Generative Artificial Intelligence in Scottish Education: Learner Experiences and Attitudes in Schools and Colleges

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Contents

Executive summary

- 2,687 learners from schools, colleges and training providers in Scotland completed an online survey exploring their attitudes toward and uses of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in their learning.
- While 64% of learners have used AI to some extent, over a third (37%) say they have never knowingly used it.
- 79% of learners get most of their information about AI from social media.
- The most commonly used AI tool reported was ChatGPT.
- Many learners reported using AI as a replacement to conducting a web search, saying that AI provided a fuller or better answer than, for example, Google.
- While about half of learners felt AI could improve the quality of their work and save time, 62% were likely to avoid using AI so as not to be seen as cheating.
- Many learners had concerns about AI, which included its social and environmental impacts, impacts on intelligence and learning, and ethics and privacy.

Introduction

This report presents the findings from our consultation with learners regarding their use of and attitudes towards generative artificial intelligence (AI) in education. To date, our AI consultation work has included:

- A survey involving 519 educators and other education staff conducted in November and December 2023.
- Focus groups with 33 education practitioners conducted in August 2024.

This report on the 2025 learner survey is focused on data from school and college learners in Scotland.

Please note that although generative artificial intelligence is commonly referred to as 'GenAI', we use the term 'AI' to remain consistent with the research instrument design and participant quotes. In this report, 'AI' refers generally to generative AI tools, though in some cases learners may have unknowingly reported on non-generative AI tools.

Method and sample

In April 2025, we sent an online survey to learners across Scotland through the SQA Your Voice panel, SQA's social media platforms, and SQA coordinators. The survey contained both closed and open-ended questions, focused on learner experiences with, attitudes towards, and concerns about AI. In total, 2,697 learners responded to the survey. The majority of respondents were school or college attendees (1,506 from local authority schools, 281 from independent schools, and 399 from colleges). The remaining were either studying with an employer or training provider (119 responses), gave an answer that was unclear, or stated that they did not know.

Results in this report are based either on responses from all centre types (all 2,697 responses) or specifically on learners from schools (1,787 responses) and colleges (399 responses). While employer or training provider learner responses are included in the

overall dataset, they are not reported separately due to the comparatively low volume of responses.

Respondent profile

Gender

Overall, 50% of respondents identify as girls or women, while 44% identify as boys or men. A smaller proportion of respondents identify as nonbinary (2%), prefer not to say (2%), or use another term to describe themselves (2%). These proportions are roughly similar across schools and colleges (see Table 1).

Table 1: Gender in school and college respondents

Gender	School	College
Girl/woman	50%	49%
Boy/man	46%	41%
Nonbinary	2%	6%
Using another term	3%	5%

Race and ethnicity

The majority of all respondents identify as White Scottish (75%), followed by Other White ethnic groups (5%) and Other British (4%). Representation from African (3%), Asian (5%), and Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups (2%) is smaller. Categories such as Arab (1%), Caribbean or Black (1%), Irish (<1%) and Gypsy/Traveller/Roma (<1%) have very low representation. 2% of respondents preferred not to disclose their ethnicity. Table 2 shows a breakdown of race and ethnicity between schools and colleges.

Table 2: Race and ethnicity in school and college respondents

Race and ethnicity	School	College
White	78%	83%
Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)	14%	10%
White Minority Ethnic	6%	5%
Prefer not to say	2%	2%

Disability and additional support needs (ASN)

The majority of all respondents do not identify as being disabled or having ASN (71%), while 16% do. 10% indicated they were unsure, and 3% preferred not to say. These proportions are given separately for schools and colleges in Table 3.

Table 3: Disability and ASN in school and college respondents

Disability and ASN	School	College
Yes	13%	28%
No	74%	60%
I'm not sure	10%	6%
Prefer not to say	3%	6%

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

Respondents were asked to give their home postcode as a proxy measure of socioeconomic status. Postcodes were converted into SIMD quintiles and postcode data was then deleted. During this process, we noted that some learners seemed have responded with their centre postcode rather than home postcode. Given the size of the sample, it was not feasible — nor ethical — to look up each postcode individually to check that it was a residential address. Postcode and resulting SIMD data are therefore rough approximations rather than absolutely accurate measures.

The resulting SIMD quintiles organise participants roughly into levels of deprivation based on area. They run from 1 (most deprived) to 5 (least deprived). Overall, participants are fairly evenly split across the quintiles with around 20% in each, though

there is a slight skew towards quintile 4 and away from quintiles 1 and 3 (quintile 1: 18%, quintile 2: 21%, quintile 3: 17%, quintile 4: 24%, and quintile 5: 20%). These proportions are given separately for schools and colleges in Table 4 below. While representation in school respondents approximately follows the overall distribution, representation in college respondents is skewed towards more deprived areas.

Table 4: SIMD quintile representation in school and college respondents

SIMD quintile	School	College
1 (most deprived)	13%	37%
2	20%	30%
3	17%	11%
4	27%	13%
5 (least deprived)	23%	10%

Access to technology

Overall, most respondents have access to a smartphone (92%), followed by a laptop or notebook computer (69%) and an iPad or tablet (61%). Access to a desktop computer (37%) and an e-book reader (11%) is less common. Proportions are given separately for school and college learners in Table 5 below. Over 95% of all respondents as well as school and college respondents indicated their internet connection was satisfactory (rated ‘Okay’ to ‘Very good’).

Table 5: Access to technology in school and college respondents

Type of technology	School	College
Smartphone	94%	86%
Laptop or notebook computer	69%	74%
iPad or tablet	65%	46%
Desktop computer	38%	40%
E-book reader	10%	12%

Experience with and attitudes towards AI

Patterns of use and sources of information

Just over one-third of all respondents (37%) said they had never used AI, while 64% reported using it to some extent. Of those who had used AI, 28% said they used it rarely, 19% sometimes, 11% often, and 6% very often (see Figure 1). In order to compare these responses between school and college learners, we recoded use patterns as 'ever used' (including rarely, sometimes, often and very often) and 'never used' and looked for differences in use patterns between centre types. This revealed that school learners are significantly more likely to have used AI than college learners (see Table 6)[1].

Figure 1: Pattern of AI use in all respondents

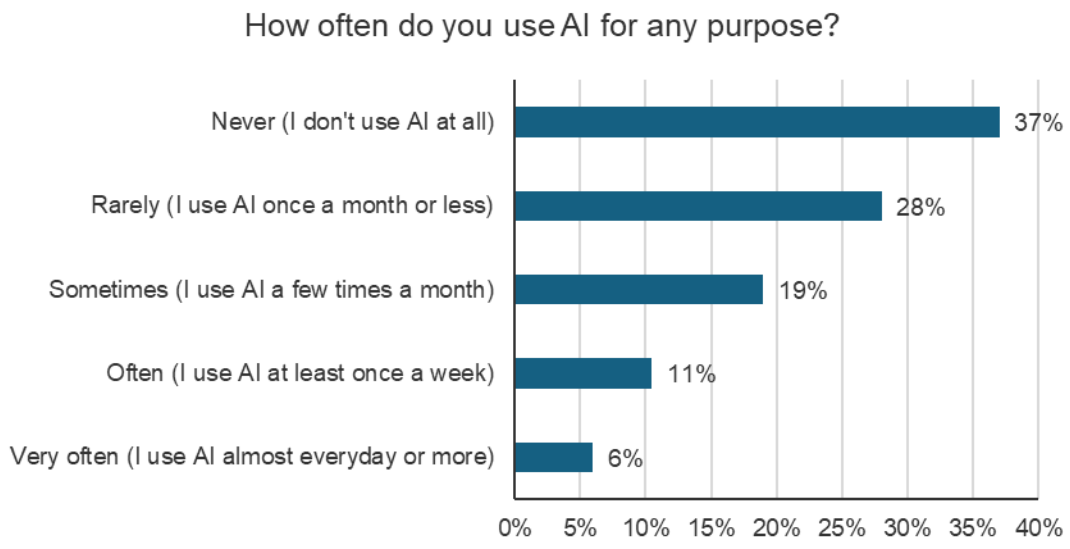


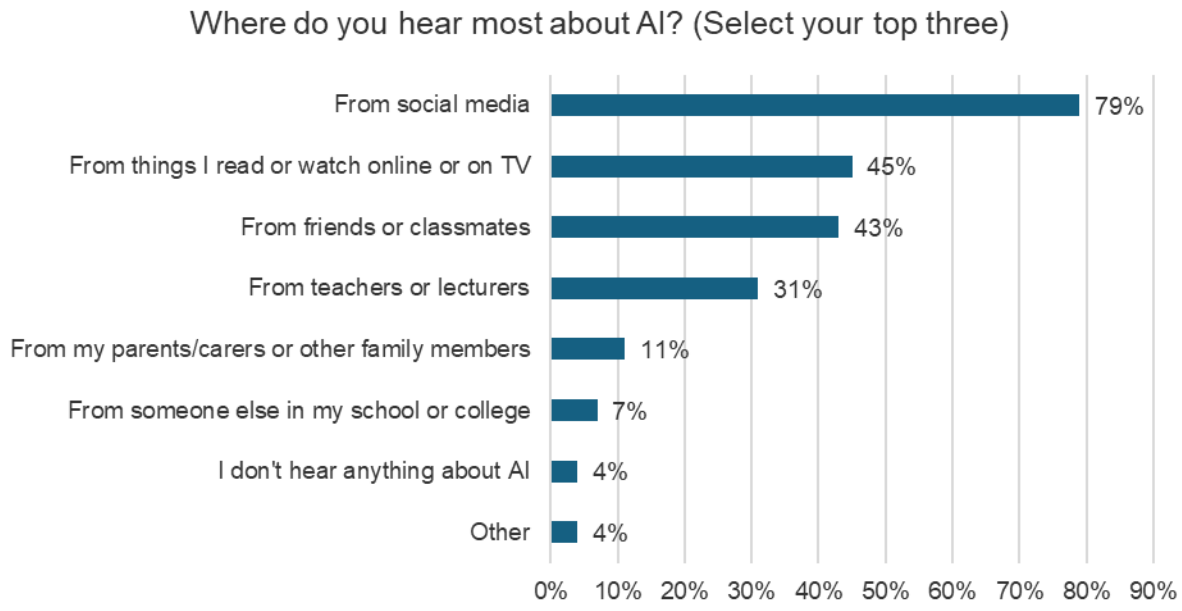
Table 6: Recorded AI use by school and college respondents

AI use	School	College
Never used AI	34%	43%
Ever used AI	66%	57%

1 Tested with chi-square tests with an alpha of 0.05

When asked where they most often hear about AI, the most common response across all learners was social media (79%). This was followed by other online or televised media (45%), friends and classmates (43%), and teachers or lecturers (31%).

Figure 2: Sources of information on AI for all respondents



When asked about how well-informed they feel about AI, the majority of learners seemed to feel they have enough information and that their centre has been clear about how AI should be used. Findings across schools and colleges were broadly similar to all respondents (Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3: Access to information about AI

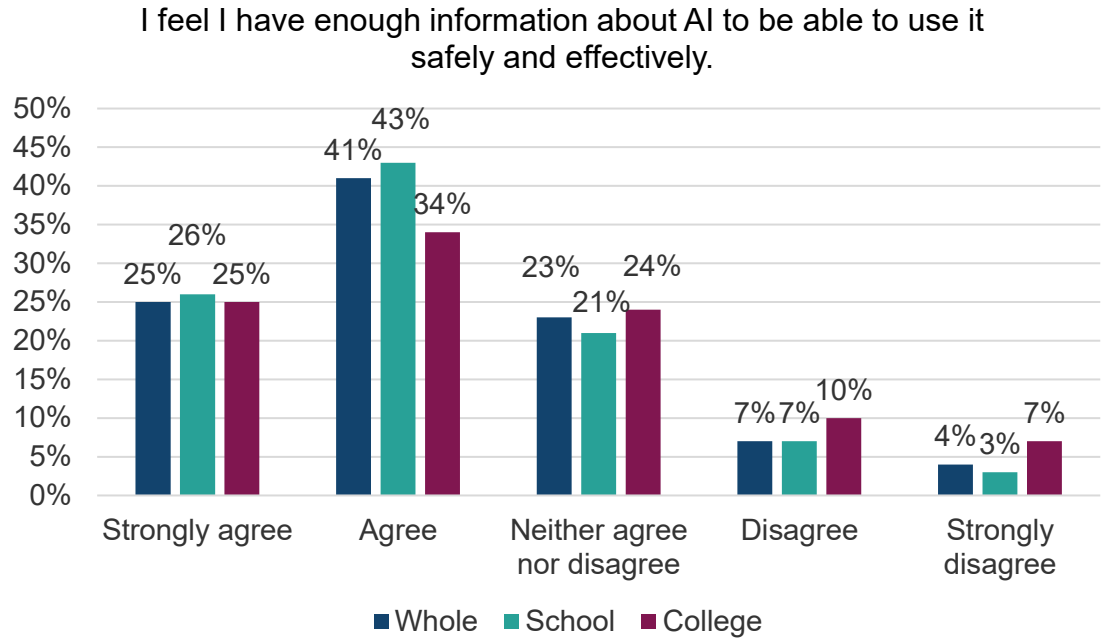
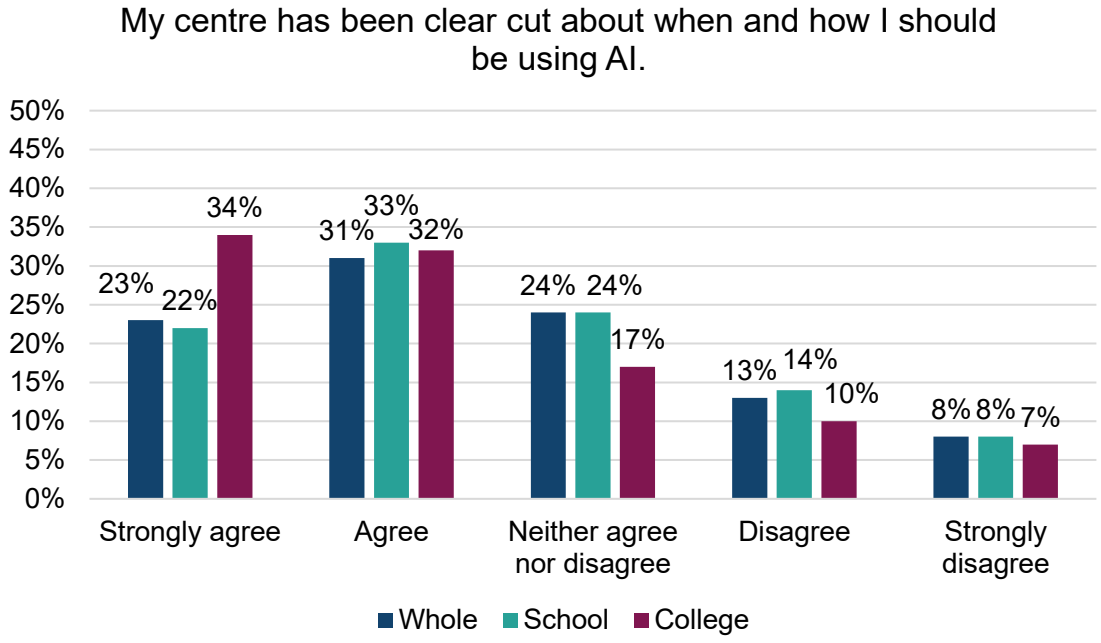


Figure 4: Clarity from centres on AI use



Feelings about AI

Learners were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with several statements relating to feelings about AI (Table 7). Regarding whether they felt they could get by without using AI, 83% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. However, just over half (55%) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that AI had the potential to make learning easier**.** A similar pattern appeared for 'AI making assessments easier', with half (50%) agreeing or strongly agreeing. When asked to what extent respondents agreed that they were worried about AI's potential disadvantages, just under half (47%) agreed or strongly agreed, while 29% neither agreed nor disagreed. On the other hand, only 38% agreed or strongly agreed that they were excited about AI's potential advantages, while 33% neither agreed nor disagreed. Around 37% agreed or strongly agreed that AI could make learning more interesting, but 29% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Overall, the results suggest that while many learners feel they could manage without AI, there is some cautious optimism about its potential benefits around learning and assessment, which sits alongside concern about its potential disadvantages.

Table 7: Attitudes towards AI in all respondents (most popular response has been shaded grey)

Statement relating to feelings about AI	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**Not sure**
I can get by just fine without using AI.	50%	33%	11%	3%	1%	1%
I worry about the potential disadvantages of AI.	22%	25%	29%	12%	7%	6%
I'm excited about the potential advantages of AI.	13%	25%	33%	11%	12%	6%
AI could make learning more interesting.	12%	25%	29%	15%	14%	5%
AI could make learning easier.	20%	35%	23%	9%	8%	5%
AI could make coursework or assessments easier.	17%	33%	26%	9%	9%	6%

What AI tools are learners using?

1,531 participants responded to a request to list any generative AI tool that they had used. From these responses, we were able to identify 122 different AI tools which had been used by at least one respondent.

ChatGPT was by far the most used, with over two-thirds of respondents (69%) saying they had used it. Snapchat was the next most commonly used tool (15%), with Gemini and Copilot being used to similar extents (8% and 8% respectively). Deepseek and Grammarly were also repeatedly mentioned (3% and 3% respectively), with the remainder of the list being made up of specialist tools mentioned by very small numbers or individual respondents (such as Character.AI, Canva AI, Dall-E, and QuillBot).

Table 8 below shows the three most commonly used AI tools in schools and colleges. It is worth noting that Snapchat is far more popular amongst school respondents than college respondents. It has 11 users in colleges and 187 in schools. A higher proportion of college respondents use Copilot and Gemini than school respondents.

Table 8: Top three commonly used AI tools for college and school respondents

College	School
ChatGPT (69%)	Chat GPT (72%)
Copilot (15%)	Snapchat (17%)
Gemini (14%)	Gemini (8%)

What do learners use AI tools for?

A total of 1,612 respondents left a comment about what they use AI tools for.

Research

Learners in both schools and colleges use AI tools to find information, as a replacement or enhancement of a web search. Compared to, for example, Google, learners feel that

AI tools can provide better or fuller answers or can synthesise information from multiple sources rapidly. Learners indicated that AI tools often provide links to sources on which responses are based, increasing their trustworthiness relative to search engines.

> *Finding out information on something I am not sure about, AI has given me a complete rundown of the required information very quickly without me having to check other sources of information. (Other training provider)*

> *I often use AI, specifically ChatGPT, to ask questions that are maybe too specific or long to get a quick answer with a Google search. (Local authority school)*

> *Researching purposes- I find AI to be useful as an advanced search tool and can help locate multiple sources of information and summaries it while also being able to provide links to their original sites. (College)*

Inspiration

Learners indicated that they commonly use AI to get inspiration for a piece of coursework

> *I use it for idea for what I could write for my English essay. (Local authority school)*

> *Ideas on what my expressive could be in art. (Local authority school)*

> *Creating images for inspiration /brainstorming ideas when designing. (Independent school)*

Summarising or simplifying information

Another common use of AI tools is to summarise information. Respondents stated that this is usually to save them time and to gather key points of information from large chunks of text, or in situations where concepts or text seem hard to understand.

I use AI to help me summarise large amounts of text for my course. (College)

Explaining complicated concepts to me, helping me have more in-depth analysis or evaluation for essays (but not having AI writing the essay itself, just using its ideas for one specific part), generating practice questions based on previous SQA exam questions, and summarising essays I have already written so I can make flash cards. (Local authority school)

I have used AI for annotating pre-existing notes so I can have a more in-depth understanding of Subjects. (Local authority school)

Asking it to simplify concepts I struggle to understand (Local authority school)

Proofreading or checking work

Another common use of AI respondents stated was proofreading and checking work. This was often in reference to spelling and grammar, as well as ensuring their work is within word limits. Some respondents use AI to edit their answers to exam questions, such as how to structure an 8 mark question.

Helping to check grammar and spelling as well as re-wording sentences (Independent school)

Cutting out words to make it within the word count, rephrasing sentences (Local authority school)

I have used it to paraphrase some text that is quite difficult to put into my own words or things I've written that don't make as much sense as I would like them to. I also use it to find grammatical errors in my writing so I don't lose marks in important assignments. (Local authority school)

Helping me with essays in English and how to lay out an 8 mark question (Local authority school)

Enhancing learning

Respondents also highlighted how AI could help them learn in different ways. This could be through creating learning tools, such as revision cards, games or quizzes, so that they could engage with content in different ways. Similarly, a small number of respondents mentioned that AI tools had helped them with ASN such as dyslexia. They stated that AI is good for checking work, and that its interactive conversational nature helps them test arguments and points.

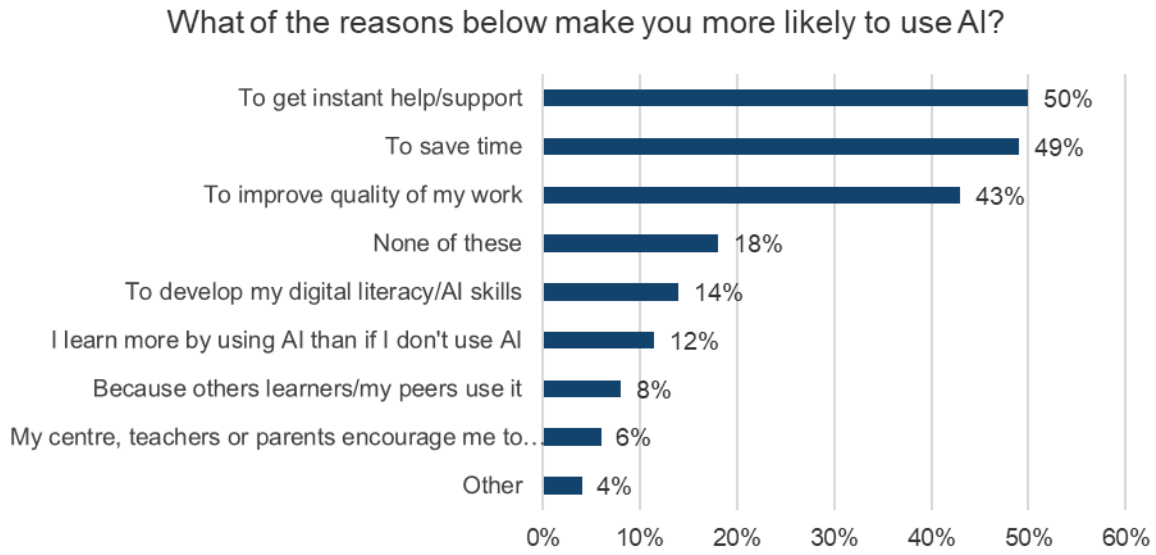
> *Making quizzes to test my knowledge on topics (Independent school)*
>
> *Practice and improve language skills by offering conversational practice, vocabulary, and grammar explanations. This has help me a lot with my dyslexia. (College)*
>
> *I have used AI to help me with revising, it can create flash cards and can mark past papers for you. (Local authority school)*
>
> *I am dyslexic and I found that Grammarly helps a ton, it helps me fix my spelling, if I have ideas in my head but no one to talk to I may use ai to give me argument against my ideas. (College)*

Influences on AI use

All participants, regardless of their personal experience with the technology, were asked to select reasons that make them more or less likely to use AI.

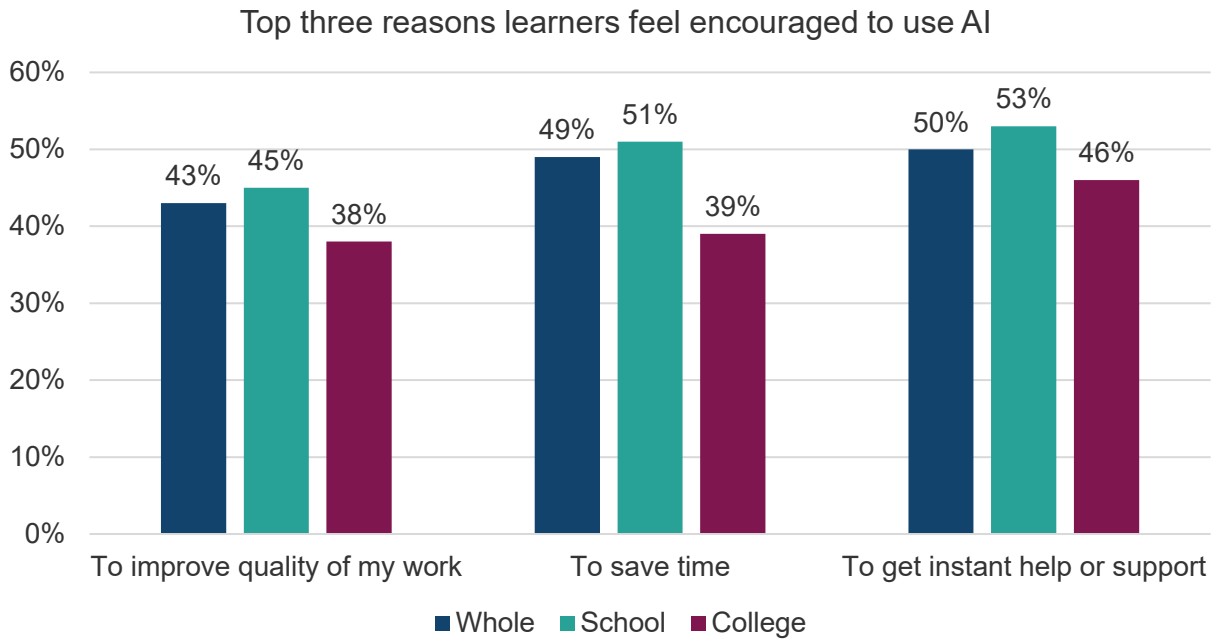
In terms of what encourages learners to use AI, getting instant help or support and saving time were the top two reasons for about half of all respondents (see Figure 5). In addition, 43% of respondents felt that the prospect of improving the quality of their work encourages them to use AI. Less popular reasons included developing digital literacy skills (14%), learning with AI being more effective than learning without AI (12%), peers using AI (8%) and being encouraged to use AI by their centre, teachers or parents (6%).

Figure 5: Reasons that make respondents more likely to use AI



Across schools and colleges, the top three reasons that encourage learners to use AI are broadly similar (Figure 6).

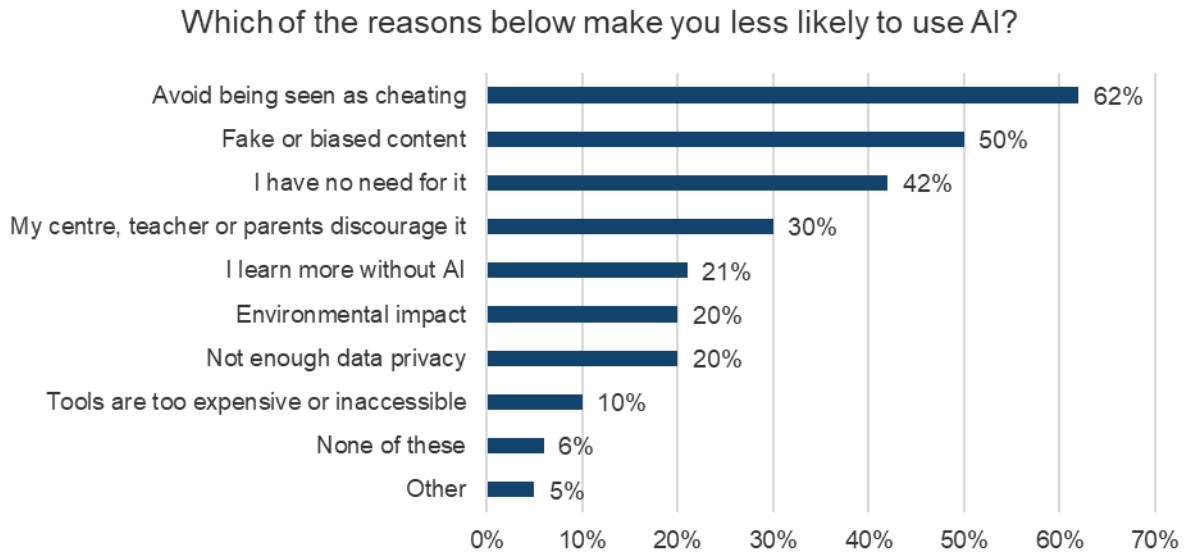
Figure 6: Top three reasons that encourage school and college respondents to use AI



As shown in Figure 7, the primary reason learners feel discouraged from using AI is to avoid being seen as cheating (62%). Half of respondents (50%) are also discouraged by

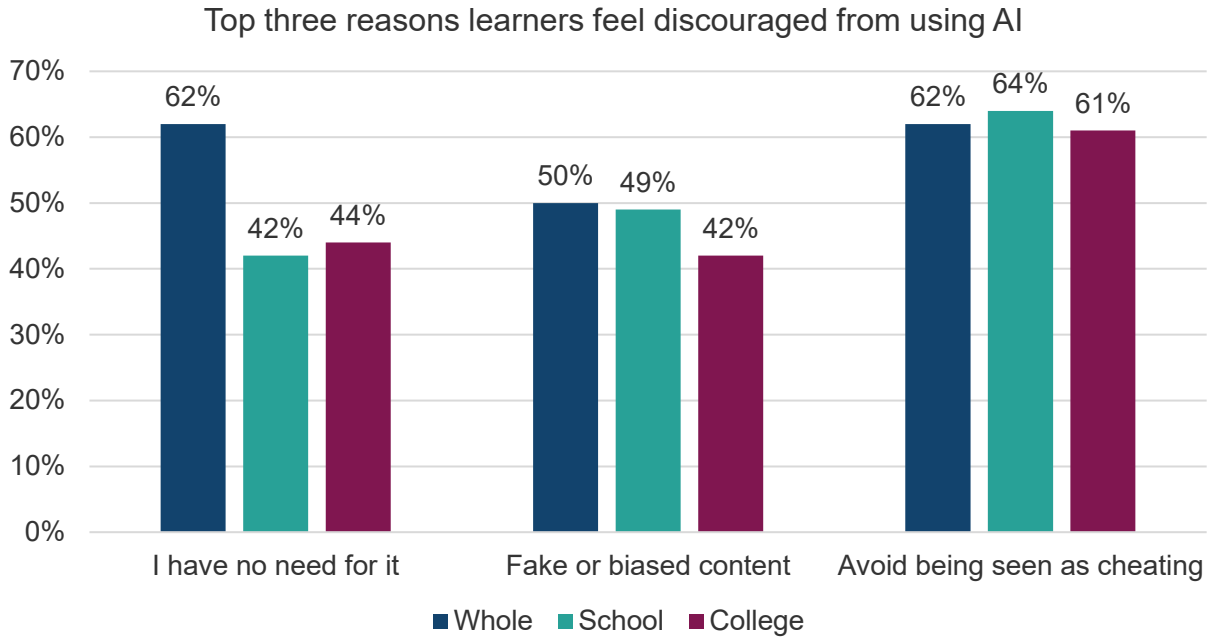
the trustworthiness of AI content and 42% have no need for it. Just under a third (30%) of respondents said are less likely to use AI as their centre, teacher or a parent discourage it. Among other reasons are learners feeling they learned more without it (21%), the environmental impact (20%), lack of data privacy (20%) and tools being too expensive or inaccessible (10%).

Figure 7: Reasons that make respondents less likely to use AI



When comparing schools and colleges, the top three reasons why learners feel discouraged from using AI are similar (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Top three reasons that discourage school and college learners from using AI



Differences between equalities groups

We conducted statistical analyses to identify significant differences in learners' attitudes and experiences on the basis of equalities data gathered in the survey. We analysed data from all respondents and repeated the analysis for schools and college learners separately, using binary ‘ever used AI’ and ’never used AI’ categorisation and an ‘AI positivity’ score.

The AI positivity score was calculated by averaging responses to the six AI attitude questions summarised in Table 7 above. Responses scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) and were tested for suitability for combining into an aggregate score[2]. Responses to each of the questions were averaged for each participant, with negativity and positivity taken into account, to produce a single ‘AI positivity’ score.

2 Cronbach’s alpha >0.7

Ranging from 1 to 5, the higher this score, the more positive an individual respondent appeared to feel towards AI use relative to others in the same group.

Results are summarised in Table 9 and described in more detail below.

Table 9: A summary of differences3 in learner attitudes towards and experiences with AI by equality group

Equality group	All respondents	School learners	College learners
Gender	Male learners more positive and more likely to use AI; nonbinary learners least positive and least likely to use AI	Same pattern, but no significant difference in use between female and nonbinary learners	Male learners more positive; no significant difference in use across genders
Race and ethnicity	No significant difference in positivity; BME learners less likely to use AI than White learners	Same as all respondents	No significant differences by race and ethnicity
Disability and ASN	Disabled and ASN learners less positive and less likely to use AI	Same as all respondents	No significant differences between disabled and non-disabled learners
SIMD quintile	No significant difference on attitude or use	Same as all respondents	Same as all respondents

Gender differences

Across all respondents, male learners reported more positive attitudes toward AI and were also more likely to report having used it. Nonbinary learners were least positive and least likely to use AI. This pattern was also seen among school learners, although there was no significant difference in AI use between female and nonbinary learners. In

3 One-way ANOVA tests were used to compare attitudes, while chi-square tests explored differences in experience, both with a conservative alpha level of 0.01.

college settings, male learners again showed higher positivity about AI, but there was no difference in use across genders.

Race and ethnicity differences

While no difference was found in AI positivity across race or ethnicity, BME learners were less likely to have used AI than White learners across all respondents and for school learners. No such difference was seen in college learners.

Disability and ASN differences

Across all respondents and for school learners, disabled learners and learners with ASN were less positive towards and less likely to have used AI. No differences were found between disabled and non-disabled college learners on either measure.

SIMD quintile differences

No differences were found between SIMD quintiles on either attitude towards or use of AI for all respondents or either centre type.

Free text comments: learner concerns

Respondents were asked whether they had any final thoughts or comments. 942 (35%) of learners responded. The majority of responses expressed negative views towards AI — although this might be expected from an optional survey question calling for final thoughts (that is, learners who feel neutral or positive about AI may be more likely to feel they had nothing further to add). The resulting data gives a clear sense of the major concerns around the use of AI in education, and in society more broadly.

We conducted a thematic analysis of free text comments from all respondents. Checking against school and college learners specifically, we found the same concerns expressed by both groups.

The main themes that emerged from comments (in order of prevalence) centred around:

- social and environmental impacts
- impacts on intelligence and learning
- AI as a helpful tool ‘if used correctly’
- concerns about authenticity and/or accuracy of AI generated content

The open-ended responses were also analysed by centre type. Most responses were from school learners (629 responses), followed by college learners (157 responses). A fairly large portion of respondents were unsure of their centre type (113 responses). The remaining responses came from learners at other training providers. The same themes emerged in the same order of prevalence between school and college learners (the majority of respondents), suggesting that learners share a common set of concerns regardless of centre type (or age, as it differs between centre types to an extent). For thoroughness, we have indicated the learner’s centre type for each quoted comment.

Social and environmental impacts

A substantial number of comments referred to AI as being detrimental or directly harmful to society and the environment. These concerns were expressed particularly in relation to jobs and creativity, ethics and privacy, and the use of power and water.

These concerns were often expressed together, as in the following quote:

> *AI steals from people to get the data to train it, uses insane amounts of power, and doesn't produce work of a higher quality than a human could. On top of that, it steals jobs, at the moment animators and voice actors are most under threat, though I have no doubts it will expand to other professions as well, such as my career path, programming. (Local authority school)*

Negative social impacts

Some learners expressed clear concern that AI tools would take jobs from humans, balancing the potential long-term advantages of AI use against immediate job losses:

I am strongly against AI as the more integrated in our society it is the more likely it will be used inappropriately and unfairly, in many cases even threatening people's jobs (the voice acting industry) and so I would not like to see it normalised and become more common. (Local authority school)

I think AI has a lot of potential, especially in sectors like health and labour for helping people, however the short-term impact for society with immediate loss of job will be the highest it ever has from any technological advancement. (Local authority school)

I feel like AI might get too strong, it's also very scary how coding and system can think more than a human. Personally, I don't like AI. (Local authority school)

Others were particularly concerned about the potential for AI to adversely impact human creativity or critical thinking:

I very much dislike the use of artificial intelligence as I believe relying on what is essentially a robot to carry out creative tasks and tasks involving learning will negatively impact the development of everyone using it. (Local authority school)

The rise in GenAI (in not needing to think critically) supports anti-intellectualism. People are learning to not think for themselves. (Local authority school)

[AI] reduces peoples critical and free thinking. (Local authority school)

Ethics and privacy

Learners indicate concern that AI models are trained on text, images and other sources without the consent of the writer or artist who produced them. Learners understand this use as unethical and often frame it as 'stealing'.

While AI definitely has important uses as a tool, GenAI is being used incorrectly. It steals from artists, writers, and other creatives without giving credit. (Local authority school)

I find it appalling that teachers who work in the arts… use AI as a 'future example' when it is stealing work and art styles from actual artists. (Local authority school)

As an artist, seeing AI being so promoted is thoroughly disheartening. It steals from artists to create those images. (College)

For some learners, these concerns translate directly into an unwillingness to use AI because of the risks of AI models using their own writing, images, or personal data without their consent. AI is perceived by these learners as being inherently untrustworthy.

The main reason why I've stayed off of all social media and will never post any images of myself is because of the very real possibility that ai can be used to create deepfake videos and inappropriate content using my image, and I've seen many more stories of ai destroying people's lives than actual reasons why it's good. Whatever happens in my life and school careers, I will not be using ai in any way whatsoever, mainly because of the lack of privacy and data protection that makes me never want to trust AI with my information that it can do anything with. (Local authority school)

Negative environmental impacts

A substantial number of comments expressed deep concern over the potential for AI technology to negatively impact the environment. These concerns were expressed most commonly with reference to water and energy use.

[…] AI [is] severely bad for the environment (High water usage, the fact that every generative AI image production uses the same amount of energy that is used to charge your mobile phone). (Local authority school)

I don't like AI. It uses too much electricity, oil and water. (College)

On top of this, GenAI has a very negative impact on the environment. It uses obscene amounts of energy and pollutes our waters. (Local authority school)

AI uses LOTS of water, and is harmful to artists! (Local authority school)

Some learners explicitly call for knowledge of the environmental costs of AI use to become more widespread.

It also surprises me how so few people know about the serious environmental impact of AI, which I think needs to be emphasised more as well. (Local authority school)

Schools should teach students about the adverse effects of AI on the environment. (Local authority school)

I wish people would know more about the environmental impact instead of using AI for simple searches they can easily ask Google. (Independent school)

Some learners indicate that they are able to balance the potential risks of AI use against its potential benefits.

While I am aware of the dangers artificial intelligence poses to the environment, I believe it has so much potential that we should instead focus on the other dangers the environment faces. (Local authority school)

[…] the environmental impact makes using it for anything less than health reasons selfish. (College)

But others state that they are unwilling to use AI because of the environmental costs.

I have recently stopped using AI as much because I found out about the horrible environmental impact. (Local authority school)

I don't use AI due to its environmental impact. (College)

For me personally, the environmental impact that AI has is way too heavy for me to think about using it. (College)

Not only is it unethical, but it isn't environmentally friendly. ChatGPT uses ≈ 150 million litres [water] per day. There is no excuse for using Gen AI. (Local authority school)

Impacts on learning and intelligence

Making learners 'lazy'

There were a number of comments framing the use of AI by learners in education and assessment as 'lazy' or amounting to cheating. These comments suggest that AI use detracts from human intelligence and from the learning experience overall. This is often explicitly expressed as concern for future generations, that is, for the long-term impact of AI use.

[…] I think that in school it [AI] will do nothing but make students lazier so it shouldn't be allowed. Working things out on your own or with a teacher is usually the best way to retain information and to additionally learn real life lessons. (Independent school)

Using AI to do the entirety of coursework is lazy and I do think it is cheating but some students do not view it that way. (College)

[…] I feel that it would cause a heap of problems within the rules of how AI works in assessments or exams; for example, AI art being used to give students a reference of what they need. Would that then be classed as cheating? If not, then why wouldn't everyone just copy AI? I would hate to see the use of AI become normalised as I think it would heavily impact the intelligence of this and the next generation. (Local authority school)

I see AI as a form of cheating and believe that many people use it too often and I'm very worried about a future where people use AI to pass tests. (Local authority school)

Some learners, however, took a more positive view of the potential future impacts of AI.

AI is the best thing that has happened to the world in a long time and is revolutionary and will shape the future of the world and its economy. (Local authority school)

Using AI for the wrong reasons

While some learners acknowledged the potential for AI to be useful in education, they also identified ways in which it can be misused; either for cheating, or in ways which encourage over-reliance. Learners also indicated particular concern over being able to express their ideas 'in their own words'.

I think AI is a brilliant tool when used wisely and I use it to enhance my education, not to cheat. However, I know that my peers do use AI for the wrong reasons which is concerning and feels unfair. (Local authority school)

In regard to coursework/assessments, I don't see the harm in using AI to gather a simpler understanding of things I may write about, as long as I can put it into my own words and not become dependent on it. (College)

I want my work to be my own, not a robot's. (Local authority school)

Learning or classroom support

Use by learners

Some participants provided further examples of how they have used AI in their learning. Across comments, there seemed to be a general consensus that AI can be helpful to

learners as an additional form of support or help — something that sits alongside, but does not replace, other forms of learning.

> *It's a helpful tool to create revision plans and all kinds of summary used to study important information in an easy and productive way. (Local authority school)*

> *I don't use it to create material such as reports or essays but I have started using Copilot as a means of doing what is like a quick Google search. I find this helpful and informative. (College)*

> *I would say that we should encourage the use of AI for learning, it has really taken my learning to new heights and it is 24/7 help machine. It's fantastic. I found some great sources I wouldn't have normally found through it. Also, it's like getting a different perspective on problems. Which in maths is really key I think. (College)*

> *I like using AI to help collecting research especially when I need to find statistics for essays. (College)*

> *I think that AI is seen as bad when it can actually be used as a great tool for learning. It is in some cases even better than my teachers at explaining certain topics. I think that it shouldn't be used as much in schools but recommend as a use for homework help. I feel that many individuals are unaware of how to benefit from AI and use it to do work for them instead of using it to benefit from learning. (Local authority school)*

Still, for other learners the potential for positive impacts on learning do not outweigh what they perceive as serious costs to the development of meta-skills.

> *Although AI has its benefits by providing instant support and overall improving quality of work, we cannot ignore the drawbacks. People are using AI to cheat and this does not help to improve critical thinking skills or writing. Instead, it creates an unhealthy reliance on AI. (Local authority school)*

If used ‘correctly’ (calls for training)

A number of comments referred to ways in which AI can be a helpful tool, however, this was often with the caveat ‘if used correctly’. These comments often associated with calls for learners to be taught how to use AI, so that its benefits can be realised and so that learners can avoid being accused of cheating while using the new technology.

> *I would [want] for AI use to be moderated. While I think that it could help us with research and refining our projects, people should be taught how to verify their information and how to use it without plagiarising completely. (College)*

> *[…] We are living in a digital world and AI is the future so I do think it is important that students are taught how to utilise it positively. (College)*

Authenticity or accuracy

A common concern expressed by respondents was the trustworthiness of the information generated by AI.

> *In first year I tried using AI once to assist in finding information for an essay, only to repeatedly be given wrong information. I feel that using AI for my own writing in education is inauthentic. (College)*

> *However, AI can be incredibly inaccurate, and AI could be used to spread misinformation which is dangerous for not just the country but the entire world. (Local authority school)*

AI as additional support

Positive comments about AI in education particularly centred around its potential to help those with ASN. These comments tended to be made by people who identified, in the comments themselves, as being neurodivergent.

> *As someone who is neurodivergent, AI is extremely useful in clarifying some information or can reword things so I can process what is being asked of me.*

It definitely supports my learning and I don't feel that I overuse it to the point AI is doing all the work for me. (College)

As someone who has dyslexia, I believe AI could help me in many ways when it comes to my learning, as it will help me save time in test and timed questions and help with spelling. However, I know there are many problems within AI as it can provide false information and not reference a source. (Local authority school)

Use by practitioners

Some learners reported ways in which they have encountered AI being used by practitioners in their centres, although they have mixed views on whether this is appropriate.

Lecturers use AI also sometimes for producing fun resources and summary tables etc. (College)

Some teachers use AI to generate questions for their lessons. I don't think that's sensible as I don't think AI has as good of a grasp of SQA requirements as teachers do. (Local authority school)

There was also some commentary around the challenge of suitable AI detection methods.

If you or your teacher puts your assignment through an AI detector to see if you have used AI it can detect you as using AI when you haven't and that is not good enough and there needs to be a solution. (Local authority school)

Conclusion

This survey shows that while a majority of school and college learners in Scotland have at least some experience with AI (most commonly ChatGPT), their engagement is limited by caution and concern.

Learners value AI's potential to save time, support learning, and provide tailored help, particularly for summarising information and generating ideas. However, they have clear concerns about the trustworthiness of AI output and its potential negative impact on skills, creativity, and jobs. Learners worry about being perceived as cheating when they use AI, and raised broader ethical, environmental and social concerns about the rise of the technology.

Analysis of demographic differences found some variations in positivity and usage across gender, race and ethnicity, and disability and ASN status, though not by socioeconomic background. While some learners view AI in strongly negative terms, others are clear that AI could be a useful tool if used responsibly, with calls for better guidance and education on how to use it effectively.