

Manifesto for Generative AI in Higher Education

A living reflection on teaching, learning, and technology in an age of abundance

Dr Hazel Farrell & Ken McCarthy

GenAI:N3, South East Technological University

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We stand at a threshold between what learning has been and what it might become. GenAI invites possibility and provokes uncertainty in equal measure. Our task is to respond not with fear, but with imagination and integrity to ensure that learning remains a deeply human act. Every generation of educators inherits a changing landscape. GenAI has redrawn ours, but the direction remains ours to choose.

This manifesto is not a rulebook or a warning. It is an invitation to think, to question, and to act with intention. It speaks to educators, students, and institutions who want to teach and learn with and without GenAI, not merely about it. It is designed to evolve and to be read aloud, debated, annotated, and rewritten.

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This manifesto unfolds across three intertwined themes:

Theme 1: Rethinking Teaching and Learning explores how curiosity, collaboration, and critical design can redefine education in an age of abundance.

Theme 2: Responsibility, Ethics, and Power examines the shared duty of educators and institutions to act with transparency, equity, and care.

Theme 3: Imagination, Humanity, and the Future looks forward, affirming that while GenAI may transform the tools of learning, it is human creativity, conscience, and connection that will shape what comes next.

We teach in an age of abundance, not **scarcity**.

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Information is accessible and freely available - it overflows onto our screens. The work of educators is to help students find meaning in the deluge, guiding them to discern, connect, and critique. GenAI does not give us more knowledge; it reveals how much we already overlook. Teaching now means navigating excess with purpose.

Inquiry has become the new **intelligence**.

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In an age of instant answers, the question assumes more importance than ever before. Crafting meaningful questions that provoke depth and not just data becomes a core academic skill. The art of prompting is curiosity in action.

GenAI does not replace thinking - it reveals the cost of not **thinking**.

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GenAI can produce fluent nonsense and hidden bias. When we outsource thought, we see how easily we mistake coherence for truth. The greatest lesson is humility: GenAI shows how much effort authentic thinking still requires.

Detection chases the past; thoughtful
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To chase detection is to fight the future with the tools of the past. Designing assessments that reward originality, reflection, and human insight changes the rules entirely. Instead of policing use, we design for purpose - where the value lies in the process, not the product.

Courage opens the door, but
resources build the path.

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resources build the path.

Innovation cannot flourish when educators are asked to reimagine learning in the margins of overfilled schedules. Institutions must match their ambitions with meaningful investment in time, training, and collaborative spaces. Without that commitment, change becomes rhetoric, not reality; aspirational, not transformational.

Curiosity surpasses completion.

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In a world where technology fills in the blanks, curiosity keeps the mind alive. When answers arrive before the questions are formed, curiosity becomes radical. True learning is not about racing to the finish but about lingering in the unknown.

Students must learn with GenAI
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Ethical understanding grows through experience, not avoidance. Ethical literacy is not born of walls, but of windows. By engaging with generative tools, students come to recognise their capacities, limits, and biases. To know GenAI is to stand beside it critically, not compliantly.

Students are **collaborators**, not spectators.

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They must help write the story of GenAI in education, not merely read its script. In doing so, they learn both the weight of responsibility and the strength to challenge the systems that shape them.

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Inviting students to collaborate in systems that will not change is not partnership but performance, deepening cynicism instead of trust. Trust is built not through invitations, but through the courage of institutions to listen and to change.

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GenAI will surge forward, indifferent to our rules. Our work is to nurture the inner compass of empathy, discernment, and ethical vision which keeps education anchored in humanity. The true horizon of learning is not control; it is conscience.

Transparency is the new **integrity**.

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As the line between original and generated grows indistinct, honesty about process becomes more important than the illusion of purity. Students and staff alike should be able to say: Here's what I used, and here's how it shaped my work. In a hybrid world, transparency builds the trust that integrity depends on.

Academic judgement is
augmented, not automated.

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GenAI can illuminate patterns, generate ideas, and offer feedback - but discernment remains the domain of educators. Algorithms may assist, but they do not assess. Human context, empathy, and fairness are not optional; they are the foundation of academic decision-making.

Institutions must lead
ethically, not just efficiently.

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Universities cannot hand their conscience to vendors. Universities must anchor decisions in the core values of equity, privacy, and sustainability rather than simply cost. Institutional courage is what makes staff integrity possible.

Accountability scales with **influence**.

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The greater the reach of our technologies, the stronger our duty to justify their use. Institutions must show, not just state, how GenAI aligns with educational and institutional values. Responsibility must be visible through transparent governance, clear boundaries, and open dialogue.

Efficiency is seductive; **wisdom** lingers.

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Automation races ahead, promising speed and ease. But learning does not live in haste; it breathes in reflection, conversation, and the slow turning of thought. Growth unfolds in the pauses. As the world accelerates, we must guard the quiet tempos where thought becomes understanding.

There is no "neutral" data -
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Every dataset carries values, omissions, and histories within it. GenAI is not a mirror of truth but a chorus of inherited biases, shaped by its makers and the cultures that feed it. Recognising this enables us to teach students to read outputs not as objective facts, but as narratives to be questioned.

Prompting is pedagogy.

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The questions we pose shape the knowledge we receive. Critical prompting requires awareness of power, context, and intention. Students must learn not only to generate prompts, but to interrogate them and question the frame as much as the response.

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Its meaning shifts across disciplines and what enlightens one may obscure another. Education does not need uniformity, but plurality with each discipline finding its own pathway. Rather than universal rules, disciplines must co-create their own frameworks in conversation with their students and communities.

Writing remains an act of **thinking**,
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even when machines hold the pen.

Text generation does not end the need for writing; it transforms it. Drafting, reshaping, and interpreting AI-assisted text can be acts of deep thought. The goal is not to reject GenAI-authored text, but to think through it, critique and refine.

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When GenAI lightens the load of routine work, the focus of education must shift to deeper learning such as thinking critically, creating boldly, and reasoning ethically. Rather than lowering expectations, grades should reflect the depth of human growth, not the ease of technological shortcuts.

- Imagination, Humanity, and the Future

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Fear of misuse must not define our pedagogy. Students need to see bold, critical experimentation modelled in practice. Courage means making space for uncertainty and trusting learners to act responsibly with the tools of their time. Courage is the pedagogy they will remember.

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GenAI carries political, economic, and social consequences. Education must make these visible by revealing who gains, who is left behind, and why it matters. To stay silent is to side with inequity; to teach critically is to challenge it.

- Imagination, Humanity, and the Future

Inclusion is not **optional**.

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When GenAI privileges some languages, abilities, or cultures over others, inequity is built into the system. Education must actively design for access and belonging, adapting tools and practices so that all voices can be heard.

- Imagination, Humanity, and the Future

Sustainability is a learning outcome.

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*GenAI engagement and innovation comes with environmental costs.
Embedding sustainability as a core learning outcome means cultivating
awareness of impact and environmental responsibility.*

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The limitations of GenAI can spark new forms of expression where human imagination and creativity expand and flourish. Constraint becomes a canvas, not a cage.

- Imagination, Humanity, and the Future

Ethics is a foundation, not a footnote.

Ethics is a foundation, not a footnote.

Responsibility should not arrive as a final slide in a presentation; it should breathe through every decision. Ethical reflection belongs in the design stage of every policy, course, prompt, and dataset used. The most sustainable systems are those that start with conscience, not compliance.

- Imagination, Humanity, and the Future

Privacy is practice.

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Understanding what data we trade for convenience is part of digital literacy. Educators should lead by example - using GenAI transparently, anonymising where possible, questioning what is collected and why, and making informed choices of the tools used and for what purpose.

- Imagination, Humanity, and the Future

GenAI challenges us to
teach **why**, not just how.

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Technical fluency without philosophical grounding lacks depth. Students must understand both the power of GenAI and the wisdom to choose when not to use it. Meaningful literacy joins purpose with skill.

- Imagination, Humanity, and the Future

The **horizon** is still ours to shape.

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GenAI may reshape how we learn, but it does not rewrite our purpose. The future classroom is not a contest of minds and machines; it is a space of shared imagination, where creativity, conscience and care continue to grow. The legacy is not the machine, but the mind that guided it.

- Imagination, Humanity, and the Future

The future classroom is a **conversation**,
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The future classroom is a **conversation**,
and it can be extraordinary.

Learning now unfolds in dialogue: between teachers and students, people and systems, questions, and responses. The challenge is not control but balance and allowing technology to contribute without letting it speak for us.

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This manifesto is open. Use it, adapt it, challenge it.
Cite it with care, change it with courage.

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in Digital Education at the University of Edinburgh*

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