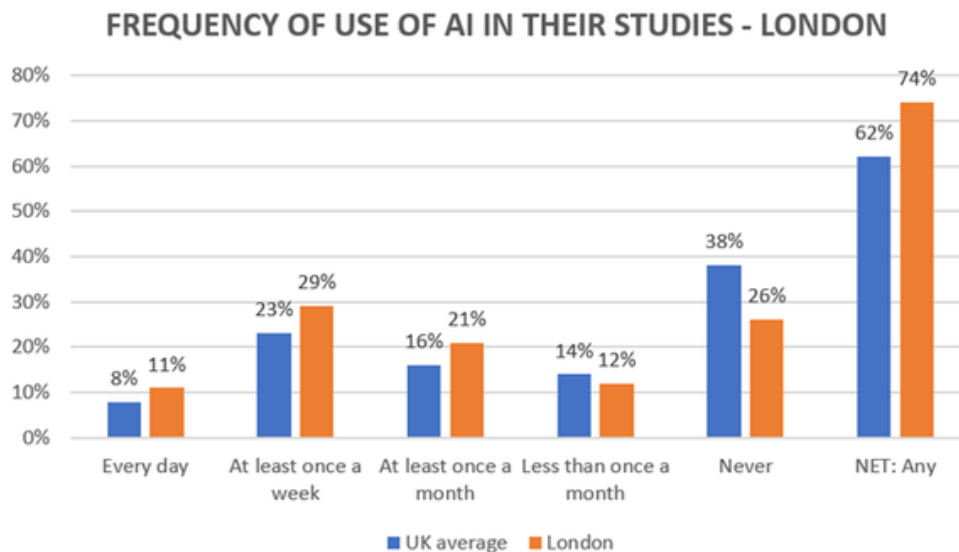
The benefits of integrating the use of AI in study support and teaching pedagogies could explain the rates of usage, such as a potential reduction in time needed for a student to process and learn information. Moreover, students being encouraged and enabled to use generative AI responsibly will upskill and improve their employability, as they will become increasingly familiar with tools that are becoming more commonplace in workplaces.

ChatGPT was only launched in November 2022, yet it [set a record](#) for the fastest growing user base, reaching 100 million users within two months of launch. In HEPI and AdvanceHE's 2024 iteration of the [Student Academic Experience Survey](#), a question about student use of AI was asked for the first time. This reflects the sudden increase in importance of AI in conversations about life in educational institutions, given its meteoric rise in use. It is notable that after not being a question that was selected to be asked last year, 62% of students across the country now use AI in their studies in some capacity.

Examining these findings from a London perspective, we can learn about how the capital's uniquely diverse student body is using AI tools in the [AI capital of Europe](#).

Note: this briefing note is based on a national, weighted dataset produced by surveying approximately 10,000 full time undergraduate students. 'Using AI' in this data refers only to use of AI tools in ways that are allowed by the student's university. Consequently, this data cannot and should not be used to infer anything about non-sanctioned use of AI or academic misconduct.

How much are London students using AI?

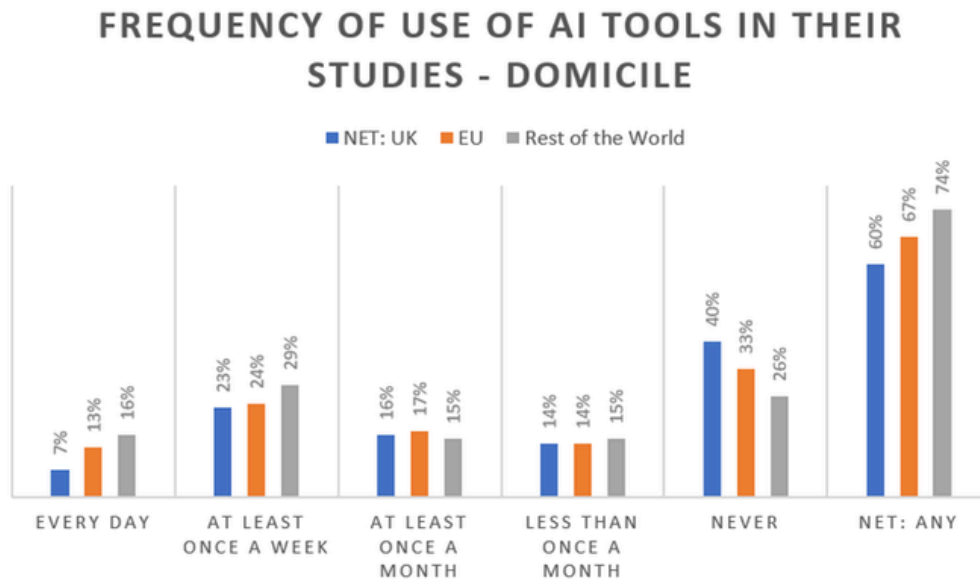


London students use AI noticeably more than the UK average. There is a 12%-point difference between students at London institutions who use AI at all in their studies and the rest of the country. The West Midlands is the area of the UK with the second highest rate of students using AI at all in their studies at 64% is still ten percentage points behind London.

London's diverse student body will contain very different attitudes to AI among its members. While more research will be needed to say more than an introductory overview of different demographics' attitude to AI, we can look at the differences between some student populations to start to unravel some of these differences.

Nationally, the type of higher education institution whose students are most likely to use AI in their studies are Russell Group universities (67%) and the students least likely to use AI are at post-1992 (59%) and pre-1992 non-Russell Group institutions (58%). London contains a multitude of all these provider types, suggesting a wide variance in how students at the capital's institutions relate to AI.

International students

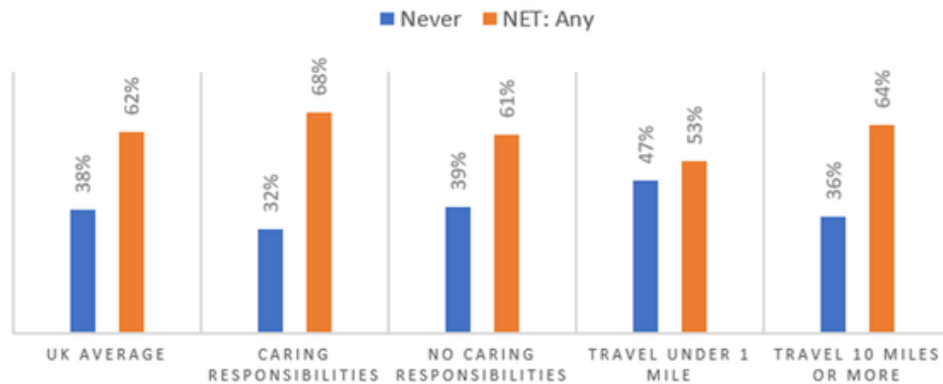


London has by far the highest proportion of international students of any UK area. International students are some of the most likely students to use AI in their studies. We can hypothesise that London's uniquely international student body drives up London's averages for AI use.

The starkest difference here is between how likely students from different parts of the world are to use AI every day. Students from outside the EU use AI in their studies every day at more than double the rate of UK students, and students from the EU are close to double UK students. Students from outside the EU are 14%-points more likely to use AI at all than UK students. While these numbers may be interpreted as telling us something about how international students view AI in general, it may also be that students in the courses most frequently chosen by international applicants are more suited to AI support within the bounds of HEIs' usage policies (as detailed in the introduction). There is a gap of nearly 20% between how likely students are to use AI between students in STEM subjects (67%) and students in the arts and humanities (48%). The fact that arts and humanities courses are comparably less likely to be chosen by international students is likely to impact rates of AI use.

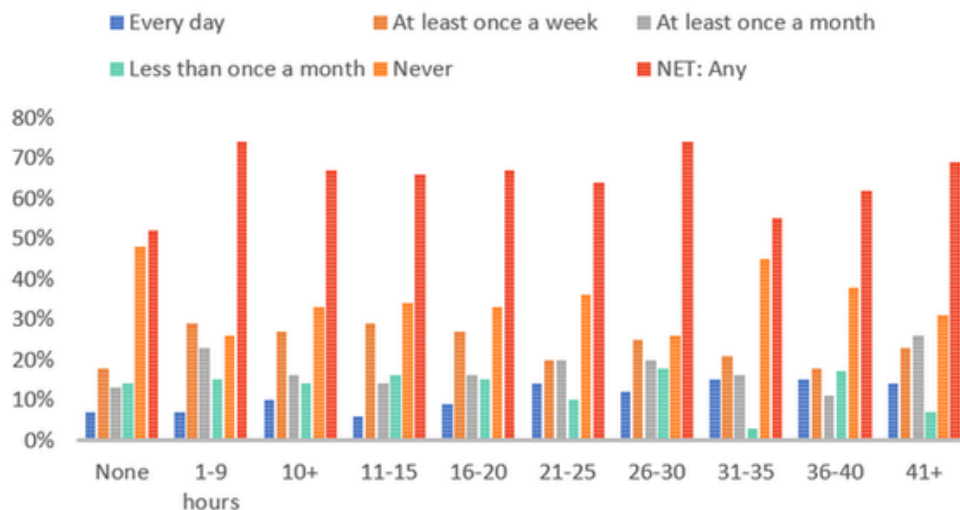
Commuter students, students with jobs and students with caring responsibilities

FREQUENCY OF USE OF AI IN STUDIES BY COMMUTER DISTANCE AND CARE RESPONSIBILITIES



The SAES data indicates that students with significant calls on their time other than studying are more likely to use AI in their studies than students who do not. Students with caring responsibilities (68%) use AI at a rate seven percentage points higher than students with no caring responsibilities (61%). Similarly, students who travel less than one mile to study during term time (53%) used AI significantly less than students who travel ten miles or more (64%). These findings strike a particular chord in London, where affordable student accommodation is under acute pressure and many students live a long way from their institution within the same city. London students are similarly likely to have caring responsibilities as other parts of the UK, but the long travel distances in the capital may compound the time pressure on students who have caring responsibilities.

FREQUENCY OF USE OF AI TOOLS IN THEIR STUDIES - HOURS WORKED



Students who do not undertake paid employment are less likely to use AI in their studies than all students who have jobs. While the scale of AI usage among students with paid jobs of varying numbers of hours per week is variable, the difference between students who do and do not have jobs is clear: 52% of students who do not have a paid job use AI in their studies compared to an average of 66% across students who work any number of hours per week.

These three metrics tell a clear story: the more time pressure students are under, the more likely they are to use AI to support them in their studies. This points to an important function of AI as a saver of time: students with calls on their time outside their studies can use AI to create, for example, to do lists, bibliographies, quizzes and revision tools. As students get busier and the proportion of students working a significant number of hours a week at paid jobs year by year, the usefulness of this tool is likely to increase. This is particularly relevant for London where students are among the most likely to have paid jobs in the country.

Conclusion

It is clear that students increasingly value and make use of AI tools in their studies in line with what is allowed by their institutions. This is not uniform, but it is on the rise, and it is an issue that affects London institutions particularly, when use is broken down by student group.

We recommend that institutions' policymaking on AI use be informed by feedback from their students about the role AI plays in their studying. Time and attention put into understanding how students in different subject disciplines approach AI will pay off by supporting the creation of policies that allow students to maximise the value they get from using AI as a support tool for their learning. This may require some rewriting of study skills modules to recognise the range of ways students are studying in 2024. Redesigning study skills, support and assessments can harness the supportive power of this technology. It is important for students to act as co-creators in this process and for their voices to be heard in describing how they currently use AI and how they want to use it in the future. Empowering students to have a say in how AI policy affects their studies going forwards should minimise the risk of misuse of AI, and encourage a realistic understanding of what AI should and should not be used for in degree study across a variety of disciplines.

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