Politics   Federal   Education

AI a headache for teachers, but could soon help mark students' work

Christopher Harris

May 24, 2023 — 3.47pm

Federal Education Minister Jason Clare has declared artificial intelligence must be part of the future of the nation's school system, saying teachers could use it to grade students' work.

Schools and education systems across the country are grappling with the rapid rise of AI tools such as ChatGPT. Teachers say plagiarism is rife in schools, while others believe students must be equipped to navigate the misinformation artificial intelligence can generate.

Education Minister Jason Clare said a draft framework of how education should incorporate AI would be ready in the coming weeks.   ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN

Clare, along with state and territory education ministers, has commissioned a framework for the use of artificial intelligence in schools, a draft of which he said would be ready in coming

weeks.

"We are entering an age where AI has got to be part of that education. With its ability to analyse data, recognise patterns and make predictions, AI can help us personalise education," he told teachers gathered at the AI in Education Conference in Sydney on Wednesday morning. "And it can also help teachers by automating routine tasks such as grading and allowing them to focus on the more critical task of teaching and mentoring students.

"At the last meeting of education ministers, we agreed to develop a best practice national framework to help schools grappling with this issue. And when we meet again in a few weeks' time, we'll look at a draft of this. AI is not going away."

Teachers say cheating is rife because of AI, but they are also using it for learning. ISTOCK

Education authorities tried to utilise computers to automatically mark students NAPLAN tests in 2017. Teachers' unions at the time furiously opposed the shift to robo-marking, saying it would lead to the de-professionalisation of the workforce.

While the NSW Department of Education has banned students from accessing ChatGPT at school, many private schools have integrated it into lessons and are using it to provide feedback to students.

Loreto Normanhurst history teacher Michael Rafe told the conference the best feature of AI for teachers was its ability to help with administrative bureaucracy – but said it was also useful for assessing students work.

"It is amazing at instantaneous feedback for students," he said. "We can put in a student's paragraph or introduction to a response […] and actually ask it for targeted feedback to identify

strengths and weaknesses."

Loreto College Normanhurst teachers have been using AI in the classroom.

Director of learning at Wesley College in Melbourne, Cameron Patterson, said students using ChatGPT to do homework was prolific in schools and acknowledged teachers could use it to write students' reports.

"The use of ChatGPT to generate homework and essays is rife in schools; I don't know that the take-home essay will survive," he said.
Patterson said last week he had to deal with the fallout from students using ChatGPT to cheat after another teacher detected plagiarism with Turnitin – software that claims it can identify the use of AI-generated text.

"My first thought was, this is serious, we can't have students cheating," he said.

But while later marking the work of another student who had not cheated, he thought ChatGPT might be able to help the student with her essay-writing skills.

"And there you have it," he said. "The dance of love and fear that teachers are living with at the moment: We love that our reports now write themselves, and we fear that students won't submit their own work."

The Morning Edition newsletter is our guide to the day's most important and interesting stories, analysis and insights. [Sign up here](#).

Christopher Harris is an education reporter for the Sydney Morning Herald. Connect via email.