STUDENTS AS
CO-CREATORS

A Learning & Teaching Research Collaboration

Generative AI for Learning: Developing a Practical Guide for Foundation Students

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Academic Year 2024-2025

Overview

This project was a collaborative effort between current and previous foundation students who had attended the core CETI foundation modules and staff from the CETI. Together, we designed a practical guide to help other early years students understand how to use generative AI (GenAI) tools effectively and ethically in their studies.

We used a range of online tools like Padlet, shared documents, and virtual meetings to brainstorm, plan, and draft the guide. Throughout the process, students were actively involved in reviewing literature, led the focus group discussion, and were involved in decision-making, with staff offering support and structure.

Why We Did This

The idea came from a combination of things: growing interest in GenAI tools among students, confusion about how and when they can be used, and feedback from an earlier research project as well as classroom observations showing that many students wanted clearer, student-friendly guidance.

We also noticed that some students found university policies on AI use too formal specially for those just starting out. We wanted to create something simple, accessible, and directly useful for new students.

Our Goals

- Create a GenAI guide written in plain language with real-life student examples.
- Help students understand both the possibilities and limitations of using GenAI for learning.
- Make sure the guide aligns with university policy, but from a student perspective.
- Practice genuine co-creation — not just gathering student input, but involving students as equal partners throughout.

How We Worked Together

We began by setting up a shared **Padlet board**, where everyone could post resources, ideas, and examples.

Together, we carried out a **literature review** — sharing articles, writing summaries, and discussing which findings were most useful for the guide.

We also **reviewed university policies**, both from our own institution and from others, and drew on data from a previous research project exploring how students were already using GenAI tools.

With this foundation, we agreed on the key areas the guide should cover and began drafting. From the outset, our goal was to keep the guide **simple, clear, and practical** — not a rulebook, but a supportive tool for students.

Testing the Guide

One of the key steps was gathering feedback on our draft. At first, we struggled to recruit focus group participants. We think this was because we initially only reached out to Social Sciences and Humanities students. After broadening the call to all cohorts, we eventually managed to get enough interest — even though the session was held in early July, which is usually a quiet time.

Students from our co-creation team ran the focus group. They contacted the focus group participants, facilitated the session and took notes. We got useful feedback on both the content and structure of the guide, as well as more insight into how students are using GenAI in real situations.

What Changed After That

We added a section on the ethical use of GenAI, emphasising that it should be used thoughtfully and responsibly. This change was informed by students, who raised concerns about the environmental impact of GenAI — for example, the significant water consumption involved in generating responses, which can affect local communities where data centres are based.

We also revised parts of the guide to improve readability, reducing wordiness in certain sections to make the content clearer and more accessible.

Looking Ahead

We hope this guide becomes a trusted resource for foundation students who feel uncertain about using GenAI. It's designed to be practical, relatable, and grounded in real student experiences.

Looking ahead, there's potential to expand on this work — for example, by creating a digital or interactive version, or tailoring it for different subjects and year levels.

Participants also shared that they would return to this guide in the future and recommend it to their peers.

What we learned

- **Co-creation thrives on flexibility.**
  Using tools like Padlet and shared documents allowed everyone to contribute in their own time and at their own pace, making collaboration more inclusive.

- **Recruitment requires planning.**
  Next time, we would start outreach earlier and avoid scheduling focus groups during quieter periods to ensure greater student participation.

- **Students offer unique perspectives.**
  Their lived experience with GenAI tools — including informal, day-to-day use — provided valuable insights that shaped the guide in practical ways.

- **Technology enables inclusion.**
  Padlet, shared docs, and virtual meetings made it easier for students with different schedules, needs, and locations to take part meaningfully.

- **Student researchers gained personal value.**
  One student researcher reflected:
  "Being part of a student–lecturer project has been really rewarding. It encouraged my proactivity and gave me opportunities to connect with students I wouldn't usually meet. Hearing different perspectives on GenAI — both from personal research and from others involved — has been eye-opening."

Final Thoughts

This guide is an important step toward working **with** GenAI rather than against it. Together with foundation students, we explored how the technology can be used responsibly and effectively within university guidelines.

GenAI is a tool — not a shortcut. We've aimed to show how it can **support** learning, not replace it. Used well, it enhances critical thinking instead of undermining it.

Students want to engage responsibly. When given the right guidance, they are eager to use GenAI in ways that align with academic values. Clear, student-centred advice empowers them, rather than making them feel monitored.

This project also highlights the value of co-creation. We hope it can serve as a model for other initiatives where student experience helps shape better outcomes.