



Young People and AI: The Opportunities and Risks

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Dr Shweta Singh
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‘Protecting young people in the AI age requires evidence-led regulation and enforcement, not good intentions alone. We must identify which interventions reduce harm, whether abuse is displaced to substitute tools or channels, and ensure protections don’t widen racial and socio-economic inequalities.’



Prof. Michael D. Smith
(Carnegie Mellon University)

‘In many areas of technology policy, the incentives that maximize firm profits diverge from what best serves society—particularly its most vulnerable members. When such gaps arise, it is the responsibility of legislatures to realign private incentives with the public good. The research proposed in this volume aims to provide rigorous evidence to support lawmakers as they confront these difficult policy choices.’



Foreword



Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping our world and will increasingly define our futures. And young people stand to be most affected by this revolution. But how many of the creators and legislators dealing with AI – tech companies and policymakers – are listening to young people’s voices? We recently convened this roundtable to discuss the specific issues for young people and AI, with young people and AI professionals. This is the report of that roundtable.

It's understandable to be excited about the technology’s capacity to create positive change. It opens new avenues for learning, creativity and connection. At the same time, the rush to allow multiple forms of AI to infiltrate each aspect of our lives must be accompanied by awareness of its potential to seriously exacerbate harms. There is already disturbing evidence of how AI can hurt young people by amplifying inequalities, undermining education systems and enabling deepfake pornography, for example.

Encouraging developers and deployers of the technology to involve young people in co-creation is a first step towards enhancing the positive and minimising the negative aspects of AI. We also urgently need the enforcement of strong legislation to prevent AI-generated harm. If such laws are to be effective, they, too, must involve young people in shaping them.

It was a great honour to chair this UKAI roundtable on young people and AI. The discussion and this report represent a small but significant move forward. Bringing young people, tech companies, policymakers and academics together allowed a diverse range of voices to diagnose the problems and start to identify the solutions. I was particularly struck by the contributions of the young participants who repeatedly reminded us of the importance of hearing diverse voices and co-creating AI systems that are rooted in consent and compassion.

The stakes are high. Getting this right now will enhance the lives of today's children and young people and those of generations to follow. Will we work with young people to make AI a positive force? Or will we ignore them and allow AI to influence their lives in negative ways?

I encourage everyone to reflect on that challenge as you read the findings and recommendations of this report. We must all think about what we are doing, and what we could do better, to hear young people's authentic voices and make AI work for them. We have a historic opportunity to shape the future here. Let's get it right together.

**Baroness Thangam
Debonaire**



Executive Summary

It is abundantly clear that artificial intelligence is rapidly changing the world in which young people are growing up. What is much less clear is *how* the developing technology will impact their lives and what can be done to maximise its positive potential while at the same time minimising the harm. UKAI firmly believes that the industry, the Government and other stakeholders need to urgently discuss the impact of AI on young people so that concrete action can be taken to ensure that the technology is a positive force in their lives. Such discussions must, of course, involve a diverse range of young people so that their opinions and lived experiences can be at the front and centre of the debate. That engagement is a crucial component of creating and regulating AI systems that serve young people and promote their wellbeing and best interests.

To explore the issues concerning young people and AI, UKAI hosted a roundtable under Chatham House rules bringing together young people, policymakers, business leaders, academics, technologists and representatives of third sector groups. The objective of the discussion was to gain critical insights into how AI is shaping the future of education, work and wellbeing for young people and to learn how to promote ethical, safe and responsible use of AI among the next generation. A key theme emerging from the roundtable was that young people are not a monolith. Therefore, engagement with them needs to amplify diverse voices, and any overarching frameworks or policies that apply to young people need to take account of their individual wishes and subjective opinions.



This report is structured in five parts. It begins with the broader context, noting how young people appear to be both enthusiastically adopting AI and expressing serious concerns about the potential implications of the technology. Growing up in the AI age requires young people to navigate significant challenges so they can benefit from the technology while seeking to avoid the harms it can create. Further, research evidence shows that not all young people have the same access to the technology, which highlights its potential to reinforce existing divisions and exacerbate marginalisation, particularly within communities which are already excluded.

The second part of the report presents eight key themes emerging from the roundtable discussion. Issues covered included the impact of AI technology on young people's identities and the growing trend of reliance on the technology for emotional support despite its lack of real experience and the fact that it is designed to agree and please its users. Serious concerns were raised about AI's capacity to undermine online safety and to create deepfake pornographic images that can be weaponised against young people, especially women. This led to a discussion about gendered harms and inequality in the AI world, with girls generally making less use of the technology than boys [UKAI have published separate reports on 'Tackling Misogyny in AI' and 'Taking Responsibility for Diversity and Bias']. Young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are also less likely to use AI technology relative to their more affluent peers.

Turning to the world of education, participants highlighted the potential of AI to drive personalised learning, alleviate teachers' workloads and support the development of students' critical thinking skills. However, much more still needs to be done to fulfil that potential as the use of AI in schools is currently undermined by a lack of effective and consistent national guidance. Young people and teachers need to be supported to ensure that the technology is being used in appropriate ways that enhance educational outcomes. Closely related to the discussion about education, participants considered the skills that would be needed to thrive in a future world of work. Upskilling is not merely a question of improving people's abilities to use AI but also instilling the values that ensure that the technology is used in appropriate and positive ways.

The digital divide continues to frustrate efforts to maximise the potential of AI for all young people. One way to address it is to engage more young people from a diverse range of backgrounds in discussions about the development, deployment and regulation of AI. Youth voice needs to be heard at all levels, from individual schools to central government, and the industry must do much more to involve young people in the co-creation of AI, as that will greatly enhance the prospect of models positively impacting the youth of today and the future. Participants also identified the importance of developing and robustly enforcing regulations intended to minimise the harms associated with AI by ensuring that systems comply with safety standards and that consumers, including young people, are warned about their potentially detrimental effects.



Part three of the report highlights the academic research regarding what works to reduce AI-enabled image-based sexual abuse - particularly ‘nudification’ tools and synthetic sexual images of children - at a time when generative AI has dramatically lowered the cost of producing and distributing such content. It focuses on the UK’s evolving policy response (including the Online Safety Act and Ofcom’s enforceable duties) while highlighting a central gap: the lack of credible causal evidence on which legal, platform and app-store interventions actually reduce harm, whether they simply displace abuse to substitute tools, channels or jurisdictions, and whether “universal” measures risk widening racial and socio-economic inequalities due to uneven reporting pathways, school capacity and access to remedies. Drawing on quasi-experimental methods across multiple jurisdictions, this section sets out an evidence agenda to identify effective interventions, understand who benefits and who is left behind, and translate findings into rapid-deployment guidance for regulators, platforms, schools and support services.

The report concludes, in its fourth and fifth parts, with recommendations for the AI industry and the Government, challenging both to do more to engage with young people so that their positive ideas and concerns are both heard and acted upon. The recommendations focus on consultation, research, regulation, enforcement, auditing, and upskilling, all of which can contribute to the creation of a positive future with AI.

The Roundtable



Background

The technology we are building today will form the society that our children live, work and thrive in. We have a responsibility to understand the opportunities and mitigate the risks, but we cannot achieve that without listening to the voices of young people and involving them in the processes for both developing and regulating AI. To help increase young people's involvement in urgent discussions about the future of the technology, UKAI convened a roundtable discussion under Chatham House rules to explore how AI is transforming education, influencing mental health through hyper-personalised content and reshaping the skills needed for future careers. Participants included young people, policymakers, business leaders, academics, technologists and representatives of third sector groups.

Objectives

The purpose of the discussion was to gain critical insights into how AI is shaping the future of education, work and wellbeing for young people and to learn how to promote ethical, safe and responsible use of AI among the next generation. The roundtable also aimed to be part of the solution by engaging young people to inform the policies and strategies that will protect and empower them in an AI-driven world. Consequently, the outputs of the discussion include recommendations for the AI industry and the Government, setting out how the positive potential of AI can be maximised for all young people and how they can be protected from harms arising from the misuse of the technology.

The Roundtable Discussion

In partnership with the University of Warwick, UKAI invited 60 stakeholders to participate in a roundtable discussion, held in the House of Lords and chaired by Baroness Thangam Debbonaire.

The event was recorded digitally, and the transcript and individual notes were analysed. The key points are summarised, and additional recommendations have been put forward.

The information gathered was then collated into this report by our team of policy researchers with subject matter expertise from the UKAI advisory board and management team.



Part 1



The Broader Context

Opportunities and Challenges: Growing Up in the AI Age

Once the stuff of science fiction, AI is no longer a distant prospect. With the AI industry forecast to grow 30 times faster¹ than any other sector, the technology is rapidly becoming an essential feature of daily life and impacting most aspects of young people's lives, including how they think, connect and learn. As with any change of this scale and speed, there is great uncertainty about how exactly the technology will reshape the future. It is already clear that AI's unprecedented opportunities must be balanced against significant risks: creating new harms and exacerbating existing inequalities.

“When I speak to young people about AI and technology... I hear big ambitions and I hear exciting ideas and actually they want to shape the future of AI.”

Youth Advocate

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-launches-national-skills-drive-to-unlock-opportunities-for-young-people-in-tech>

Young people who are growing up in a world being rapidly changed by AI are both particularly well placed to take advantage of the technology and particularly at risk of the harms it could cause. Children being born today will never know a world without AI, and evidence suggests many of today's teenagers are embracing the technology, with 77% already using it.² However, it is already also becoming clear that not all young people have equal access to the opportunities that AI presents and that some groups are disproportionately negatively affected by it. More broadly, the pattern mirrors offline harm: as women and minoritised groups face higher risks of gender-based and sexual violence, AI-enabled image-based abuse is also likely to be distributed unequally, compounding existing inequalities. For example, young women are both less likely to use AI and more at risk of becoming victims of AI-enabled online abuse, such as deepfake pornography. Children from economically disadvantaged households are also 50% less likely² to use the technology compared to their wealthier peers.

“AI systems amplify the biases of the societies that create them. And without intervention, these systems will scale and automate inequality for young people and particularly for young girls and women and marginalised youth.”

Academic Researcher

Nevertheless, surveys show young people's enthusiasm for helping to shape the future of AI, with one roundtable attendee referencing a survey showing that the majority of participants would love to have a say on how new technology is created and implemented. That enthusiasm, however, remains largely untapped.

² <https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/state-schools-falling-behind-in-new-ai-digital-divide/>

Much more needs to be done to ensure that a diverse range of young people's voices are informing the ways in which AI is developed, implemented and regulated. Doing so will help maximise the positive potential of the technology for all young people and minimise the harms associated with its use. This roundtable was one step in that process, bringing together representatives of the AI industry, the Government, academics, researchers and third sector organisations to listen to young people, discuss the issues and identify potential paths forward.

When setting the context for the roundtable discussion, young people emphasised that their experiences and needs are not uniform, and should not be treated as such. Self-evidently, enormous diversity exists within the UK's young population, and attempts to create frameworks that fail to take account of individual identities, differences and preferences are highly likely to be counterproductive. Research and anecdotal evidence cited by participants showed both young people's enthusiasm for AI technology and their deep concerns about the impact it will have on their lives. One young participant reported that even primary school children are concerned about what jobs will be left for them to do when they grow up.



“To really think about young people, you have to consider subjectivity, identity and nuance.”

Young Person

The roundtable took place in a context in which society faces two closely related risks: not developing AI technology fast enough or developing it faster than sufficient guardrails can be put in place to prevent harm. While AI optimists worry about legislation stifling innovation, those who focus more on the risks associated with the technology fear that a race to develop AI that prioritises speed over all else will lead to major harms at both individual and societal levels. Regardless of which side of that divide one may sit on, there is a consensus that talk about AI needs to be rapidly translated into action. As one participant put it, ‘Let’s make sure this conversation is coming towards action...We can all moan, and we can all state the problem, but we want to be looking at solutions. Because it’s not just about protecting young people from harm, it’s about unlocking their potential. ‘

“it’s not just about protecting young people from harm, it’s about unlocking their potential”

Senior Policy Maker

The opportunity exists for the UK to become a world leader in both the development and the regulation of AI. Seizing that opportunity requires policymakers and industry to listen to and actively involve those who will be most affected by the proliferation of AI: young people. It is hoped that this roundtable will help inspire leaders across the industry and in Government to do much more to include young people in co-creating the future of AI.

Part 2



Young People and AI: The Opportunities and Risks

1. Mental Health, Identity and Emotional Reliance on AI

A key theme raised in the roundtable was the impact of AI on young people's mental health and sense of identity. One of the young people participating in the discussion argued that questions of identity are more important to today's youth than their economic contribution to society and highlighted the threat AI poses by enabling identity theft and the creation of fake images that purport to represent somebody. Young participants also discussed how their peers who do not trust their teachers or parents are increasingly relying on AI for emotional support on sensitive issues like bullying, which poses challenging and urgent questions about the sort of society that we are building and the breakdown of the relationships that previously supported young people's emotional development. Tragically, recent reporting and litigation in the United States have alleged cases in which AI chatbots encouraged self-harm or suicide among teenagers, reinforcing the need for stringent safeguards when young people use AI for emotional support.³

3 [Google, AI firm settle lawsuit over teen's suicide linked to chatbot](#)

“Has AI ever had a breakup or been fired from a job? I don’t think so. So I think it’s really important that we install different guardrails before using it for mental health support.”

Senior Policy Maker

In that context, pertinent issues were raised regarding the efficacy of AI as a mental health support tool given that it has never actually been through a real human experience, such as a breakup, and is programmed to agree with the person asking it questions and tell them what it predicts they want to hear. All of which means that significant guardrails need to be put in place to mitigate the potential harms stemming from reliance on AI for emotional and mental health support. One such guardrail would be providing people with clear research evidence showing the risks and benefits of AI in mental health contexts so that they can make informed choices about what works for them as individuals. Young participants called for more longitudinal studies showing the impact of AI use on mental health and urged industry and the Government to act on research evidence.

Research referenced by the Ada Lovelace Institute already shows the detrimental effect that turning to AI agents for support is having on young people’s lives.⁴ Participants also reflected on the importance of human connection and compassion when dealing with mental health issues and highlighted the potential of ‘offline online’ solutions, such as using an app that connects you to a real therapist.

The focus on identity also acted as a reminder of a crucial point raised repeatedly throughout the roundtable: young people’s experiences and needs are not uniform. Therefore, any overarching policies regarding AI and its impact on young people need to take account of individuals’ subjective experiences and identities.

4 <https://www.adalovelaceinstitute.org/blog/ai-companions/>

2. Online Safety, Deepfakes and Image-Based Abuse

Young people's online safety was a key concern raised by many participants. It was argued that the online safety risks are already broadly understood, given that they are the same as those posed by social media, but are significantly exacerbated by the presence of AI. Children's rights, therefore, need to be understood and respected by the creators of all digital services and products, especially those that use AI. The 5Rights Foundation's Children and AI Design Code was cited as a way to help developers identify, evaluate and mitigate the known risks from AI to children, while also preparing for unknown risks.⁵

Many attendees highlighted the specific issue of deepfake pornographic images. Multiple AI-powered apps now enable people to upload a picture of a fully clothed individual and turn it into an image that purports to show that person naked. Recent reporting on xAI's Grok – used to generate non-consensual sexualised deepfakes and prompting ministerial concern and regulatory scrutiny – illustrates how quickly 'nudification' capability can scale when safeguards lag deployment.⁶

Numerous incidents of such images being weaponised against children have already been documented in the UK and the US, with devastating consequences for the victims. Importantly, these harms are not evenly distributed: image-based sexual abuse disproportionately targets girls and young women and can compound existing vulnerabilities linked to socioeconomic disadvantage and marginalisation.



⁵ <https://5rightsfoundation.com/resource/children-ai-design-code/>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2026/jan/05/elon-musk-grok-ai-digitially-undress-images-of-women-children>

A New York Times story from April 2024 referred to an epidemic of deepfake pornographic images of school-age children.⁷ A similar story in the Wall Street Journal quoted one survey participant as saying that young victims of such images would be thought of as ‘dirty’ by their peers, even if they explained that the pictures were fake.⁸

In May 2025, The Independent quoted Laura Bates, the founder of the Everyday Sexism Project, saying that deepfake pornography ‘is the next big sexual violence issue that is going to impact schools’.⁹ And in April 2025, the children’s commissioner for England, Dame Rachel de Souza, said, ‘The evolution of these tools is happening at such scale and speed that it can be overwhelming to try and get a grip on the danger they present.’¹⁰ Roundtable participants stressed that researchers must attempt to meet that challenge so that the danger of deepfake pornography can be both widely understood and urgently addressed.

Participants highlighted the reputational risks to the AI industry as a whole if the technology becomes associated in the public mind with deepfake pornography and emphasised the commitment at senior levels of the Government to tackling such abuses. It was suggested that education programmes telling children what not to do with AI could help address the problem. However, some participants expressed concerns that such programmes would be insufficient in a context in which the apps to create deepfake pornography are widely and freely available.

7 <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/08/technology/deepfake-ai-nudes-westfield-high-school.html>

8 <https://www.wsj.com/tech/personal-tech/ai-fake-nude-photos-schools-victim-impact-88a4b1e4>

9 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/schools-sexual-violence-deepfake-porn-laura-bates-hay-b2757933.html>

10 <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/resource/children-nudification-tools-and-sexually-explicit-deepfakes/>



3. Gendered Harms and Inequality

Related to the issue of online safety and deepfake pornography, the participants also discussed the gendered harms and inequality associated with AI technology. Research evidence shows that young women are less likely to feel safe online than young men, and a poll commissioned by Amnesty in 2025 found that 73% of Gen Z social media users in the UK have witnessed misogynistic content online, with half encountering it on a weekly basis. The same poll found that 70% of Gen Z believe that divisive and misogynistic language has increased on social media.¹¹

“Misogyny and online digital safety are big concerns for many young people. And we know that young women are less likely to feel safe online than young males.”

Youth Advocate

Such statistics caused the participants to question why algorithms are feeding such content to young people and to ask what could be done about it. Research into algorithmic fairness shows that AI systems amplify the biases of the societies that create them. Therefore, without intervention, such systems will scale and automate inequality for young people, with a disproportionate negative effect on young women and marginalised youth. For example, recommendation algorithms tend to reinforce gender and racial stereotypes, hyper-personalised content loops harm concerning mental health and body image, and AI is enabling new forms of grooming and exploitation.

¹¹ <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/toxic-tech-new-polling-exposes-widespread-online-misogyny-driving-gen-z-away-social>

In that context, participants argued for the importance of intersectional fairness, which means taking account of issues related to gender, race, disability and class when designing and using AI systems. Failing to do so risks deepening existing inequalities. Addressing intersectional issues requires robust regulatory mechanisms, such as creating a standardised framework for bias testing and performing mandatory bias audits for AI systems before deployment. It was also suggested that regulations could mandate better gender balance in the boardrooms and research teams of AI developers. Such regulations would need to be backed by strong and appropriate penalties for developers and deployers of systems that cause harm such as gender-based discrimination.

Other suggestions included mandatory watermarking or labelling of AI-generated media to identify manipulation, safe reporting and takedown mechanisms for victims of AI-based gender and racial discrimination, and platforms being held liable if they fail to act on flagged content. It was also suggested that young people need to be more heavily involved in the co-creation of AI, so that their concerns could be taken into account, an issue that is discussed in more detail in Section 7 of this report.

4. Education, Assessment and AI Literacy

Unsurprisingly, AI in education was a key area of focus for many of the roundtable participants, with opinions divided about both the potential benefits of the technology and the drawbacks that could be associated with its use if it is not properly managed.

Advocates of AI in education emphasised the technology's potential to personalise learning and amplify the voices of young people who have long been silenced. Summarising the benefits of AI in education, one participant stated, 'This is not instead of teachers, this is alongside teachers. And the more we can get personalised education in place [with AI], the more time teachers will be able to spend bringing humans together and teaching them how to interact with each other.' The prospect of AI alleviating some of the burden on teachers is to be welcomed in a context in which many are overburdened with both work and stress.

However, concerns were raised about how AI is currently being used in education, with students often merely copying and pasting answers from ChatGPT, which obviously does nothing to develop their critical thinking.¹² Students using AI in that way typically struggle in exams, and when they go on to job interviews, potential employers are discovering that they do not match how they presented themselves on their AI-generated CVs and cover letters. It was suggested that greater transparency regarding both students' and teachers' use of AI could help to improve the situation.

Young people participating in the roundtable highlighted that AI needs to be integrated into the curriculum so that students can be helped to understand the technology and use it appropriately. As one young participant put it, 'I think the next step is to educate people [about AI] because it's not being taught in school and it's not something that's discussed. So, I think policymakers need to change the curriculum to include AI because people really don't know what's going on with it.'

Questions were posed about how the curriculum can be changed so that it does not just focus on success in examinations but helps generate the knowledge and practical skills that will be required for the future world of work. In that context, it was also recommended that the use of AI in education should be designed so that it helps students develop the critical thinking skills that are at the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy (a framework for categorising educational goals that extends from simply remembering facts through to active creation).

For example, rather than just providing an answer to a question, AI systems could be used to guide students to think critically so they can generate their own answers and learn to question AI-generated responses. Concern was expressed by participants that schools had been advised to use AI without any proper guidance about how it can function best as a learning tool to develop critical thinking skills. Participants also recommended further research to determine how AI affects cognition and how the technology can best be used to develop critical thinking skills.

12 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/homework-cheats-parents-need-to-know-mnjdwjml>

Citing a pilot project attempting to integrate AI into education, some participants highlighted differing attitudes between private and state schools, with schools in the latter category significantly less receptive to the technology even when it is offered for free. It was suggested that government intervention may be required to make state schools embrace the learning opportunities presented by AI and to enable public-private partnerships that can introduce children and young people to the positive sides of the technology. Such exposure can also help students to make responsible choices regarding their AI use. The Government also has a role to play in terms of sharing best practice regarding the use of the technology in education.

Various participants emphasised the criticality of educating teachers so they can understand the positive educational aspects of AI and upskilling them so they can work with the technology and help their students make the most of the opportunities that it presents. However, it was also argued that the AI industry as a whole needs to do more to inform the Government's thinking about how to best implement AI in schools.

“We need teachers to be upskilled as well and that is super urgent so they’re not shutting down opportunities and they understand how AI can be a positive force within their classrooms”

Education Consultant

5. Skills, Work and Future Uncertainty

The transition from education to the world of work is widely recognised as one of the most challenging periods in a young person's life. But how much more fraught is that translation likely to become, given the enormous uncertainty that AI is generating about job security and the skills that will be required to thrive in future? The rapid development and deployment of AI is already posing challenging questions about the future of work, with jobs that were previously thought safe suddenly placed under threat by new technology.



Young people attending the roundtable reported significant concerns regarding the jobs that will be lost to AI, which they identified as a cross-cutting issue that also affects adults. One young attendee indicated that even primary school children are stating that AI is going to take away the jobs that they would like to do in the future. Policymakers' responses to that concern stressed that we do not know yet the extent to which AI will take jobs and what space will be left for

humans in certain professions. Young people were advised to prepare for an unpredictable job market and to follow the advice of the tech entrepreneur Azeem Azhar, who recommended that jobseekers should search for something they love doing and then learn how to do it better with AI.

Attendees also commented on the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology's commitment to embracing AI to increase productivity and improve individuals' quality of life. However, they admitted that there are many unanswered questions about where humans will fit in that vision. Social care and nursing were repeatedly cited as examples of professions that will continue to require human staff (possibly with AI assistance), and it was suggested that such work should be better paid and valued in future. One young attendee highlighted a lack of support for students aspiring to be entrepreneurs and asked how that ecosystem could be nurtured.

Attempting to allay concerns about the future, some participants argued that ‘mainlining AI into the veins of the economy’ would not only drive growth but also create new roles. Considerable emphasis was placed on the importance of reskilling to help people transition to the new jobs that AI will create. The potential roles of businesses in such reskilling were highlighted, as they may need to offer more free training to their employees and also be prepared for longer waits before new employees are making economic contributions to the firm.

It was further suggested that young people, as digital natives, would naturally be able to excel in the new jobs AI will create, giving them advantages over older generations. However, there was some criticism of the term ‘digital natives’: It was argued that the notion that children have natural capabilities for using technology is discredited. Such assumptions can also be damaging because they ascribe capability and agency to young people that have to be learned and earned.

From that argument, it was suggested that more emphasis needs to be placed on teaching young people AI capabilities as part of a broader education, so they can develop both the cognitive capacity and the societal understanding to put AI to good use. It was further claimed that the focus on capabilities needs to be balanced with more emphasis on developing young people’s consciences and characters as well, through a graduated approach that builds agency and understanding in an age-appropriate way to prepare young people to thrive in the future. Therefore, attendees called for a national framework (underpinned by research and backed by industry) that addresses not only skills but also values.

Reflecting on the positive changes AI could bring, participants highlighted the technology’s potential to drive innovation and help tackle longstanding global challenges, such as climate change and food scarcity. Such potential emphasises the importance of upskilling young people to work with AI so that they can harness it as the leaders of the future and make the changes they want to see. Participants also reflected on the potential to use AI to rapidly upskill young people so they could compete effectively against more experienced people in the job market.

6. Access, Exclusion and Digital Divides

Many attendees discussed the issues of access, exclusion and the burgeoning digital divide (or ‘digital chasm’ as one participant described it). Figures from the Digital Poverty Alliance show that 13–19 million people in the United Kingdom have no digital skills, giving a sense of the size of the divide.¹³

***“We know that the possibilities of AI can be fantastic...
But we also know that it’s not currently
accessible for everyone.”***

Youth Advocate

Research studies cited pointed to different dividing lines related to gender, class and economic advantage. For example, girls are less likely to use AI than boys. Evidence also suggests that young people from households at the lower end of the economic spectrum are 50% less likely to access the technology. Relatedly, research from the Alan Turing Institute for the Lego Foundation shows that private school pupils are three times more likely to use AI than their state-school-educated peers.¹⁴

Such statistics suggest that AI-driven personalisation in education risks exacerbating existing divides unless access to the technology is increased and made more equitable. Given that 93% of secondary school pupils have mobile phones, such devices were identified as one of the ways to make AI technology more accessible and thus bridge the digital divide. AI businesses were also challenged to think about what more they could do to ensure that they are as inclusive as possible.

¹³ <https://digitalpovertyalliance.org/digital-poverty-in-the-uk-a-socio-economic-assessment-of-the-implications-of-digital-poverty-in-the-uk/>

¹⁴ https://www.turing.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/understanding_the_impacts_of_generative_ai_use_on_children_-_wp1_report.pdf

Another element of the digital divide highlighted in the discussion concerned the gap between London and the rest of the UK. Organisations like the Good Future Foundation are trying to tackle that by working with schools across the country to raise awareness and listening to the opinions and concerns of other stakeholders, such as parents and young people themselves.

Those events have suggested that there is a widespread fear of the future and a culture of suspicion around AI. One way in which that culture manifests is with high-performing students being suspected of using AI. Engaging with and tackling people's fears and suspicions could help to lessen the digital divide. Reference was also made to the Digital Poverty Alliance's recently launched National Delivery and Advocacy Plan, which aims to offer a coordinated framework to end digital poverty in the UK.¹⁵

¹⁵ <https://digitalpovertyalliance.org/national-delivery-plan-2025/>



7. Youth Voice, Agency and Co-creation

The roundtable's attendees overwhelmingly agreed about the importance of engaging young people in debates around AI and co-creating the technology. Studies show young people's enthusiasm for such engagement too, with one survey reporting that 80% of young people would love to be involved in shaping the future of AI. However, very few currently have that opportunity.

“The young person is always left outside the room and never in the room.”

Young Person

Young participants emphasised how their voices are consistently ignored in policy development and challenged attendees at the roundtable to stay focused on young people's issues, with one stating, 'I think consistently in policy, the young person is always left outside the room and never in the room.' In that context, young attendees expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be involved in the roundtable and emphasised the importance of such events as one way to bring youth voices into the discussion about AI. As one put it, 'The fact that we're having this conversation actually makes me hopeful for the future.' However, young attendees also challenged participants with the observation that 'even today [at the roundtable] the conversation is going further away from young people and not focusing on young people.'

The importance of listening to young people's voices was illustrated with reference to an example from the history of AI development. Amazon started to use an AI tool in its recruitment process. However, that tool had been trained on data that did not feature a sufficiently large sample of women. Therefore, the output was a system that was biased against women and automatically rejected a disproportionate number of female applicants at the start of the recruitment process.¹⁶ That example illustrates how failures to engage with a demographic, such as young people, result in an AI system that is biased and detrimental to that section of the population. This can be combatted by building youth voice into the creation of AI systems from the design stage onwards.

Centring youth voice was thus identified as a key priority for both the Government and the AI industry. Expressing a view that was widely held by roundtable attendees, one participant stated, 'AI must serve young people, not the other way around. That means designing for dignity, safety and inclusion. It means regulating with urgency. And it means listening to those whose future is at stake.' Listening to young people in this context means giving them a meaningful say in how AI systems are built, governed and regulated. Ways to achieve this include establishing youth panels, engaging people in participatory research, and being committed to listening to and acting upon young people's lived experience.

***“AI must serve young people,
not the other way around.”***

Policy Maker

Importantly, it was repeatedly emphasised that focusing on young people does not mean defaulting to a one-size-fits-all view of 'youth'. Policies that treat young people in that way fail to focus on individuals and take account of their differing needs. As one young person put it, 'to focus on the young person is to focus on the individual and on those individual aspects which consistently get ignored by overarching policies.' A relevant issue raised at the roundtable was the divide in the AI industry between the people who develop the models and the people who use the technology. More needs to be done to join the dots between the two and to ensure that young people's voices are heard at both levels.

¹⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-45809919>

Young voices also emphasised the importance of broadening the debate around AI's impact so that it was not so heavily focused on the implications for the job market. For example, will the technology risk exacerbating issues that directly affect young people, such as youth violence, and will it pose new risks to them in the form of identity theft? Broadening the discussion to consider such elements is an important part of listening to young people's real concerns rather than just assuming which issues will be of interest to them. One participant observed that young people 'want an analogue life as much as they do a digital life,' indicating that they still want freedom from a world governed by algorithms that impact their autonomy and don't want to be pressured to be constantly online and ever-present in the digital world.

Relatedly, the issue of informed consent was raised by participants. Questions were posed about the extent to which data is being fed into AI models without people's consent and the trade-offs between personalisation and surrendering control of one's data. A specific consent issue that was highlighted concerns researchers who input participant data into AI systems, such as Claude, without checking whether participants consented to their personal information being used in that way. Researchers were thus challenged to be more transparent and to ensure that participants' data was not processed by AI without their active consent. The point was also made that adults had not necessarily provided positive role models to young people in terms of consent, as most people have neglected to read online terms and conditions (e.g. End User Licence Agreements) and to properly inform themselves about how their data is being processed and used.

Summarising the importance of youth voice in the context of an increasingly AI-dominated world, one attendee stated, 'If young people are going to live in these systems, they deserve a say in how they work and they deserve to be able to challenge what isn't working... young people's voices need to be heard throughout and it needs to be true co-creation.' One participant quoted a young woman who had said, 'The online world isn't built for us, it's built around us, and we're the ones trying to make it safe while it keeps moving faster.' A quote which led the participant to conclude with a crucial point, 'Young people aren't resisting the future, they're just asking to help build it.'

***“Young people aren’t resisting the future,
they’re just asking to help build it.”***

Youth Advocate

Finally, youth participants in the roundtable challenged the Government and industry to take concrete action to increase the involvement of young people. As one young attendee put it, ‘Is there an AI youth government board there? I don’t think so. That’s what we could start to implement, or AI youth ambassadors for every educational institution to empower youth to actually start... talking about AI with their teachers. And I think that is the best way to co-create, collaborate and create a better future with AI.’

8. Accountability, Transparency and Governance Gaps

The issue of improving how AI is governed came up repeatedly throughout the roundtable discussion because improving regulation is a crucial way to minimise harms and maximise the technology’s positive potential. As AI is developing faster than efforts to regulate it, participants identified many gaps in current governance arrangements and also suggested ways in which the UK could become a global leader in the development of ethical AI.

Some argue that waiting for appropriate guardrails to be placed around AI comes with a risk that the UK will fall behind in the race to develop, exploit and profit from the technology. However, the counter argument is that taking products to market that have not been appropriately tested risks creating significant harm. Just as new medicines or food products need to go through appropriate testing to ensure they comply with safety standards, so should AI systems be appropriately monitored before, during and after release to ensure that they are not detrimental to the population at large or to segments of that population.

Summing up that argument, one participant stated, ‘We don’t take things to market if they’re not safe. And stop saying that’s going to stifle innovation. No, it’s not. We just have to think about how we licence it.’ Another participant argued for borrowing the concept of labelling from the food industry, so that AI systems would be labelled for the potential harms that they could cause, thus helping potential consumers to make informed decisions. Any such labelling would need to be very clear and understandable to help consumers, including young people. Similarly, the people designing and developing new AI technology should also be governed by clear product standards that are easily understood by all. Platforms also need to be held accountable for harms related to the AI that they use or AI-generated content that they permit.

Despite many years of debate and attempts to legislate, significant governance gaps still exist with regard to the ethical gathering and use of data. Furthermore, there are many unanswered questions about the technology companies creating harmful AI applications. For example, who are they, where are they based, where are they getting their data from, and what rules and regulations exist to control them? Although there have been some legislative advances—such as the Online Safety Act, the Policing Bill and the Data Use and Access Bill—much more is needed from the Government to understand the risks and legislate to address them. The difficulties of legislating against powerful, rich technology companies and being able to hold them to account were also stressed, showing that strong responses were needed at a government level. Researchers emphasised the urgent need to evaluate which laws, platform interventions and education efforts work to protect young people and promote their wellbeing. And research on that subject needs to inform action as, obviously, legislation alone is insufficient without implementation.



Participants also highlighted the difficulties of creating legislation for an uncertain future, particularly when the capabilities and potential harms of a particular AI system are not well understood. The danger of backward-looking policy is that it might not prevent unanticipated new problems. But it is also difficult to legislate against such problems when the future is so uncertain. One participant raised specific concerns around the coming exponential increase in interactions with ‘fake people’ online. Hyper-personalised AI systems built around mimicry and similar psychological influencing techniques could significantly impact people’s decision-making, potentially influencing them to do things that are not in their best interests. Legislation needs to take account of such risks to prevent people from being exploited by AI conversational agents.

Although there was consensus in the room about the need for regulation, the regulatory challenge is one that crosses international borders, and action within the UK alone may not be sufficient to prevent the harms associated with AI. Questions were raised about the extent to which the current administration in the United States, for example, is committed to appropriately regulating the AI industry and what could be done to influence that so that positive, ethical AI legislation is adopted globally across as many jurisdictions as possible.

Relatedly, when considering the potential harms caused by AI, it is important to not just focus on the individual level but also to think about society as a whole. For example, AI-powered disinformation campaigns can affect entire societies. Many countries lack the strong regulatory frameworks required to govern new technology, and that creates opportunities for bad actors to exploit AI to create social strife, disharmony, violence and even war, all of which would have major negative consequences for young people. One participant warned that we could be ‘looking at a future where we may be constantly at war with no idea what is true and what is false. And AI is such a powerful force, so much more powerful than interpersonal weapons, nuclear weapons, biochemical weapons, because this can affect our mind.’ All of which poses the question of whether global standards regulating AI can be created and enforced.

Events like the roundtable show that a positive way forward is to hear as many voices as possible so that different perspectives can inform the policymaking process and increase the chance of success. Although the solutions generated to such complex problems may appear clumsy and insufficient, they are still better than having no solutions at all. It was also emphasised that more needs to be done to learn from other countries, such as Singapore, which requires transparency through AI supply chains.¹⁷ Similarly, Sweden was highlighted as another example of a country that is ahead of the UK, with one participant arguing that it has spent a decade working on the sort of AI governance issues that are only just starting to be discussed in the UK.

The Government was urged to urgently make space to discuss these issues because a failure to do so means that the profit motive and the pressure to innovate will drive developments forward without sufficient consideration for ethical questions and the impact that the technology may have on society as a whole and especially young people. Despite the difficulties of legislating appropriately for an uncertain, AI-driven future, bills currently being debated in Parliament offer the UK the opportunity to become a leader in this field. As one participant put it, ‘there’s also a brilliant opportunity at the moment for the UK to become the gold standard leader in ethical AI rather than the nation left behind.’

“there’s also a brilliant opportunity at the moment for the UK to become the gold standard leader in ethical AI”

Policy Maker

Finally, participants again highlighted the importance of listening to a diverse range of young people’s voices when designing legislation, so that policy reflects differing needs and contexts rather than assuming a single ‘youth experience’.

¹⁷ <https://aiverifyfoundation.sg/what-is-ai-verify/>

Part 3

What Works to Reduce AI-Enabled Image-Based Sexual Abuse: Evidence on Displacement and Inequality

Shweta Singh & Michael D. Smith

Generative AI has sharply lowered the cost of producing and spreading image-based sexual abuse materials, including ‘nudification’ and synthetic sexual images of children. Recent reporting around xAI’s Grok illustrates how quickly such harms can scale when image models are deployed without robust safeguards, attracting international scrutiny and temporary access restrictions in some jurisdictions.¹⁸ The UK has strengthened its response to these harms through the Online Safety Act and Ofcom’s enforceable safety duties (including illegal-content risk assessments and adherence to approved illegal harms codes), and has advanced measures on intimate deepfakes, including commitments to criminalise the creation of sexually explicit deepfakes. However, parliamentary scrutiny highlights implementation gaps and timing uncertainty, with some provisions reported as not yet in force and no clear timeline for banning nudification tools.



¹⁸ CNBC, “Grok app should be suspended from Apple, Google, Democratic senators say,” 9 January 2026, <https://www.cnbc.com/2026/01/09/grok-app-should-be-suspended-from-apple-google-democratic-senators.html>.

The core missing ingredient is credible causal evidence on which legal, platform and app-store interventions reduce harm in practice; whether harms are displaced to substitutes (other tools, channels or jurisdictions); and whether ostensibly ‘universal’ responses inadvertently widen racial and socioeconomic inequalities because reporting pathways, school capacity and remedy access are uneven.

Our research addresses this gap through two linked aims. First, we identify what works to reduce harm, and whether interventions unintentionally displace abuse into adjacent tools, platforms or channels. Second, we assess who benefits, who is left behind, and why – so mitigation strategies reduce, rather than reproduce, existing inequalities.

Using natural experiments, difference-in-differences methodologies and event studies across the UK, EU, US and Canada, we will estimate whether legal changes, platform policy shifts and app-store enforcement reduce access to nudification tools and curb distribution (including re-uploads), and whether harms are reduced or displaced to substitute tools and channels. We will link these intervention shocks to youth wellbeing indicators such as crisis-line demand, school incident reporting and observable online behaviour. Using the same strategy, we will test whether interventions narrow or widen racial and socio-economic gaps in outcomes for ages 5–25 and identify mechanisms – differential exposure, institutional response (reporting friction; safeguarding/support versus punishment), and remedy success – using a high-frequency 2023–2028 panel combining pre-shock tool demand, de-identified reporting/remedy aggregates and district administrative outcomes (attendance/absenteeism, discipline versus support referrals, reporting/takedown success).

To ensure immediate policy utility, we will translate findings into four rapid-deployment outputs: a Regulator Enforcement Playbook, a Platform/App-Store Enforcement Memo, an equity-centred School Response Playbook, and a Remedy Access Brief focused on reducing reporting friction and improving takedown/support success. We will drive adoption through targeted briefings and uptake tracking so effective protections scale quickly and ineffective measures are retired, strengthening delivery of the Online Safety framework through evidence rather than assumptions.

Recommendations for Industry

UKAI makes the following recommendations for the AI industry to implement to help address the issues raised in this report.

1. Urgently investigate and implement new methods for involving young people in the creation and deployment of AI.

- Such methods need to take account of bringing diverse voices into the debate and ensure that there is a close connection between the issues raised by young people and the action taken to address them.

2. Ensure that all systems being designed are fully audited for intersectional fairness to make sure they are not exacerbating inequality and marginalisation.

- Intersectional fairness means taking account of issues related to gender, race, disability and class when designing and using AI systems. Understanding these issues requires the industry to engage with existing research and listen to the lived experience of young people from marginalised groups.

3. Adopt industry-wide codes of practice that are explicitly directed at combating the harms that AI can create for young people.

- While waiting for appropriate legislation in these areas, the industry can build trust and credibility by creating robust codes of practice that set out how specific harms to young people can be minimised or altogether prevented.

4. Support the upskilling of teachers and other professionals working with young people.

- Significant knowledge and skill gaps must urgently be filled in the current workforce so that educators and others both recognise the positive potential of AI and are able to use it in ways that improve outcomes for young people. Engaging with teachers and their unions will help the industry understand how that upskilling can best take place and be balanced with the many other demands that are placed on teachers' time.

5. Engage with longitudinal academic research regarding the long-term implications of AI usage in different contexts and act on the evidence generated.

- We currently understand very little about the long-term impacts of AI on issues like mental health and cognition. More longitudinal research needs to be commissioned and implemented, and industry has a key role to play in supporting that research and acting on its results to ensure that young people's best interests are safeguarded.

Part 5



Recommendations for Government

UKAI makes the following recommendations for the Government to implement to help address the issues raised in this report.

6. Create forums that meaningfully engage young people in debates about the future of AI from a local to a national level.

- Such forums could include an AI youth government board at a national level and a network of AI youth ambassadors in schools and universities. It is essential to ensure that such forums give voice to diverse perspectives, so they do not risk reinforcing the digital divide.

7. Require the assessment of AI powered tools to audit the impact on young people.

- Such mechanisms should include a standardised framework for establishing the potential harms of an AI system on young people and mandatory bias audits that quantify intersectional unfairness.

8. Ensure that young people, teachers and parents are provided with clear evidence-based guidance regarding the use of AI and its potential detrimental effects.

- More research is needed on the impact of AI usage on issues such as education and mental health. The Government can play an important role in supporting this research and promoting the findings across the education establishment, and more broadly with parents.

9. Strengthen and rigorously enforce regulation against companies that enable, and individuals who create or distribute, deepfake pornography.

- Such regulations are necessary to prevent the continued expansion of this misuse of AI and the very detrimental effects that it has on young people, especially young women. Tough action is required not only to address current problems, but also to monitor and address future uses of AI-powered technology.

10. Consult with young people, teachers, researchers and the AI industry about how the technology can best be integrated into the national curriculum in ways that help students to understand the technology and use it appropriately.

- Such consultations should focus on ensuring that students are using AI in responsible ways to enhance their critical thinking skills. Curriculum reform should be accompanied by an age-appropriate, evidence-based and industry-backed national framework for the use of AI in education, which sets out both the skills that students need and the values that they should embody when using the technology.

11. Commit to upskilling teachers so they are better able to understand AI and incorporate it positively into their pedagogy.

- The Government should provide clear guidance to schools on how to manage AI use to strengthen students' critical thinking and creativity and develop future-proof skills for the world of work. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that AI helps to alleviate aspects of teachers' workloads, freeing them up to focus on where they can add most value to their pupils' education. Innovation and curiosity should be encouraged.

12. Ensure that research evidence and best practice from around the UK and other countries inform policy development and are made accessible to organisations and individuals.

- There is already much evidence about best practice regarding the usage of AI and relevant examples from other countries that are at different stages in regulating and employing AI. Such evidence should be studied, together with the results and impact of its application, to inform future UK policy. Where possible UK policy makers should work collaboratively with colleagues to build on joint-learnings, rather than trying to solve each new challenge in isolation.

Conclusion



Involving Young People in the Co-creation of a Better Future with AI

This report has explored the urgent necessity of investigating how AI is impacting young people, both positively and negatively, and working with them to minimise harms and co-create a better future with AI. The report began by setting the context. AI is already impacting most aspects of young people's lives, and many have already embraced the technology to see how it can benefit them. However, deep divides in access to AI technology remain, with such divides manifesting along lines of gender, geographic and socio-economic status. Further, young people also have deep concerns about the ways in which AI is already impacting them and will continue to do so in the future. Such concerns revolve around issues of AI enabled gendered harms, inequities, Image based abuse, education, future job security and the ways in which the technology can be exploited to victimise, abuse and spread dangerous misinformation.

Some at the roundtable stressed the positive potential of AI for young people and discussed how that could be unlocked. Suggestions included improving the ways in which the technology is used in education so that it facilitates the development of critical thinking rather than encouraging the copying and pasting of AI-generated responses. Participants spoke of the importance of increasing access to the technology and ensuring that teachers fully understand its potential and are trained to guide young people to use AI in positive and productive ways. It was acknowledged that both the Government and the AI industry have key roles to play in that upskilling. Furthermore, efforts need to be taken to make sure that integrating AI is not an extra burden on teachers but rather a way of relieving aspects of their workloads, so they have more time to focus on nurturing their connections with their pupils and adding value to their education.

Others at the roundtable focused more on the risks associated with AI. In a headlong rush to embrace the technology, there is a danger that the risk of negative outcomes to young people's mental health is being downplayed. Participants questioned whether technology that had never experienced real human emotions and that is coded to agree with its users could have detrimental effects when used as a mental health support tool. Other concerns focused on how the technology enables the creation of fake images (such as deepfake pornography) and misinformation that can have serious consequences at both the individual and the societal level.

Overall, there was a remarkable consensus about the urgency of involving a diverse range of young people in debates about the future of AI and ensuring that their contributions help to shape that future in a positive way. The creators and users of AI systems should always keep young people in mind when developing and deploying the technology, asking themselves, 'How is this helping and how is this harming?' And the best way to answer those questions is to ask young people themselves. Crucially, young people's lives and perspectives are highly diverse; therefore, engagement must amplify a wide range of voices, and any overarching frameworks must still take account of individuals' subjective experiences, preferences, and circumstances.

There was also a consensus regarding the need for improved regulation to promote positive uses of AI. Suggestions made included labelling AI technologies with evidence-based health warnings, so people can make informed decisions about their personal use. It was also suggested that thorough audits were required to ensure that products were safe before they went to market and that they did not discriminate against or disadvantage specific groups within society. Involving a diverse range of young people in the creation of regulations is one concrete example of where their engagement can lead to better outcomes for all.

It is worth remembering that the capabilities of AI are increasing exponentially, and we cannot know what this technology will be capable of in five years, let alone when today's newborn children are adults. But what we can be sure of is that if we continually involve young people in how AI is developed and regulated, we will stand a much better chance of realising its upsides and minimising its downsides.

Finally, it is appropriate that a report of this nature should give its final word to young people themselves. The contributions of the young participants at the roundtable gave eloquent testimony to the crucial importance of integrating their voices into the broader debate around AI and the future that it is creating. They expressed gratitude for being involved but also challenged all attendees to do more to engage with young people in the future. It is imperative that the AI industry and the Government both rise to that challenge. As one of the young participants put it, involving young people in the debate around AI at every level, from individual schools to national government, 'is the best way to co-create, collaborate and create a better future with AI.'



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