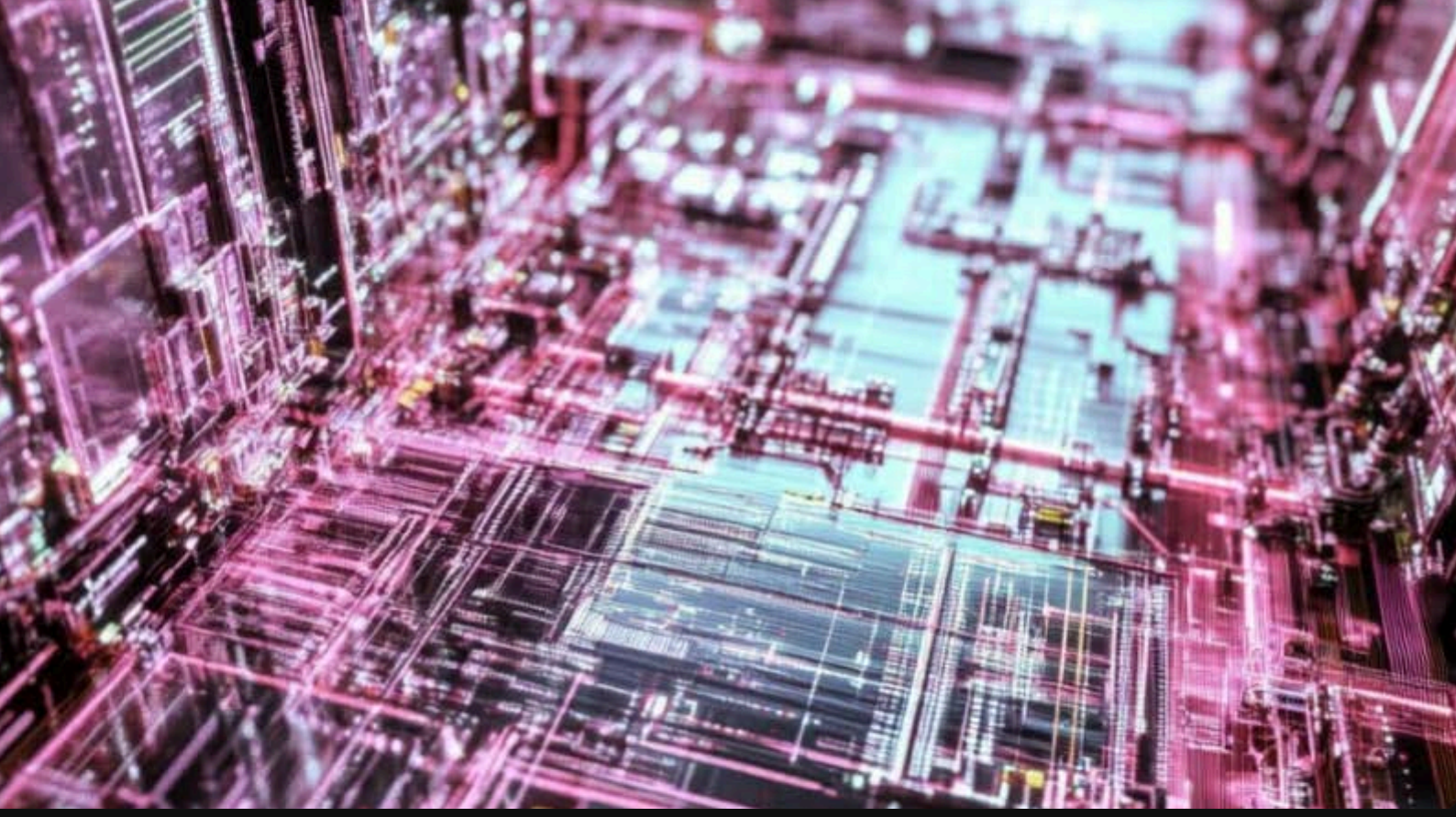

The AiEd Certified Framework

Excellence in AI Integration

December 2025

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AI in Education Certified

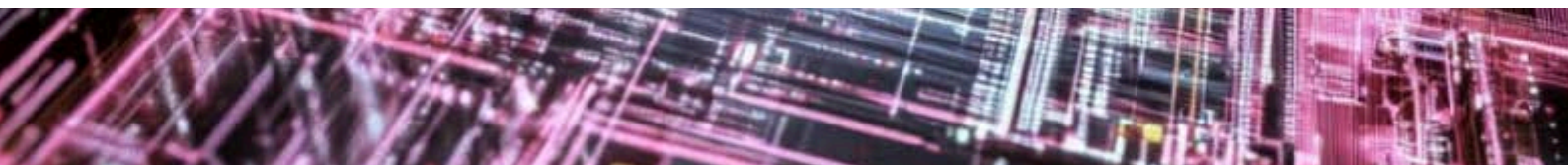
www.ai-in-education.co.uk

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence and Generative Artificial Intelligence (collectively referred to as AI in this report) are transformative and rapidly developing technology, reshaping the educational landscape. Many educators remain conflicted about the changes, wanting to embrace the positives while retaining focus on the day-to-day practice of teaching and learning. **This report details the development of the AI in Education (AiEd) Certified Framework for AI adoption within schools and colleges in England, designed by education practitioners and researchers who firmly believe that guidance on AI use in education should be led by teaching, not technology, experts.**

We maintain that learning institutions must take proactive steps to harness the opportunities of AI through co-created systems and innovative teaching methods. They are responsible for preparing a generation to thrive in a world where AI is embedded in every career, including those yet to emerge. Simultaneously, it is essential to tackle the challenges posed by data privacy, misuse, academic integrity, bias, and conflicting political or commercial interests. Achieving this demands that **humans and pedagogy stay at the heart of education**, with teachers remaining focused on teaching. However, an institution-wide adoption of AI is challenging, time-consuming and potentially costly. Schools and colleges are already under-resourced and under-funded, and the additional burden of keeping up with AI benefits and challenges can seem impossible. Yet **learners will not wait** for schools and colleges – they are already using AI in homework, coursework and revision, and whilst some might do so effectively, good practice is by no means universal.

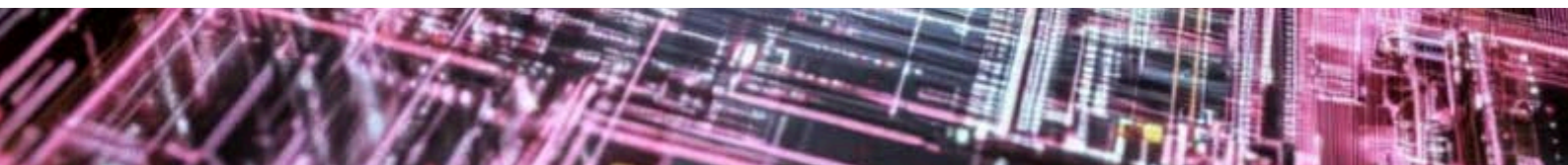
Ignoring AI is not an option. The AiEd network was officially established as a charity in 2025 and launched the **AiEd Certified Framework, providing a sector-aligned implementation roadmap that establishes a clear model of good practice for integrating AI into school and college environments.**



Foundations in Research and Practice

The AiEd network was created by thought leaders in school and college education. Sir Anthony Seldon and Alex Russell, OBE, are established in education practice as forward-thinking innovators and change makers. They heard the question being asked by teachers and Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) - **What should we do about AI?** – and began creating Panels uniting practitioners with specific interests, including Strategy, Advisory, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Students, and Examiners. **Over 100 individuals** from schools, colleges, Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), examining boards and chartered institutions came together across these panels, adding detail and nuance to the underpinning question. Learning institutions wanted to know what 'good' practice looked like, but there was not a simple, one size fits all, answer. In January 2025, Alex Russell and Chris Goodall – Head of Digital Education at Bourne Education Trust (BET) – met with Sarah Alcock, then a PhD candidate at The Open University with over 20 years of experience in education operations, to share their idea of creating a roadmap to support AI implementation in schools and colleges. The brief was clear:

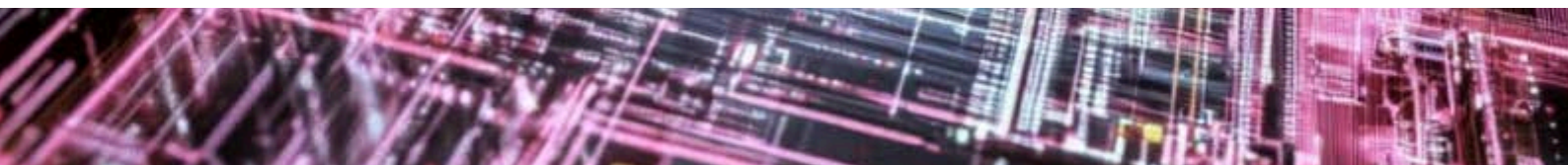
- The work should integrate the professional experience and practice of the AiEd network with relevant research.
- It should be meaningful, accessible, and rigorous for educators working across schools and colleges.
- Schools and colleges should be able to gain recognition for the work they undertake through engagement with AiEd.
- The approach should provide guidance rather than prescription, supporting professional judgement rather than imposing fixed models.



Between January and April 2025, Sarah completed a **thorough narrative literature review**, searching for "AI" and "Education" across The Open University library and following relevant links. It became clear that the pace of AI development far exceeded that of traditional literature publishing, and so the search was widened to **policy documents**, including the education departments of UK and USA government, and international agencies such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). While literature based in Higher Education (HE) was not discounted, the focus stayed on the demands of **compulsory education**. Key references are listed at the end of this report.

Using an iterative process consistent with Thematic Analysis, **the benefits, challenges, and questions around AI in education were collated and grouped.** Taking a pragmatic approach, the **five Framework elements** were founded in the context of schools and colleges in England – the physical environment, governance, regulations, and existing teaching and learning practice. **Three stakeholder groups** were also defined, each with a unique perspective on AI within schools and colleges. Finally, given the request for recognition of implementation work and the apparent diverse stages of, and approaches to, implementation, **three Framework levels** were also defined.

This early work cemented our **strategy of focusing on longevity** over the latest product or trend. We were not designing training, a compliance checklist or a vendor selection tool. The term 'roadmap', which became 'Framework', was specifically used to facilitate the **creation of an enduring approach to guide thinking and decision making** even in the fast-moving arena of AI. We wanted to help schools and colleges foster a **'whole-institution' approach**, supporting joined-up thinking across leadership, teaching, safeguarding, data and community engagement. This help needed to be high level enough to be **applicable across contexts** – from a small primary school in the countryside, to a large secondary school in the heart of a city, to a specialist college. Resources and community would be different, but the framework would offer a shared structure that could flex around those differences. This flexibility would lead to agency; schools and colleges could make decisions that fit their values, ambitions, and realities, **empowering stakeholders to shape AI adoption rather than being shaped by it.**

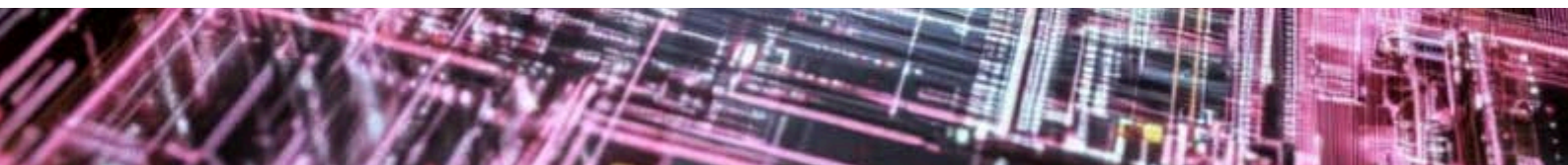


The AiEd Certified Framework

The resulting AiEd Certified Framework is therefore a **multi-dimensional matrix for planning and implementing AI in schools and colleges**. The framework consists of **five elements** and **three stakeholder groups**, creating fifteen areas of work.

AI Literacy	Understanding AI's potential and limitations.
Policies & Ethics	Developing safe, ethical and responsible usage guidelines.
Tools & Systems	Selecting and implementing appropriate AI technology effectively.
Digital Pedagogy	Using AI to enhance teaching and learning, not replace human connection.
Collaboration & Community	Learning together and sharing best practices internally and externally.

Leaders	Staff	Students
SLT, Governors and administrative staff.	Teaching staff and assistants.	At Primary, Secondary and College level.



The AiEd Certified Framework - further definitions

AI Literacy

Having a clear understanding of what AI is, how it can benefit education, and its risks and limitations is fundamental to meaningful adoption. SLT, Governors, administrators, teachers, support staff and students must all start with digital literacy; with access and experience of using technology in their daily school life. From here, they will recognise the need to develop skills in using AI to problem solve, whilst being aware of the potential pitfalls around trustworthiness, misuse, bias and conflicting political or business interests. Schools / colleges must move to providing structured and timetabled opportunities for individuals to learn how to effectively interact with AI, to have realistic expectations of output and ultimately demonstrate an approach which is both critical and collaborative.

Policies & Ethics

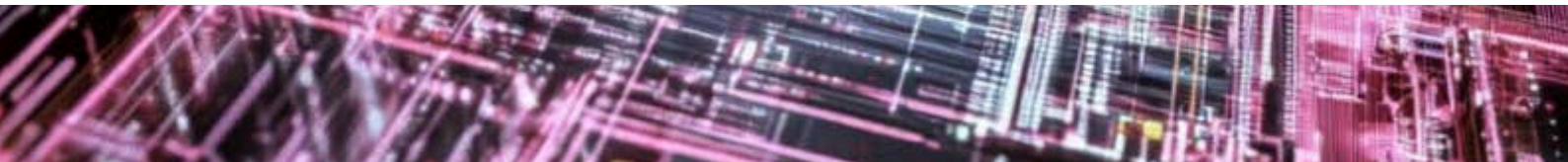
Moving forward with a coherent approach to AI requires institution wide, unified policies which are comprehensively communicated to stakeholders. Starting with basic online safeguarding, SLT and Governors must aim to provide clear and feasible AI policies which address issues around data privacy, security, intellectual property, bias, plagiarism and exploitation. Equity in access, use and representation should be pervasive across all documents and strategic plans. Teachers, support staff and students should demonstrate safe, inclusive and effective practice in planning and activities, taking a mindful approach and feeding into iterative policy updates as technology continues to develop.

Tools & Systems

School-wide infrastructure and educational technology systems are a prerequisite for using AI for meaningful change, and integrated data systems are required to use AI strategically. There is a fast growing and constantly evolving market for AI tools around curriculum planning, administration, resource creation, assessment and feedback, and so time must be invested in selecting, implementing and monitoring impact. AI tools must be chosen for targeted reasons, with input from those who will use and be affected by the change. Commercial decisions on purchasing must consider the need for user training and ongoing support in implementation, with monitoring strategies in place.

Digital Pedagogy

AI does not replace teachers or support staff, instead it should be used to augment teaching and learning. This starts with supporting learning design, including lesson and curriculum planning, and other administrative tasks. It can progress to the creation of resources, and learner interaction with these to promote engagement, accessibility and inclusion. This interaction must maintain a social approach, with teachers, support staff and learners taking the lead, and AI acting as a co-facilitator or collaborator through meaningful stages of learning. AI marking and feedback can provide immediate opportunities for improvement and guidance for next steps, with the teacher supporting a learner who understands when human interaction is beneficial.



Collaboration & Community

Learning about AI together is key to success. Schools and colleges should take a collaborative approach both between staff and students, and externally with community, government, exam board and academics to maximise the benefits of AI implementation. Collaboration can take the form of sharing experiences and best practice, working with community activities and leading or participating in research projects to generate evidence of impact. Collaboration should become culturally embedded, led by SLT example with teachers and students given autonomy to innovate.

Levels of Adoption

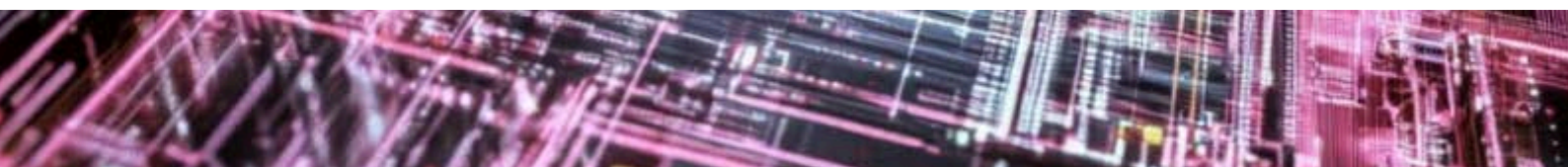
Schools and colleges across England are at varying levels of AI adoption. To recognise this, we defined **three Framework levels**, each building on the previous.

Explorer	A school or college who has demonstrated a commitment to AI, and are investigating how it will best fit in with their community. There are some AI champions, and the institution is moving towards general practice.
Practitioner	There is widespread and integrated use of AI, by well trained and confident staff and learners. There is evidence of collaboration and evidenced AI benefits.
Innovator	There is evidenced expertise in AI by staff and learners, who are actively pursuing new AI benefits. These institutions are leading the way in contributing to the wider AI community, and directing next step policies with government and examining bodies.

These three levels complete the AiEd Certified Framework. The following pages define each element by level and stakeholder, providing a comprehensive set of criteria for learning institutions to work towards in AI implementation.

AI Literacy

	Leaders	Staff	Students
Explorer	Digitally literate, recognise significance of AI, know there are benefits and challenges of implementation, arbitrary training completed.	Digitally literate, have used AI in an experimental and ad-hoc way, aware of potential issues / trustworthiness.	Digitally literate in school, have heard about AI, used in unstructured way.
Practitioner	Confident AI users, awareness of issues around prompting, bias, limitations. Provides training / CPD opportunities to staff.	Regular AI user with critical approach to inputs and outputs.	Understand the risks and benefits of using AI, able to apply a critical lens to outputs.
Innovator	Creates bespoke training for own context, shows awareness of potential hidden interests (business, politics) in AI and actively manages this risk.	Confident approach and critical practice are second nature. Are given time to embrace developments and implement innovations.	Can use AI in subject specific and creative, cross curriculum ways. Understands wider societal risks and benefits (e.g. environmental, geo-political).



Policies & Ethics

	Leaders	Staff	Students
Explorer	Have basic safeguarding policies, perhaps defensive bans on certain products.	Wary of issues such as security, safety and data protection, concerned about risks of bias.	Awareness of inherent bias / misinformation in AI outputs and the potential impact. Takes responsibility for safety of self and peers.
Practitioner	Strategic approach taken. All policies take AI into account, with data privacy, intellectual property, security and online safety a priority. Clarity for all stakeholders, including parents/guardians on data issues.	Fully briefed on policies and demonstrate safe and ethical practice.	Understand ethical implications of using AI, including plagiarism, intellectual property, appropriateness of content.
Innovator	Regular policy update schedule acknowledging ever changing technologies. Take a collaborative approach with stakeholders to agree ethical approach.	Time allowed to understand policy updates. Participate in defining implementation strategies.	Understanding of and openness to changing policies, including why updates are necessary. Student voice is heard.

Tools & Systems

	Leaders	Staff	Students
Explorer	Digital infrastructure and Edtech available throughout school, with data integration. Using obvious and embedded tools (e.g. ChatGPT, MS Co-pilot) for internal administrative tasks.	Curious about AI, beginning to individually use freely available tools in a subject specific way.	Likely using AI in an ad-hoc way outside of school, perhaps some in-lesson use.
Practitioner	Identifying AI tools to address specific needs, and implementing school-wide, including user training and support.	Using AI tools provided by school, beginning to seek out subject specific tools and requesting management support in implementing.	Taught to use specific AI tools effectively across a variety of subjects.
Innovator	Making strategic and commercial decisions, linking systems and paying attention to the AI lifecycle (including monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement) as part of a long-term view.	Contribute to tool selection and developing best use practices.	Understand why the chosen tool is beneficial. Students have a voice in tool selection for different tasks.

Digital Pedagogy

	Leaders	Staff	Students
Explorer	Ad-hoc use of AI in curriculum planning tasks.	Occasional use of AI to create lesson plans / teaching resources.	Sporadic use of AI to complete given tasks, focus on 'right' answer.
Practitioner	Systematic and regular use of AI to make regular tasks easier. Upfront time investment giving ongoing benefits. Applied to learning design and overall curriculum, school wide systems create 'joined up' thinking by learner and by subject.	Creative and ongoing use of AI to produce resources, activities and promote engagement. Some automation of tasks such as marking / feedback may be applicable on a by subject basis.	Demonstrate an awareness of their learning process, supported by AI but student takes the lead in activities.
Innovator	AI Pedagogy is at the forefront of stakeholder/governance decision making and projects, including overall strategy. Particular attention is paid to necessary changes to assessment. School is transparent about aims and ongoing projects.	Systematic approach to Learning Design with AI. Uses AI to provide feedback and guidance without impacting social interaction. Links AI use to future careers / life outside school.	Value automated feedback and guidance, knows when teacher interaction is beneficial. Treats AI as an assistant /collaborator, taking responsibility for learning.

Collaboration & Community

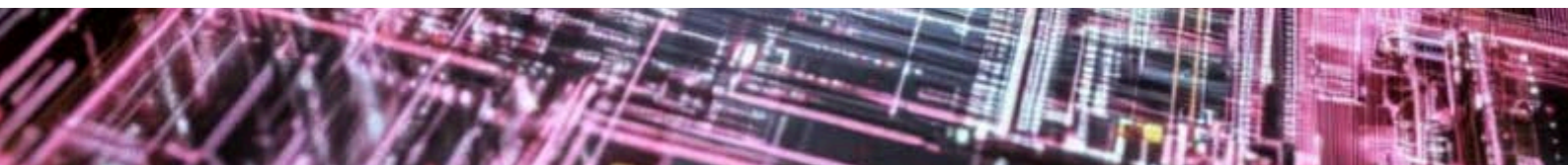
	Leaders	Staff	Students
Explorer	AI issues feature in meetings and activities; non-compulsory training or information is shared.	Informal AI discussions and knowledge sharing between staff referencing external sources.	AI interest is demonstrated through ad-hoc discussions, in and outside of classroom likely focused on news / latest developments.
Practitioner	Responsibility is taken for co-ordinating knowledge sharing. Formal training and managed groups exist and collaborate regularly.	Subject specific working groups led by teachers create and share knowledge. Effort is made to monitor impact of AI on learning and behaviour.	Students and parents are engaged with learning using AI through ongoing communication about practice (newsletters, website, open evenings).
Innovator	Takes the lead in collating / sharing experiences and best practice. Contributes data and participates in wider activities with government / exam board / research / community initiatives.	Are empowered to implement AI initiatives and create evidence-based practice with new technology. Collaborate within and between subjects.	Students share their knowledge and experience with parents, able to transfer school practice to the real world, including community-based activities.

Assessment & Certification

Establishing the Framework elements, stakeholders and levels was the crucial foundational stage of the project. We consider the Framework to be useful as a standalone contribution to the implementation of AI in schools and colleges as it could be used by a dedicated SLT without further input. However, as previously noted, time and resources for this individual work are rarely available. The second stage was to build a certification pathway for schools and colleges, guiding and recognising their AI implementation work. **The goal of certification was defined as helping schools and colleges to move from a fragmented and individual-led adoption of AI to a coherent, institution-wide approach that ensures consistency, safety, and innovation across all areas.** We aimed to continue the collaborative approach of AiEd Panels, keeping knowledge-sharing at the centre of the work.

Evidence-based assessment was chosen as it supported our aim of promoting educator agency and professional judgement over a strict and prescriptive structure for AI implementation. Instead of listing tasks schools and colleges must do, we developed questions based on each of the fifteen criteria at each level of the Framework, asking what the learning institution was doing to address the points raised. We invested in PebblePad as our assessment platform, requiring schools and colleges to supplement their descriptive responses with uploaded evidence of practice for each question.

This approach to assessment encourages reflective practice, fostering an environment where institutions can continually review and enhance their AI strategies in line with evolving best practice and the changing educational technology landscape. By prioritising evidence collection and self-evaluation, **the Framework empowers schools and colleges to set meaningful goals, celebrate progress, and identify areas for development, ensuring that AI adoption is both purposeful and sustainable as they move forward.**



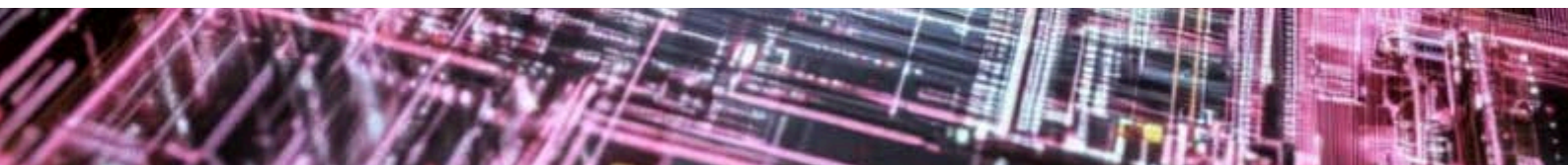
Benefits of Participation in the AiEd Certified Framework

Schools and colleges who participate in the AiEd Certified Framework provide teachers and educational leaders with a **structured and practical pathway** to enhance their professional practice. Through engagement with the Framework, institutions are better equipped to improve outcomes for students and maintain relevance amidst rapid technological change. Educational leaders and staff benefit from access to a **supportive community of like-minded professionals,** which assists in developing the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of AI adoption within educational settings.

The certification element of the Framework also enables schools and colleges to **formally demonstrate their commitment to AI engagement and best practice** to their wider community. This visible recognition can be used in recruitment processes to **attract prospective teachers and incoming learners** who are seeking forward-thinking institutions with a clear strategy for technological advancement. By showcasing certified status, schools and colleges can strengthen their reputation for innovation and responsible AI adoption, reassuring stakeholders of their proactive approach.

The Framework encourages leaders to prioritise ongoing professional development and **adopt a strategic approach to planning for AI integration.** At the same time, **classroom practitioners are empowered to innovate** with confidence, supported by a unified and thoughtful institutional vision. This collaborative approach fosters the sharing of experiences and best practice, supporting both organisational growth and the personal and academic well-being of students.

By promoting a culture of open dialogue, reflective practice, and continuous improvement, the Framework helps to **embed AI as a positive and sustainable force in education.** Schools and colleges are thus equipped to respond proactively to emerging opportunities and challenges, ensuring that they remain adaptive, resilient, and at the forefront of educational technology.



Progress and Future Directions

The AiEd Certified Framework provides a robust and adaptable structure for the implementation and evaluation of AI in schools and colleges. Integrating five core elements across three stakeholder groups and three levels of adoption, the Framework enables institutions to develop agency and coherence in their approach to AI. By emphasising professional judgement, evidence-based assessment, and collaborative practice, the Framework remains both meaningful and practical.

At the time of writing, **over 300 schools and colleges have enrolled** and are working towards certification. Several have made excellent progress, and we expect to award the first certificates in early 2026. Support offered includes online workshops and webinars, and we will soon begin publishing **'Showcases' of effective practice** from certified institutions, allowing schools and colleges to share experiences and inspire others.

From our experience and feedback so far, we believe that **the Framework is suitable for a wide variety of learning institutions**, including those outside England, within professional learning, or universities. We are pursuing discussions with HE Institutions, and **we welcome approaches from any education or training institution who wish to discuss certification.**

Our ongoing certification process will naturally build a comprehensive database of successful AI integration in education activities in schools and colleges. A significant number of our enrolled institutions have expressed interest in participating in research, and we are **actively pursuing research funding**. We are **open to approaches from research and policy institutions** who are interested in a partnership for knowledge creation and exchange.

Through these initiatives, our aim is to foster a **dynamic and inclusive community** of practice, enabling institutions to collectively advance their understanding and application of AI. The Framework will continue to evolve in response to sector feedback and emerging challenges, supporting sustained innovation, safety, and excellence in AI adoption across education.

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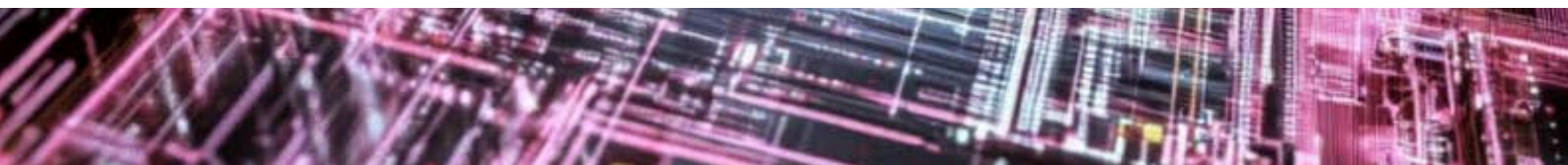

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