Empowering our communities: Library support for AI literacy at UCL

Angela Young
UCL Library Services, Library, Culture, Collections & Open Science (LCCOS), University College London (UCL), London, United Kingdom

Abstract
As generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) continues to reshape higher education, libraries must adapt their services to support evolving user needs and practices. This article outlines how LCCOS (Library, Culture, Collections and Open Science) at University College London (UCL) is supporting AI literacy across its community. It describes the development of guidance and training for users, LCCOS staff development initiatives designed to build confidence and capability in the use of AI, and emerging approaches to evaluating AI tools to inform both library service decision-making and individual use. These activities are underpinned by a departmental AI strategy, which enables a coordinated and sustainable approach aligned with broader institutional priorities.

Key words: *artificial intelligence; generative artificial intelligence; information literacy; academia; education.*

Introduction

Initial academic skills support for generative AI (GenAI) at University College London (UCL) focused on its use in assessment, including the library's development of institutional guidance on acknowledgement and referencing (1). The library has since continued to collaborate with other UCL support services to ensure a coordinated approach, with each service developing support in its area of responsibility. In this follow-up article, we outline the developing strategic approach by UCL LCCOS (Library, Culture, Collections and Open Science) to engaging with and supporting the use of artificial intelligence (AI).

Strategy development

As GenAI is still new and is rapidly evolving, the need to draw on expertise across LCCOS was recognised early on and addressed through a staff special interest group formed in early 2023. The initial focus of the LCCOS AI Group was to monitor developments in the use of GenAI in higher education and its impact on library services and cultural heritage, while considering approaches to and priorities for adapting support and service provision. While the group's initial response to GenAI was necessarily reactive, the need for a more strategic approach was recognised.

A subgroup scoped existing strategic models (2-5) and made recommendations to inform the development of a strategy. The LCCOS AI strategy, formalised in September 2025, presents a vision in which LCCOS will "harness the potential of AI to drive innovation and engagement across our spaces, services and collections" (6) with a commitment to effective and responsible use, and to empowering "staff and communities to develop the skills and confidence needed to engage with these technologies thoughtfully and ethically" (6).

Five foundational principles underpin the strategy, including utilising AI for enhancement and innovation of services, operations and skills while recognising the value of continued human expertise and input. It advocates for responsible and ethical use, and a culture of experimentation and learning, collaboration and collective engagement.

The strategy identifies broad themes from which tangible outputs will be developed and implemented through a new committee structure, comprising an oversight group and working groups.

While the strategy was in development, initiatives and activities which addressed clear priorities continued to be progressed.

Address for correspondence: Angela Young, UCL Library Services, Library, Culture, Collections & Open Science (LCCOS), University College London (UCL), Gower St, London WC1E 6BT, United Kingdom. E-mail: angela.young@ucl.ac.uk

Journal of EAHIL 2026; Vol. 22 (2): 4-8 DOI:10.32384/jeahil22717

Support for AI literacy

One of the strategic themes, "Empowering our communities", builds on ongoing support for AI literacy. Initial library guidance (7) covered referencing and acknowledging the use of GenAI, and using GenAI as a source of information. It has expanded to include guidance on summarisation, copyright, and using AI for systematic reviews, as well as signposting selected AI tools for supporting the library research process, and it continues to be developed.

Library support focuses on principles for effective and responsible AI use, including critical engagement with inputs and outputs, and using AI to enhance learning and reflection. In parallel with guidance development, a student workshop was developed and initially delivered as part of UCL's ExtendED Learning programme, which offers "students a wide range of free learning opportunities to enhance skills and networks" (8). The programme is aligned with UCL's Pillars of Employability (9), which encourage students to develop skills to support their future and includes AI literacy as a foundational skill. The workshop is now incorporated into the library's regular programme of skills sessions, with its content complementing a session facilitated by UCL's Academic Communication Centre on critical use of Generative AI tools in the writing process.

Through practical activities and discussion, the "Critical thinking in a GenAI world: Summaries and sources of information" workshop explores GenAI as a summarisation tool and source of information for academic work and beyond. The copyright and intellectual property implications of uploading materials to GenAI tools regularly prompt more discussion than workshop time allows. To address this, a complementary session is now offered, which explores copyright considerations in the use of AI in depth.

Increasingly academic departments and other UCL groups request library sessions on the use of GenAI. The "Critical thinking in a GenAI world" workshop provides a useful model, easily adaptable to specific disciplines or use cases, such as a recent adaptation to address using GenAI to engage with and understand scientific articles.

Enabling change

The LCCOS AI Strategy recognises that to respond to the "transformative potential of AI", staff need to be equipped and supported, including ensuring all "staff have the opportunity to achieve baseline AI literacy" (6), and more specialist skills where required.

The LCCOS AI Group recognised that effective use of GenAI is shaped not only by task requirements but also by individual working practices, and developing effective usage is therefore an individual journey, best achieved through active engagement, experimentation, and reflection. The group observed that engagement with GenAI varied considerably across the department. Some colleagues readily engage independently, experimenting and identifying effective applications. Others struggle to achieve useful outcomes or are uncertain where to begin, and some express concern about potential implications of AI for their roles. The group identified the need for a structured, supportive environment in which colleagues could experiment and share experiences to build confidence, capability and understanding, supporting the strategic aim of staff baseline AI literacy.

In summer 2025, the group facilitated two workshops for LCCOS staff, one in-person and the other online, in which colleagues were introduced to a selection of AI tools through a range of activities. Some activities were directly related to the work context, such as simulating a role-play of a difficult conversation with a student at a library enquiry desk, while others encouraged engagement through fun, such as creating a "choose your own adventure" story. The sessions ended with reflection on how these uses of AI tools might be adapted to other work-related purposes and contexts.

More specialist skills in AI are required by library colleagues who deliver support for AI literacy across the UCL community in relation to the library research process. Dedicated subject specialist librarians support specific academic departments, so to ensure sustainable support for AI literacy development, all colleagues with a remit for teaching library skills must be confident and able to facilitate AI literacy sessions.

A barrier to library staff delivering AI literacy teaching is a personal perception of their own lack of expertise. As fundamentals of AI literacy align with the skills, attributes and behaviours inherent in information literacy, however, library staff are well placed to adapt their existing practices to provide AI literacy support and teaching. To address self-perceptions of their lack of confidence, library trainers at UCL are encouraged to

manage expectations in the workshops they deliver through transparency around the limitations of their technical expertise, and the content of sessions is designed around sharing of experiences and knowledge, and critical discussion around findings in the activities, with library teachers facilitating and drawing together key learning points, rather than solely imparting their knowledge as a perceived expert.

In supporting library staff to gain confidence in delivering teaching on AI, similar principles are adopted as for developing their broader information literacy teaching competencies, through gradual immersion, exposure and contribution. Colleagues attend sessions delivered by more experienced staff or, in the case of AI, early adopters, before being involved in delivery themselves, and subsequently progressing to independent design and delivery. To support shared practice, colleagues are encouraged to contribute materials from their teaching sessions to a central resource outlining session aims, coverage, delivery dates, and links for reuse or adaptation.

AI tools evaluation

To date, AI literacy support provided by the library has excluded recommendation or use of specific AI tools owing to:

- the rapidly evolving landscape, with new tools emerging and existing tools developing at pace;
- concern around endorsing specified tools without thorough evaluation;
- equality concerns regarding access to paid versions of tools.

In workshops, practical activities utilise Microsoft Copilot, to which UCL has an institutional subscription with added data protection. Other tools may occasionally be mentioned or signposted, or feature in discussion.

Increasingly the library receives enquiries relating to access to specific AI tools. The library does not have additional resource for AI tools, so any institutional subscriptions would require funding from existing budgets, which would impact on funds available for other electronic resources. Decisions therefore require careful consideration and thorough evaluation of tools.

The library is developing a framework for staff to evaluate AI tools, to inform acquisition decisions and respond to recommendations or enquiries about access to AI tools. The framework includes a screening stage, in which the purpose and function of the tool determine whether it is in scope for the library, and a staged evaluation process which progresses to greater depth where the evaluator determines it is worth continuing with the evaluation.

The framework was informed by existing examples developed at other institutions (10-15) and includes evaluation criteria grouped under 4 themes of functionality; usability; security, ethical and legal; and practicalities.

To support and empower students and researchers to make their own assessments around their individual choice of AI tools, a checklist (16) was developed in tandem with the library staff framework, with corresponding themes and prompting questions tailored towards individuals. It acknowledges that while consideration of all sections of the checklist ensures a balanced, thorough evaluation of any tool, the priority and relevance of the points to consider will vary depending on an individual's needs and the task at hand. It therefore does not incorporate a scoring system and instead supports critical decision-making.

Changing behaviours and future considerations

Rapid technological development requires support services to adapt to ensure ongoing effective support for users to navigate an evolving information landscape. Through interaction with and feedback from users in training sessions and examination of library enquiries we can gain understanding of current and changing behaviours and needs. Data from confidence polls taken at the start of training sessions delivered by UCL library staff has shown rapid increases in attendees' confidence in using AI tools for academic work, which reflect findings of broader studies (17). Such insights inform review and updating of sessions ahead of each instance of delivery to ensure user expectations and needs are addressed at appropriate levels.

Ongoing observation and analysis are needed to enable support services to adapt. User experience projects and surveys, such as a current survey by UCL Digital Skills and wider surveys (17, 18) help inform future AI skills support at UCL, but ongoing user experience work would further facilitate adaptation of services to support changing user behaviours and needs.

The development of AI in search and discovery tools is likely to lead to significant change in library skills support, as information-seeking behaviours of students and researchers evolve. Established search techniques may cease to be the most effective methodologies for finding information, and library staff will need to acquire new specialist knowledge and adapt their approaches.

In acknowledgment of UCL's 200-year anniversary, LCCOS colleagues are reflecting on the past while looking to the future. A workshop on the future of roles in libraries and cultural heritage will explore how roles are changing and anticipate how staff skillsets must evolve, with the impact of technological advances a key theme.

At an institutional level, UCL recently consulted with staff across academic and professional services departments to inform its ongoing approach to AI in education. Implementation of the LCCOS AI strategy will respond to these priorities while establishing a foundation that positions the department to adapt and contribute to a sustainable, institution-wide approach.

Submitted on invitation.
Accepted on 11 May 2026.

REFERENCES

1. Young A, Chandler J, Norris C, Prevatt-Goldstein A. Generative AI and academic skills support at UCL: an institutional approach. JEAHIL. 2024;20(2):16-9. Available from: https://doi.org/10.32384/jeahil20620
2. Pirgova-Morgan L. Looking towards a brighter future: the potentiality of AI and digital transformations to library spaces. Leeds: University of Leeds; 2023. Available from: https://library.leeds.ac.uk/downloads/download/196/artificial-intelligence-ai-in-libraries
3. Library AI Statement. Sheffield: University of Sheffield Library; 2025 [cited 2026 May 01]. Available from: https://sheffield.ac.uk/library/about/library-ai-statement
4. Association of Research Libraries. Research Libraries Guiding Principles for Artificial Intelligence. 2024 April. Available from: https://www.arl.org/resources/research-libraries-guiding-principles-for-artificial-intelligence/
5. Cox A. Developing a library strategic response to Artificial Intelligence. eLucidate [Internet]. 2024;16(4). Available from: https://doi.org/10.29173/elucidate847.
6. Moyle M. LCCOS AI Strategy (unpublished paper). UCL LCCOS (Library, Collections, Culture and Open Science); 2025.
7. UCL Library Skills. Generative AI and library skills. London: UCL Library Skills; 2026 [cited 2026 May 01]. Available from: https://library-guides.ucl.ac.uk/generative-ai
8. University College London (UCL). ExtendED Learning. London: University College London (UCL); 2026 [cited 2026 May 01]. Available from: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/study/current-students/academic-support-and-skills/extended-learning
9. Careers U. Developing your employability skills at UCL. London: UCL Careers; 2026 [cited 2026 May 01]. Available from: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/study/careers/preparing-your-application/developing-your-employability-skills-ucl
10. Bassett MA. SECURE. GenAI Use Framework for Staff. Australia: Charles Sturt University; 2025 [cited 2026 May 01]. Available from: https://secureframework.ai/
11. Mackie K, Aspenlieder E. Rubric for evaluating AI tools: Fundamental criteria. MacPherson Institute for Leadership, Innovation and Excellence in Teaching, McMaster University; 2024. Available from: https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/mcmasterpracticalaiguide/chapter/evaluating-ai-tools/
12. University of Birmingham Libraries. Responsible AI tool selection for researchers. Birmingham: University of Birmingham; 2026 [cited 2026 May 01]. Available from: https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/student/libraries/copyright/researchers/responsible-ai-tool-selection.aspx
13. Purdue University. How to evaluate AI tools. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University; 2026 [cited 2026 May 01]. Available from: https://www.purdue.edu/ai/how-to-evaluate-ai-tools/

14. CDA-AMC. Development of an evaluation instrument on artificial intelligence Search tools for evidence synthesis. Canadian Journal of Health Technologies [Internet]. 2024;4(10). Available from: https://doi.org/10.51731/cjht.2024.1004.
15. Michalak R, Tzoc E, Lewis JD. Practical considerations for adopting generative AI tools in academic libraries. Journal of Library Administration. 2025;65(5):596-615. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2025.2506151.
16. AI tools evaluation checklist. [Internet]. London: UCL Library Skills; 2026 [cited 2026 May 01]. Available from: https://library-guides.ucl.ac.uk/generative-ai/ai-tools-evaluation-checklist
17. HEPI (Higher Education Policy Institute). Student generative artificial intelligence survey 2026. 2026. Available from: http://hepi.ac.uk/reports/student-generative-ai-survey-2026/
18. StudentXGenAI. Student experiences of generative artificial intelligence in UK universities. 2025 [cited 2026 May 01]. Available from: https://www.studentxgenai.co.uk/