



Case Study 25: University of West of England, Bristol

AI Literacy Development at University of the West of England, Bristol: Initial Response and Future Plans.

What issue were we trying to address and why?

In response to the rapid emergence of generative AI, we wanted to establish a coherent, ethical, and contextually relevant approach to AI literacy. Understanding the need for speed, we wanted to demonstrate that the University was actively engaging with AI, to provide practical and ethical framing around its use, and to fill a gap left by generic external resources that lacked institutional relevance and completely side-stepped key ethical concerns for universities, such as copyright, intellectual property and creativity.

Student feedback was revealing a paradox. Many students claimed little to no engagement with AI, yet academic staff were witnessing an increase in its inappropriate use in assessments. A side aim was to simply signal that we, as an institution, were not naïve to AI's possible uses (and misuses), hopefully deterring some students from risking intentional cheating.

We also identified some fragmented approaches across colleges, with differing messages around the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), academic integrity, and ethical considerations. A unified, institution-wide baseline was essential to avoid conflicting narratives and ensure consistency.

Seeing that external AI literacy materials often shift ethical responsibility solely onto the user (bias, critical thinking, academic integrity) ignoring the systemic issues disowned by corporations and regulatory bodies (data exploitation, consent, environmental damage, threats to democracy and profit), we believed we could provide focus on the broader implications of AI - a goal that we have not yet managed to successfully crack (see later).

Identifying a perceived split down staff/student lines, we wanted to build a collaborative space where staff and students could approach AI together, sharing concerns and good practice. However, we found that open dialogue was initially stifled by fear - students hesitant to disclose AI use and staff reluctant to admit uncertainty. Still, it served as an important institutional signal: we are working on this together.

What we did

Under the banner of Access, Aware, Agency, we developed a responsive, cross-institutional training programme. It launched with a series of online seminars and workshops designed to help both students and staff navigate the appropriate use of generative AI for study, research, and teaching. Topics ranged from productivity and media creation to the use of AI in reading, writing, and planning.

Our pilot sessions were developed collaboratively with our academic library team and later expanded online. The initial sessions were (perhaps overly) necessarily didactic, prioritising

urgent messaging in response to emerging risks. However, we are moving towards a more hands-on and exploratory format, encouraging play, discussion, and experimentation.

Rather than static PowerPoints we chose interactive, openly available (to anyone in the world) digital workbooks. This resource enabled participants to engage directly with content, testing prompts and ideas within the University's data-protected Microsoft Copilot and Adobe Creative Cloud platforms. These tools were selected deliberately to mitigate some of our ethical concerns.

We did not want to treat ethics as an afterthought. Instead, we developed a comprehensive presentation addressing cultural, economic, and systemic ethical issues often omitted from mainstream AI courses. While powerful, this one-off ethical 'download' proved overwhelming for some. We now aim to embed these conversations more incrementally - encouraging ongoing critical engagement and empowering users to make informed, values-driven decisions.

Who was involved

The initiative was led by learning technologists from the Library and Careers teams (now the Digital Learning team), in collaboration with the library academic teams and AI in Learning and Teaching Community of Practice. We also worked with the University's Learning and Development Centre to offer staff-focused sessions on incorporating AI into teaching preparation.

All sessions were open to staff and students, with some attracting external participants. Feedback from students played a key role in shaping the programme, refining both the content and delivery style to better meet their needs.

Measures of success

Since its launch in May 2025, over 500 staff and students have voluntarily attended our introductory sessions. A significant proportion continued into the rest of the programme, despite limited formal promotion. Awareness, however, remains an ongoing challenge. While some academics passed the resources onto students, most participation remained individually driven, with few whole-cohort bookings or team-based engagement.

However, many staff have since embedded our open workbook into their own teaching, demonstrating both uptake and adaptability. Qualitative feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with participants expressing greater confidence, awareness, and critical engagement with AI tools.

Importantly, several of our core ethical messages have been adopted University-wide. For example, staff are now advised not to upload student work to third-party platforms without consent. Simple clarifications - such as explaining that generative AI models are pattern-based, not databases - have had powerful effects on participant understanding.

How do you plan to develop the intervention/activity?

Looking ahead, we aim to deepen engagement by embedding AI literacy more explicitly in the students' learning situation. This includes tailoring examples and scenarios to disciplinary contexts and working directly with Schools to co-develop training sessions that resonate with their specific needs.

Ethics will remain central - not as an add-on, but as a core part of developing critical digital literacies. Our goal is to equip students and staff not only to use AI but to interrogate and challenge the structures behind it, applying cultural, political, and economic lenses. We believe that drive will also distinguish us from other available training.

We're also moving towards a more task-oriented model, recommending Copilot and Adobe tools for classroom use and feedback, while acknowledging that alternative platforms may be appropriate for independent exploration. This pragmatic approach balances ethical safeguards with academic freedom and relevance.

Our main focus going forward is the development of a fully open, asynchronous online course, accessible to all staff and students, including pre-arrival learners. It will offer flexible, timely engagement with evolving AI issues and support self-directed learning on practical and ethical use. In line with our civic mission, this course will be openly available to the public, without registration - enabling us to share our values and resources beyond institutional boundaries. Freely available to everyone in the world, we hope to have initial iterations of the course live by the beginning of the academic year.