The Economic and Social Review, Vol. 56, No. 3 Autumn 2025, pp. 363-382

POLICY PAPER

Future Proofing Schools: Bringing School Policies into the AI Era

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Abstract: The digital landscape in education has evolved rapidly, necessitating updates to Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) that reflect current technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI). This study analysed the AUPs of 51 large post-primary schools, with student populations exceeding 1,000, uncovering a concerning trend: very few AUPs are current for the Academic Year 2024/25, with many still dating from before 2020. A survey of one-in-seven leaders examined the challenges schools face in updating AUPs to keep pace with rapid digital and AI developments. Given limited guidance from the Department of Education, school leaders emphasised the urgent need for relevant, updated policies.

I INTRODUCTION

Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) in schools traditionally govern internet and device use, aiming to provide a safe and controlled learning environment. However, as technology has advanced, so too have the expectations and demands on these documents. This paper assesses the readiness of current AUPs to address AI and outlines potential risks and benefits for post-primary schools. Drawing on

Acknowledgements: This research has been funded as part of the EFFEct project funded from the European Union's Horizon Europe Programme (Grant No. 101129146). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the granting authority. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. The authors are solely responsible for the content and the views expressed.

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documentary analysis and a survey of school leaders, the paper seeks to understand the extent of AUPs in post-primary schools and the barriers to their creation and adaptation over time. Education systems and school communities internationally grapple with the risks and benefits of AI, making effective AUPs vital. However, we have little evidence on the experiences of schools in Ireland in addressing these needs, a gap this paper addresses.

The Department of Education has acknowledged the use of AI tools in completing Additional Assessment Components for senior cycle, with students now being advised on how to appropriately reference AI usage, including details such as the name of the AI tool, the date the content was generated, and a brief explanation of its use (Department of Education, 2024). Where generative AI tools produce shareable URLs containing session content, students are expected to include these in their research sources. In cases where no shareable URL is available, students must still cite the AI tool and provide details of the prompts used. However, in the absence of clear guidelines from the Department on how teachers and schools should navigate the complexities of AI integration, they are left to independently determine the extent to which AI tools can be used in teaching and learning. This lack of guidance risks significant variation in AI implementation across institutions until standardised policies are introduced. Addressing the gap in AUPs is critical as AI becomes increasingly integrated into educational tools, with impacts on privacy, student behaviour, and educational equity (Ali *et al*., 2024; Luckin, 2016).

In May 2025 media outlets in Ireland reported on the growing student engagement with generative AI and claimed that the Irish government is reportedly considering an official integration of ChatGPT into post-primary school classrooms (Weckler, 2025). This follows data indicating that nearly 75 per cent of post-primary students have already used the technology independently (Studyclix, 2025). The potential rollout would mirror Estonia's recent implementation, which introduced ChatGPT to thousands of students and educators, with further expansion planned (e-estonia, 2025).

II BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Acceptable Use Policies provide the rules for technology use within schools and aim to create boundaries for online engagement. Emerging technologies, especially generative AI, are transforming how information is accessed and managed in classrooms, raising new ethical concerns and demands for policy adaptation. For over 40 years AI has played a role in education, and generative AI (GenAI) is the latest innovation with transformative potential for educational systems (Cox, 2017). While some view AI as a catalyst for accelerating educational change, others urge a more cautious approach, emphasising both the benefits and drawbacks of its application in learning environments. Recently some have cautioned about possible

adverse effects of AI on individual subjective well-being (Zhao *et al*., 2024). While AI in education holds the potential to provide personalised, scalable solutions and bridge gaps, it also comes with significant risks, particularly if not implemented thoughtfully, as it can exacerbate existing inequalities. Although AI tools are not new, their current applications, such as ChatGPT, launched in 2022, have been among the most disruptive technologies in education. As of June 2025 there are many generative AI tools including Co-Pilot, Claude, Gemini, and Perplexity. However, ChatGPT has become one of the most advanced publicly available chatbots, capable of generating text within seconds and presenting itself as a major disruptor to traditional teaching, learning, and student assessment (Cotton *et al*., 2023; Hays *et al*., 2024). As a state-of-the-art language model based on OpenAI's Generative Pretrained Transformer (GPT), ChatGPT can generate text that often appears indistinguishable from human writing, and its conversational abilities suggest potential uses in education. However, it is essential to recognise that ChatGPT and similar AI tools are not without their limitations and may not fully live up to the expectations of revolutionising education. While students are increasingly using ChatGPT as a starting point for drafting work and speeding up assessment completion, this reliance underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of AI's capabilities and boundaries (Kasneci *et al*., 2023; Rudolph *et al*., 2023). AI can assist students in achieving their full potential but it is not a substitute for the deep understanding and nuance developed through traditional learning approaches (Ducar and Schocket, 2018; Pham *et al*., 2022; Urlaub and Dessein, 2022).

The promise of AI in education is significant, but it is equally important to manage expectations and focus on thoughtful, equitable implementation to truly realise its potential. Policymakers and school leaders must prioritise and acknowledge the voice of educators – rather than yielding to the interests of large corporations – when embedding digital technology in education, to ensure that moral and ethical considerations are appropriately addressed.

III AI IN EDUCATION

Studies on AI in education suggest that while AI tools can support learning, they also introduce risks around data privacy, equity, and potential over-reliance on automated assessments (Farooqi *et al*., 2024). At an OpenAI education forum, it was revealed that a majority of ChatGPT users are students, illustrating AI's influence on education globally (Watkins, 2024). This intersection of opportunities and challenges presented by AI in education underscores the need for comprehensive frameworks and teacher competences, as detailed in the report published by the European Digital Education Hub's Squad on Artificial Intelligence in Education, which focuses on the integration of AI into education. The report outlines the necessary competences for teachers, emphasising three areas: teaching

for AI (developing critical engagement), teaching with AI (using AI as educational tools), and teaching about AI (explaining its technical fundamentals). It highlights the need for AI literacy, ethical considerations, and data privacy. The report also provides practical examples and scenarios for incorporating AI in classrooms, and underscores the importance of supporting teachers through training and institutional frameworks to maximise AI's potential while addressing challenges (European Commission *et al.*, 2023).

Some countries are actively integrating AI into their education systems (Sanusi *et al*., 2024). In Estonia, AI is being used to promote personalised learning (Kasneci *et al*., 2023). The Ministry of Education and Research has established an AI council comprising educational scientists, teachers, and entrepreneurs to guide this initiative (Education Estonia, 2024). The council has developed general principles to ensure consistent and stable AI integration in schools. Recognising the societal demand for AI proficiency, the ministry plans to offer comprehensive courses for teachers, students and civil servants, focusing on practical applications of AI in education. To maintain cognitive engagement, the council emphasises the importance of keeping learning processes mentally stimulating, even with AI assistance. AI-based educational tools are being introduced to provide adaptive learning experiences tailored to individual student needs, aiming to free up teachers' time for more personalised student interactions. Norway has also taken steps to integrate AI into education. In 2023, Oslo Municipality launched a local chatbot to explore AI's role in education; an investigation involving 246 teachers revealed that instructional self-efficacy significantly influenced the perceived utility of AI, while management and colleague discussion showed lower impacts. These findings highlight the untapped potential of management and peer collaboration in maximising AI's benefits, especially in the absence of established national guidelines during the study (Elstad and Eriksen, 2024). In September 2024, Italy also initiated an AI pilot as part of the national strategy for AI 2024-2026 to integrate AI into 15 classrooms across four regions, aiming to enhance digital competencies among students (Agenzia per l'Italia Digitale, 2024). The initiative employs AI tools on tablets and computers to serve as virtual assistants, facilitating personalised learning experiences and aiding teachers in developing tailored educational methods. This effort addresses Italy's position among the EU countries with the lowest basic digital skills, with plans to expand the programme if successful (Reuters, 2024).

IV AI AS A LEARNING AID

AI-powered apps like Duolingo are being used as learning aids for post-primary students, enhancing traditional education with engaging, personalised experiences. By using AI, these apps adapt to each student's proficiency level, ensuring that content is challenging enough to promote growth but not too difficult to be discouraging. For language learning, apps like Duolingo employ game-like

elements, encouraging regular practice through rewards and levels that make learning both fun and effective. This tailored approach can improve retention and foster a positive attitude towards learning outside the classroom. Additionally, AI apps often include immediate feedback, which helps students quickly correct mistakes and build confidence. By making lessons accessible anytime, anywhere, AI learning tools help students take charge of their education, support skill development at their own pace, and expand learning beyond school hours, making them valuable tools for post-primary learners. When employing ChatGPT as a learning aid, it may be beneficial to provide multiple-choice options within the prompt. This approach enables the model to identify the most accurate response, thereby reducing the risk of generating incorrect or misleading information ('hallucinations').

In 2023 a study looked at the capabilities of ChatGPT (GPT-4) on second level (high-school) computer science examinations: the UK A-Level (CS) and Irish Leaving Certificate (LCCS). This research found that ChatGPT was capable of answering many exam questions but that this should not undermine the integrity of the LCCS and A-Level CS exams, as they are still conducted under invigilation (Mahon *et al*., 2023). In the future, computer science assessments might be redesigned to incorporate interactive elements where students engage with ChatGPT during exams. Through this interaction, students could obtain information, explore problem-solving strategies, or request clarification on complex topics. With the capability to log these interactions, assessment could increasingly focus on students' analytical processes rather than on memorisation alone (Mahon *et al*., 2023). This research provides a compelling argument for integrating instruction on AI, specifically on using tools like ChatGPT, as part of computer science education. By familiarising students with AI-assisted learning, educators can equip them with skills to effectively leverage AI as a supportive tool rather than a substitute for their knowledge. Teaching students how to engage with AI for problem-solving, information retrieval, and conceptual clarification can enhance their analytical capabilities and deepen their understanding of complex topics. This approach encourages students to see AI as a collaborative learning aid, promoting critical thinking and informed decision-making. Embedding such instructional components into the curriculum would prepare students not only to navigate assessments that may incorporate interactive AI elements but also to apply these skills beyond the classroom in real-world problem-solving contexts.

V POLICY CONTEXT

Ireland's inaugural national AI strategy, *AI Here for Good* (Department of Enterprise, 2021), outlines a comprehensive plan to equip Ireland's workforce and population with future-oriented skills essential for driving AI development, deployment and utilisation, aimed at enhancing productivity and societal well-

being. The integration of digital and technical competencies into school curricula is anticipated to contribute significantly to achieving this goal. However, as emphasised in the AI Strategy, it is crucial for educators and school leaders to understand both the potential and limitations of AI within teaching practices; leveraging AI to enhance learning experiences while also addressing the ethical considerations and risks associated with its use. AI-based educational tools offer numerous benefits, including the ability to deliver tailored learning experiences and personalised feedback, as well as specialised support for non-traditional learners and children with diverse needs. The outcomes of various EU initiatives and the engagement of teacher support services in European AI pilot projects, such as the AI4T (Artificial Intelligence for Teachers Erasmus+ Project), will provide valuable insights into the application of AI and big data in education. These projects are expected to yield high-quality resources developed collaboratively with European partners, which can be adapted appropriately within the Irish educational framework (Department of Education, 2022). As policies surrounding AI use in education continue to evolve, it is essential to provide children with opportunities to become familiar with and comfortable using AI tools from an early age, fostering a foundation for future interactions with AI technologies. Studies indicate that AI-driven educational technology should be guided by pedagogical principles and prioritise user-centered design to ensure that both teachers and students are empowered, not marginalised, by the integration of technology (European Commission, 2020; Selwyn, 2019). Many researchers have published extensively on the disconnect between educational policy and practice (Bartell, 2001; Selwyn, 2023). In his 2010 article, Selwyn examined how information and communication technologies (ICT) are often promoted in educational policies as solutions to educational inequalities. He argued that there is a significant gap between these policy intentions and the realities of classroom practice, highlighting the challenges in effectively implementing ICT to address educational disadvantage. More recently, this work underscores the broader issue of misalignment between educational policy directives and actual teaching practices.

In the context of AI use in Irish schools, policy is critical to success as it provides a structured framework that ensures consistency, fairness, and accountability in the implementation and operation of AI tools. Policies establish clear guidelines and expectations around the ethical use of AI, data privacy, and the equitable deployment of technology, helping educators, students and parents understand how these tools should be used and what safeguards are in place (Murphy *et al*., 2021). This foundation promotes a stable, organised environment where AI can enhance educational goals effectively, supporting learning and development while protecting the rights and well-being of all school community members. Research undertaken in 2022 looked at over 30 countries which had published national strategies for AI, detailing anticipated impacts across various policy sectors, including education (Schiff, 2022). Findings from this analysis

indicate that AI's application in education is largely overlooked in these policies, with greater emphasis placed on education's role in cultivating an AI-ready workforce and training AI professionals. Despite frequent mentions of AI ethics, the ethical considerations specific to education receive minimal attention, suggesting that the broader policy and ethical ramifications of the use of AI in education remain outside mainstream policy agendas and key decision-making processes. In Ireland, the Department of Education has acknowledged that there is a need for guidelines for the use of AI in education. However, despite the press releases of 2024 which commit to providing AI guidelines, there remains a lack of clear direction for schools, despite growing concerns around the responsible use of AI in education (Schiff, 2022). The department may be choosing to observe and assess what has proven effective in other countries before designing its own AI for education policy. This approach enables experts to monitor the outcomes of various approaches internationally and identify best practices and potential pitfalls, allowing for a more informed policy development process. This strategy enables a careful analysis of how certain policies perform in practice, especially regarding adaptability to specific educational and cultural contexts. By learning from the successes and challenges faced by others, a policy can be crafted that is both evidence-based and tailored to the unique needs of its own educational landscape, ultimately increasing the likelihood of successful implementation. However, while policy borrowing can offer valuable insights and tested frameworks, it is not without its pitfalls. Policies effective in one context may not translate seamlessly into another due to differing educational environments, cultural norms, and resource availability (Burdett and O'Donnell, 2016).

VI METHODOLOGY

This study reviewed AUPs from the largest post-primary schools in Ireland; some 51 schools with over 1,000 students as of July 2024. Schools with large student populations were chosen to reflect settings where digital tools are more likely to be heavily used, potentially increasing the relevance of comprehensive AUPs.

Larger schools also tend to have more complex administrative structures. For example, Conaghan (2024) found that principals in larger schools often act as gatekeepers who delegate responsibilities to staff, whereas principals in smaller schools engage more directly with stakeholders. This delegation can impact how policies are developed, communicated and enforced. Moreover, while Education and Training Board (ETB) schools, many of which are among the largest, generally benefit from stronger administrative support, recent findings suggest that even in these contexts school leaders report insufficient capacity to manage the rapid integration of digital technologies, including AI (Ní Chinseallaigh *et al*., 2025). These structural constraints can contribute to policy gaps and inconsistencies in

implementation. Finally, large schools often serve more diverse student populations making them critical sites for examining how digital divides and varied levels of digital literacy affect equitable access to and understanding of AUPs (Carroll *et al*., 2024).

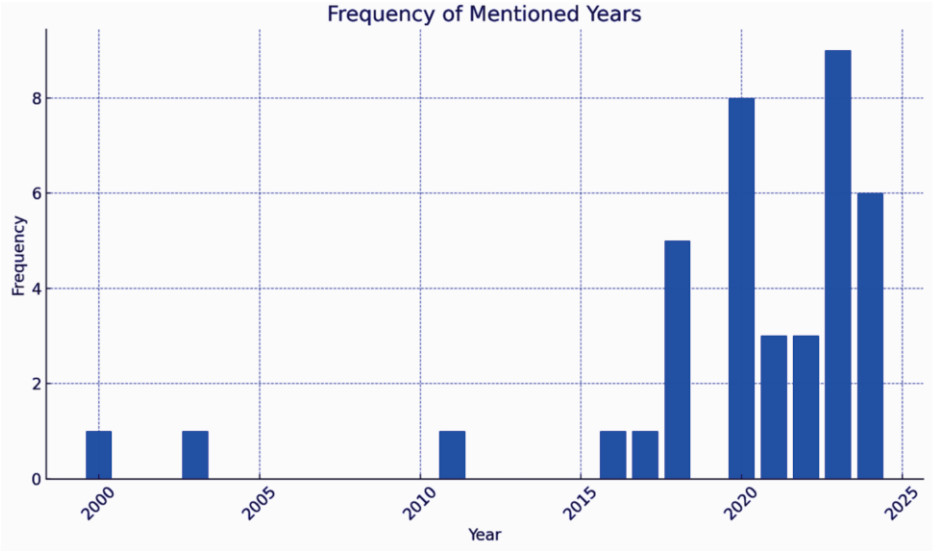
The AUPs were collected and analysed for references to AI and other recent technological advancements, with particular attention to guidelines around ethical AI use, privacy, and application in educational contexts. Additionally, a survey was conducted among 87 school leaders to capture their perspectives on updating AUPs to meet the demands of today's digital environment. The survey was sent to all post-primary principals via the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, the Joint Managerial Body of Secondary Schools and one Education and Training Board in the last week of November and first week of December 2024. Given the short survey window, a response rate of 10 per cent of schools was highly positive and the participating schools are broadly representative of the national population. It gathered qualitative data on the challenges faced by schools in maintaining relevant and up-to-date policies, as well as the types of support that would be most beneficial. This mixed-methods approach enabled a robust analysis of both existing policy documents and the insights of school leadership, providing a comprehensive understanding of the current state of AUPs in large post-primary schools and the evolving needs around digital and AI policy in Irish education.

VII FINDINGS

The number of large post-primary schools has grown significantly, which may signal increasing complexity in managing and updating digital policies for larger student bodies. Figure 1 displays the number of schools with AUPs and the year of publication. Only six schools, all ETB schools, had AUPs that were current for the Academic Year 2024/25, revealing a general lag in policy updates that address rapid digital advancements in schools. The dataset includes publication years spanning from 2000 to 2024, with data available for 11 distinct years: 2000, 2003, 2011, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. This range highlights a gradual increase in policy updates over time, with a notable clustering of documents in the 2020s, suggesting a more recent focus on modernising school policies. This cluster is possibly associated with the necessity for a revised AUP document during the physical closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the pivot to online teaching and learning.

Some schools, particularly fee-charging institutions, restricted public access to their AUPs post-2020, indicating a shift towards guarded policy distribution. Of the 51 schools a total of 11 did not have an AUP on the school website; eight religious schools and three community colleges. Two of the three community colleges without an AUP had evidence of having had an AUP. One had a policy

Figure 1: Distribution of School Policy Document Publication Years



Source: Authors' analysis based on a review of school policy documents.

relating to Chromebook usage and mobile phone usage. In this case the school AUP document was incorrectly linked to Chromebook policy. Another community college provided a link to a generic Education and Training Board Mobile Phone Policy that was not school-specific.

A total of five of the AUP documents were scanned pdfs (two Catholic schools, two inter-denominational schools and one multi-denominational school).

Across all 51 AUP documents AI-related guidelines were notably absent, with most AUPs lacking comprehensive instructions on emerging digital tools, underscoring the disconnect between policy and practice.

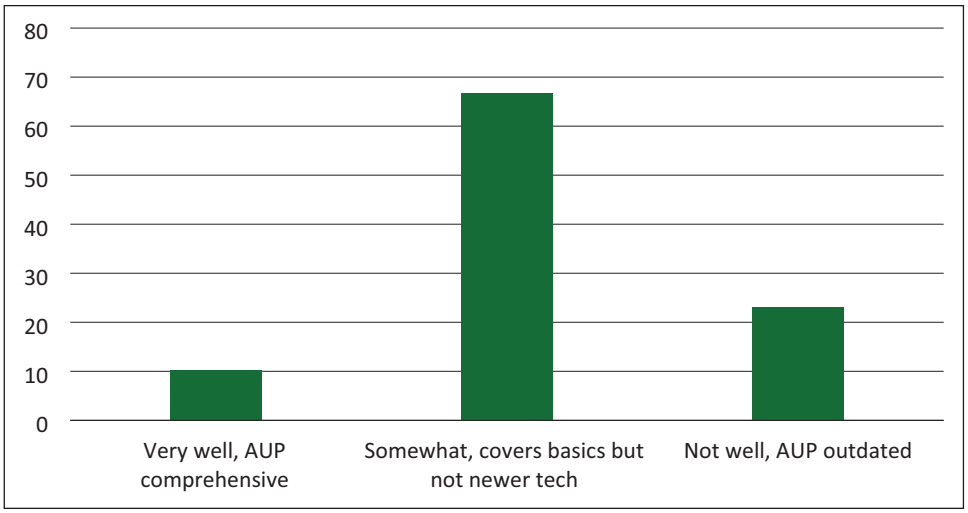
7.1 Findings from Survey of School Principals

A short online survey was issued to school principals at the end of November 2024, to assess their experiences and views in relation to AUPs. A total of 87 school leaders responded; just under one-in-seven school leaders, representative of all school types. The results highlight current challenges and provide some implications for policy.

Each school leader was asked how well their school AUP addresses the challenges and needs of the digital environment today (Figure 2). Just 10 per cent of school leaders were confident their AUP addresses needs, with the vast majority highlighting shortfalls (67 per cent indicating their AUP does not cover newer technologies and 23 per cent indicating their AUP is outdated). School leaders in voluntary secondary schools were more likely to feel their AUP is outdated,

reflecting the different supports and resources for this sector compared to ETB schools (see Carroll *et al*., 2024).

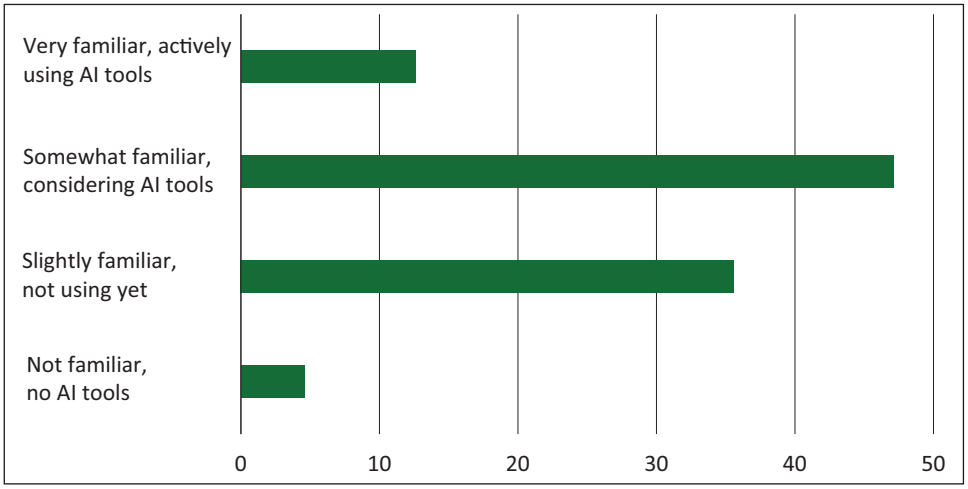
Figure 2: How Well Does AUP Address Challenges and Needs of Today's Digital Environment?



Source: Authors' analysis based on survey responses from school leaders.

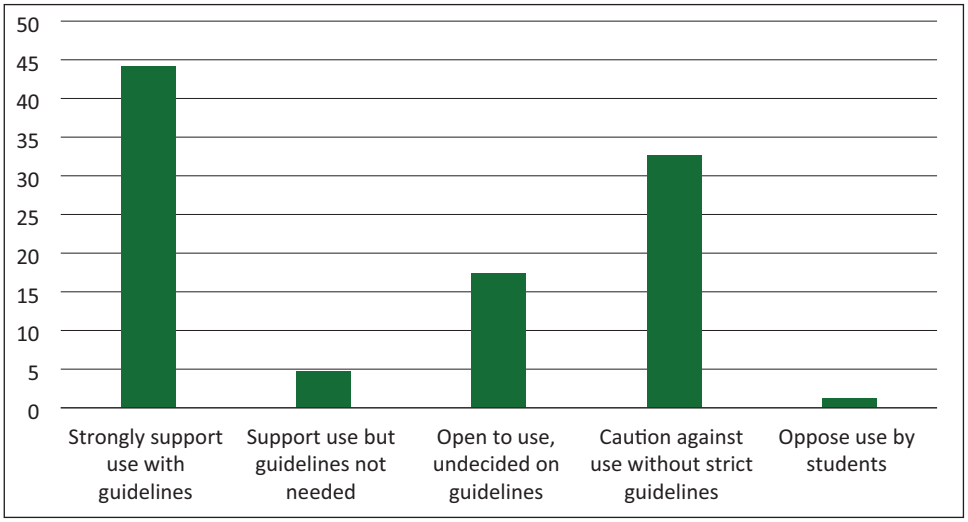
Almost three-quarters of school leaders report that their AUP does not address the use of AI by staff and students, while one-quarter indicate their AUP partially addresses AI usage but there are no specific guidelines. In terms of familiarity with AI tools, just 13 per cent of school leaders indicate they are familiar with AI tools and actively use them (Figure 3). Just under half are somewhat familiar and considering the use of AI tools, while 36 per cent are not yet using AI tools. Overall, school leaders are open to students using AI tools like ChatGPT, but only once guidelines are in place (Figure 4). In total 44 per cent are in support of students using such tools with guidelines in place, while one-third caution against such use unless strict guidelines are in place. Over half of school leaders identify 'strong ethical or privacy concerns' regarding the use of AI tools, and 44 per cent identify 'some concerns', which need to be addressed by policies. School leaders in voluntary secondary schools are more likely to raise strong concerns. All school leaders indicate a need for training and resources to help staff and students understand the appropriate use of AI. In terms of the most useful support, school leaders were most likely to highlight the need for training for teachers/staff (39 per cent), clear guidelines on acceptable AI use for students and staff (38 per cent) and resources or templates to incorporate AI into AUPs (20 per cent) (Figure 5). School leaders in the voluntary secondary sector were particularly likely to highlight the need for templates/resources.

Figure 3: How Familiar are School Leaders With AI Tools That May Impact Education (e.g. AI-driven Tutoring, Assessment Tools or Plagiarism Detection)?



Source: Authors' analysis based on survey responses from school leaders.

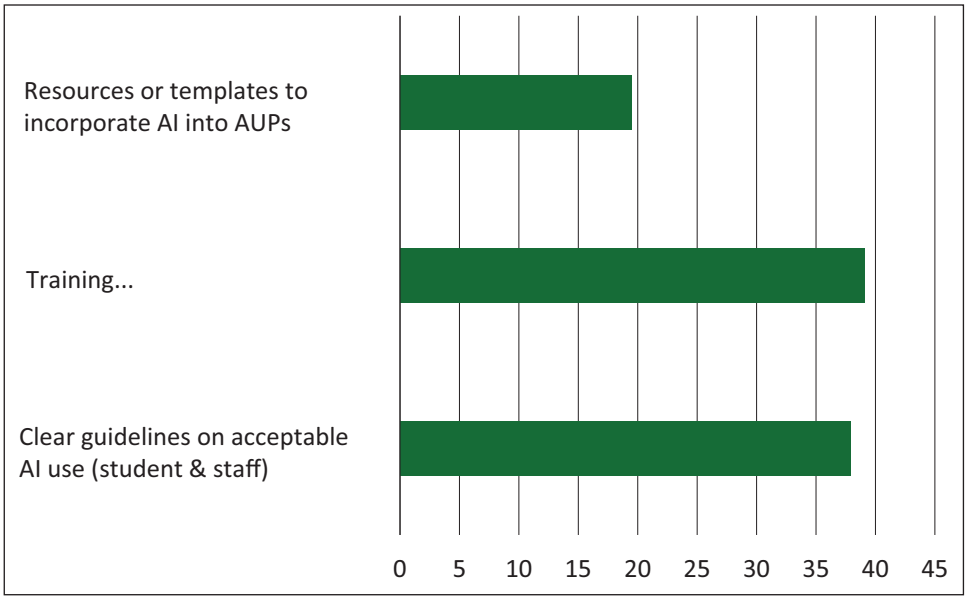
Figure 4: How do School Leaders Feel About Students Using AI Tools Like ChatGPT For Assignments or Learning Support?



Source: Authors' analysis based on survey responses from school leaders.

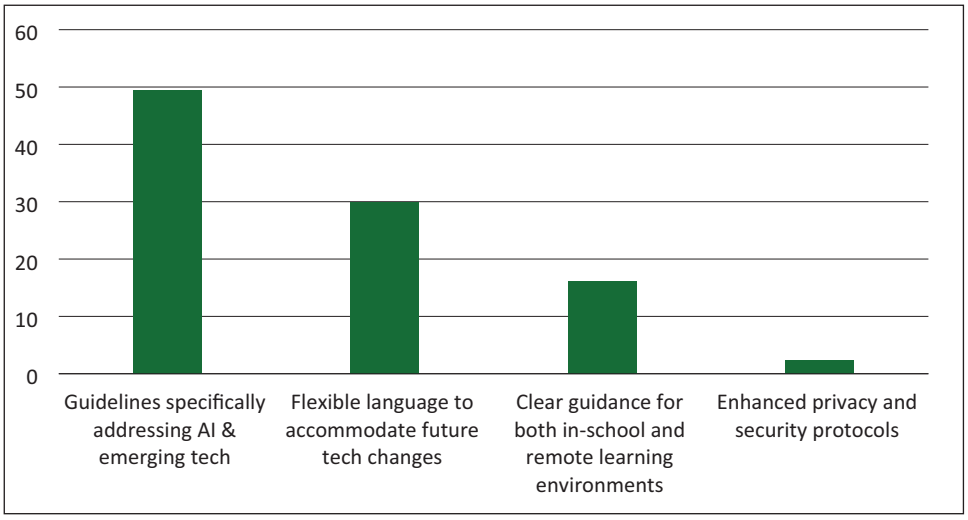
Overall, school leaders are more likely to identify risks rather than benefits in adopting AI tools within their school setting. In total 58 per cent identify some risks but equal benefits and the need to proceed with caution. Conversely, 38 per cent identify significant benefits and the potential to enhance education. Over

Figure 5: What Support Do School Leaders Feel Would Be Most Useful for Their School?



Source: Authors' analysis based on survey responses from school leaders.

Figure 6: What Would School Leaders Like to See in a Modern AUP to Make it Relevant for the Next Five Years?



Source: Authors' analysis based on survey responses from school leaders.

62 per cent feel AI tools used within the school (for learning, administration, or security) should be monitored differently than traditional digital tools, with 23 per cent undecided on this issue and just 14 per cent disagreeing.

School leaders were asked (Figure 6) what would they like to see in a modern AUP to make it relevant for the next five years. Just under half indicated they would like guidelines specifically addressing AI and emerging technologies, while 30 per cent would like to see flexible language to accommodate future technology changes, and 16 per cent would like clear guidance for both in-school and remote learning environments.

Finally, and as noted earlier, some schools have made their AUPs private in recent years; we asked school leaders their preferences on this. In total, 53 per cent feel that these policies should be publicly available, 16 per cent feel they should include both public and private sections and 12 per cent feel access should be restricted for privacy/security reasons.

VIII DISCUSSION

As stated earlier, only six schools – all ETB schools – had AUPs that were current for the Academic Year 2024/25. It is possible that voluntary secondary schools might be more likely not to have an AUP or an up-to-date AUP due to differences in resources, governance structures, and support systems compared to ETB schools (see Carroll *et al*., 2024). The fact that only the ETB schools have up-to-date policies highlights the advantages of centralised resources, standardised templates, and administrative support provided by the State. Non-ETB schools may lack equivalent funding, expertise or oversight, placing them at a disadvantage in maintaining compliance and modern policy management.

AI brings unique challenges, such as bias, privacy issues, and the risk of academic misconduct, which demand clear guidelines in school policies. The choice between integrating AI guidelines into the AUP versus creating a separate AI policy document depends on the depth and complexity of the AI issues the school aims to address, as well as its resources and policymaking priorities. There are advantages and limitations to each of these approaches.

Schools often lack the resources or centralised guidance to frequently update AUPs, leading to outdated policies that no longer reflect digital realities (Marcus-Quinn, 2024). While the Department of Education has acknowledged the need for AI guidelines, the absence of concrete direction leaves schools without a standardised framework for responsible AI use. Open AI, in a move to support educators in incorporating AI into their teaching practices, provide resources including introductory materials from leading educational organisations on teaching with and about AI (Open AI, 2024). The company has also published useful responses to frequently asked questions from educators on effectively utilising ChatGPT for educational purposes. Similar but more objective resources are required from the Department of Education.

If schools in Ireland are not formalising AI use policies in writing, they may instead be addressing AI awareness informally through classroom discussions, workshops, or by integrating digital literacy topics into the curriculum. Over the last two years, AI translation tools have played a critical role in fostering inclusivity within educational settings, particularly for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. These tools facilitate real-time translation, enabling students to comprehend instructional materials and participate actively in classroom discussions. The Department of Education has supported the integration of over 18,000 children from Ukraine into Irish schools, and for many the integration of Google Translate has been instrumental in assisting Ukrainian students to navigate the curriculum and engage with peers, thereby enhancing their overall educational experience (Shiel, 2022). New arrivals from Ukraine are also advised to use Google Translate to access information from the Citizens Information service (Citizens Information, 2024).

At a local level, teachers might also be highlighting the ethical and practical aspects of AI during relevant lessons, to help students understand both the potential and the limitations of AI. Additionally, schools may rely on broader internet safety and critical thinking lessons to indirectly address issues related to AI use, encouraging students to think critically about digital tools, data privacy, and the reliability of AI-generated content. However, without a clear, written policy, these efforts could vary significantly from school to school, potentially leaving gaps in consistent understanding and responsible AI use among students.

Many teachers in Ireland are interested in the use of ICT in their own teaching practice (Carroll *et al.,* 2024). Where appropriate many may be proactively addressing the integration of AI in education, rather than passively awaiting official guidelines. Recognising their influential role in shaping students' responsible and effective use of AI, educators are voicing their perspectives and concerns through op-eds, letters to newspapers, and interviews with national media outlets. Beyond public discourse, teachers are also actively supporting one another through peer-led professional development resources, sharing valuable insights and strategies at no cost. Often these contributions are offered voluntarily, during their own time and at their own expense, underscoring the commitment teachers have toward navigating the ethical and practical challenges posed by AI in the classroom. This collective initiative reflects a strong sense of responsibility among educators to guide students thoughtfully in an evolving digital landscape.

Ireland's education system is implementing 'additional assessment components' (AACs) for the Leaving Certificate, aiming to reduce exam-related stress by assessing 'key competencies' outside traditional exams. Starting in 2025, 40 per cent of each subject's grade will stem from assessments outside exam halls. Some teachers are currently raising concerns over AI's potential to compromise assessment. Studies reveal that current AI detection technologies are unreliable,

leading to false accusations or undetected misuse. Education experts suggest delaying AACs, given the challenges in verifying student-authored work. Some teachers query whether self-declaration of AI use could fairly prevent cheating. In subjects like English, assessing students in controlled conditions remains infeasible due to logistical limitations, leaving AACs vulnerable to manipulation. Many teachers agree that while AACs aim to reduce pressure, high-stakes assessments are increasingly at risk in the AI era, threatening the integrity of Ireland's examination system (Girdham, n.d.).

In addition to the promises and limitations of using AI, such as ChatGPT, in education, Irish-language schools present a unique set of challenges. Although AI is marketed as a solution for personalised learning and reducing teacher workload, its effectiveness in non-English contexts, like Irish-language education, is questionable due to significant data limitations. AI models require vast amounts of data for reliable functionality, but the Irish language lacks sufficient resources to train these tools effectively. Additionally, the small number of students in Irish-language schools makes it unlikely that private companies will invest in developing sophisticated Irish-language AI systems, as the limited user base would not guarantee a profitable return on investment. Without targeted government support, Irish-language schools may be forced to choose between substandard AI tools or missing out on AI's potential benefits altogether. In October 2024 the Irish Government launched a tender process to develop an innovative Irish language-based AI tool, spearheaded by the Gaeltacht development agency, Údarás na Gaeltachta, under the project *ArdIntleacht na Gaeilge*. This AI initiative aims to enhance Irish language capabilities in real-time speech processing, query responses, translation, and the use of cultural context within AI-generated content. Scheduled for completion by 2026, the tool is intended to improve public service delivery by offering responses in various Irish dialects and reflecting Ireland's cultural context in its interactions. The tool is also anticipated to serve as a model for other lesser-used languages worldwide, promoting AI development that respects linguistic diversity. Additionally, it is expected to create research and innovation opportunities for other countries with minority languages, positioning Irish as a pioneering force in AI for linguistic preservation and digital inclusivity.

The *ArdIntleacht na Gaeilge* project could significantly enhance AI resources for Irish-language post-primary schools by providing tailored, culturally relevant tools that support Irish-language learning and communication. By focusing on real-time speech processing, intelligent responses and translation in Irish, the project offers schools a powerful resource for engaging students in immersive, practical language experiences within the digital sphere. This AI tool could help schools address the gap in educational resources specific to Irish, aiding students in understanding and using the language in a variety of contexts, from academic subjects to everyday interactions.

IX CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools should explicitly address AI's role, covering data privacy, ethical usage, and limitations to prevent misuse. Regular updates, as recommended by digital education experts, are necessary to keep AUPs relevant and effective. The Department of Education and Youth could provide a model AUP or guidelines, giving schools a basis for developing AI-inclusive policies. Transparent, accessible AUPs foster trust and provide clear expectations for students, parents and educators alike.

Integrating AI guidelines directly into the AUP can simplify policy management by consolidating all digital use expectations into a single document, making it easier for students, parents, and staff to understand and follow without having to refer to multiple sources. Including AI guidelines within the AUP provides immediate context, aligning AI use with other responsible and acceptable technology practices, which may reinforce its relevance as part of daily digital engagement in schools. For schools with limited resources or personnel to maintain policy updates, embedding AI guidelines in the AUP offers a streamlined approach to keeping digital policies current as technology evolves. However, this approach comes with limitations. AUPs are generally designed to cover a wide range of digital behaviours, so adding AI guidelines may result in limited scope, possibly omitting critical details specific to AI. The addition of comprehensive AI guidelines could also make the document long and complex, which might impact readability and compliance, especially for students. This integrated approach is best suited for schools aiming to introduce basic AI guidelines related to privacy, ethical use, and usage boundaries within their existing tech policy framework.

Creating a separate AI policy document may allow for a more comprehensive approach, offering detailed coverage of specific issues such as privacy, data security, ethical concerns, and AI-driven learning tools. A standalone policy also provides flexibility, enabling schools to address nuanced aspects of AI such as data governance, transparency in AI-based grading, and limitations on AI tools without diluting or overcomplicating the broader Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). This structure could also support policy evolution, allowing schools to update their AI guidelines more frequently to keep pace with rapid technological developments, without revising the entire AUP. However, having multiple policy documents could create a challenge for users who must navigate and adhere to different policies, potentially affecting compliance. Additionally, developing and maintaining an extra document requires time and expertise, which may strain the resources of smaller schools. This standalone approach is more suitable for schools with significant AI integration, like those using AI-driven learning tools or planning to expand their AI use, as it provides the specificity and depth necessary to address complex AI-related issues effectively.

Integrating AI use guidelines directly into the AUP would streamline policy management, making it easier for students, parents, and staff to access and understand all digital use expectations in one place. This approach also ensures that AI is positioned within the broader context of responsible technology use, reinforcing its role as part of everyday digital engagement in schools. In Ireland, Webwise, an initiative supported by the Department of Education and the European Union, focuses on promoting internet safety in Ireland by offering educational resources, guidance and support to teachers, parents, and young people. The service assists Irish schools in revising their AUPs to enhance online safety. A free AUP Generator tool is available, allowing schools to create customised policies, alongside comprehensive templates and guidelines addressing rights, responsibilities, and consequences related to internet use (Webwise, 2022). Additionally, Webwise provides training sessions, workshops, and continuous support for educators and school leaders to ensure successful implementation. These efforts equip schools with the tools to support a secure and responsible approach to internet use within their communities. If the Webwise AUP generator tool were to incorporate AI guidelines, it would provide an exceptionally efficient mechanism for embedding this crucial content into school AUPs, ensuring that schools are equipped to address emerging challenges and opportunities related to AI technology.

The review of current AUPs for the Academic Year 2024/25 reveals an urgent need for updates, specifically with AI guidelines that keep pace with the current technological landscape in education. This analysis underscores the importance of proactive policy adjustments and calls for more research on how AUPs can support safe and effective AI use in schools (Holmes *et al.*, 2019).

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