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A CTaLE-Stone Centre - Royal Economic Society Report

Rethinking Economics Assessments for a GenAI World

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September 2025

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This report is supplemented by three CTaLE Working Paper appendices:

Nassehi et al. (2025), Working Paper 1: How Economists are using GenAI at work: The new employability skills

Cortinhas et al. (2025), Working Paper 2: How are Economists adapting assessments for a GenAI world?

Chaudhury et al. (2025), Working Paper 3: Academic Integrity in a GenAI World – A Comparative Review of University Policies in the UK

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Executive summary

The launch of ChatGPT 3.0 on November 30th, 2022 fundamentally altered the landscape of higher education. For economics academics and students, this technological shock has created both unprecedented challenges and opportunities that demand urgent attention. The world has changed and continues to evolve, necessitating structured and targeted advice on how best to adapt what and how we teach and assess.

This research project provides a snapshot of how those teaching on economics degrees in the UK have responded to this technological transformation in their assessment design and proposes next steps for such degrees. Our work addresses a critical need: ensuring that economics graduates remain attractive to employers and that our degrees retain their value in an GenAI-transformed world. This is not merely about adapting to new technology; it represents a fundamental rethinking of what an economics degree should be in preparing students for their future lives and careers.

Using mixed methods to gather evidence—including surveys of professional economists and economics academics, an all-day workshop featuring panel and focus group discussions, and comprehensive desktop research including a grey literature review—we analyse the impact of GenAI on assessment in economics degrees in the UK through three critical lenses.

KEY FINDINGS: THREE PERSPECTIVES ON GENAI INTEGRATION

Employer Expectations and Skills Evolution: Our pulse survey of professional economists reveals that GenAI is now embedded at every level of knowledge work in such jobs, from routine tasks such as coding and debugging, to mid-level tasks like literature reviews and summarising documents, and finally to high-level tasks such as data analysis and idea generation. This suggests that the skills economics graduates need have expanded and evolved significantly. In addition to existing employability skills expectations, graduates must now be able to engage in complex collaborative processes with GenAI. They need to know how to critically use and challenge GenAI in the context of their work—both when to use it and how best to use it. This requires ongoing engagement with the tools, continuous learning and training, and insight into what ethical and responsible use of GenAI means, both generally and within their specific work contexts.

Adaptation in Economics Degree Programmes: Our bottom-up analysis through a pulse survey of economics academics and workshop discussions provides a snapshot of how the profession is currently adapting assessment in response to GenAI. While UK institutions have developed more structured approaches to GenAI integration compared to non-UK institutions, concerns about academic integrity, inclusivity, and inadequate institutional support remain prevalent across all contexts. We observe a variety of changes being made across modules and degree programmes, generally led by individual lecturers without significant programme-wide discussion about optimal integration of GenAI into the curriculum. The overall sense is of a community of academics who are largely cautious in making change, with a small number of trailblazers and experimenters. Many are increasing in-person assessments (exams, presentations) without apparent evaluation of the potential impact on student skill development or on differential outcomes by demographic/socioeconomic characteristics.

Institutional Policy Context: Our top-down analysis of the institutional context in which economists design their assessments reveals that vague policies leave academics and students operating in a vacuum, with uncertainty stifling activity and experimentation. The lack of clarity on what constitutes firm rules versus guidance prevents academics from knowing the extent to which they can explore new approaches. There is a clear need for comprehensive policies and guidance from institutions, alongside discipline-specific guidance and sharing of practical examples on adaptation strategies.

THREE CORE OBJECTIVES FOR ECONOMICS DEGREES IN A GENAI WORLD

Bringing these three perspectives together, we emphasise the need to consider curriculum (re)design in a way that recognises three objectives that must be met simultaneously in our degrees:

1. Protect Academic Value: Ensure that the awarded degree classification reflects a student's knowledge and skill and is a credible signal for the labour market, thereby protecting the academic value of our degrees.

2. Develop Essential Skills: Continue to provide students with opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge they need for life after their degree, particularly skills that employers value in a GenAI-enabled world.

3. Support Student and Staff Adaptation: Recognise that students and staff are navigating how to adapt to GenAI and support them in their journey, helping them learn how to learn effectively and responsibly with available tools and supporting staff to facilitate this.

Assessment sits at the heart of these principles, embedded within curriculum decisions on what we teach, how we teach, and how we support students with their learning—all of which must adapt to GenAI and its impact on university degrees and the labour market.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Royal Economic Society (RES) is in a strategically important position as a platform to help academics in economics departments across the UK move towards meeting these principles in their assessments. The 2024-2028 strategy focuses on four strategic priorities (bring communities of economists together, advocate for economics, improve diversity, inclusion and integrity in the profession and develop the next generation of economists) giving RES the space to support economists to embed these principles in their assessment.

Several areas of support are needed:

Sector-Level Leadership: The Committee of Heads of University Departments of Economics (CHUDE) should endorse the need for change to ensure we retain the value of our degrees, helping departments influence institutional discussions. Proactive leadership from economics, one of the largest degree subject areas in the UK, may help the sector coordinate a credible response that emphasises the value of universities.

Discipline-Specific Guidance: Where institutional policies are vague, and delegate to departments, faculties and schools to determine context-appropriate approaches, there is a need for sector-wide and discipline-specific guidance and support. Guidance on curriculum and assessment design adaptation facilitated by the Royal Economic Society may provide a useful resource for economics departments working to influence institutional policies upwardly.

Practice Sharing and Co-Creation: We must move away from conversations about problems to discussions about solutions. Departments and professional organisations need to provide more opportunities to share practice and case study examples, as well as opportunities to co-create assessments and wider curriculum design for a GenAI-enabled world. It is particularly helpful to hear from other economists working with large cohorts and constrained institutional budgets.

Stakeholder management: Economics degrees are delivered in a variety of settings from autonomous economics departments, economics divisions within business schools and degree apprenticeships with significant employers such as the Government Economic Service. Any work through CHUDE needs to work across the sector and will need to be co-created through practice sharing from a diverse set of departments to ensure our collective knowledge is built on our diversity of experience.

Programme-Level Assessment Strategy: Heads of Department, Directors of Education and Programme Directors must recognise the value of mixed assessment methods within an economics degree to meet different objectives and learning outcomes, in line with the QAA Economics Subject Level Benchmark Statement and the Degree Apprenticeship Standard for Professional Economists. This includes both GenAI-free assessments (e.g. presentations, invigilated exams) and GenAI-enabled assessments (e.g. team projects using GenAI for empirical analysis). Assessment changes need programme-level evaluation, considering skill development mix and inclusivity impact alongside academic integrity assurance.

Balanced Assessment Approaches: While mixed methods will include exams as part of GenAI-free assessments, we must ensure that 100% exams do not become the default option, or we will lose significant progress made in diversifying assessment for skill development and inclusivity. We need conversations around when exams are appropriate and when other assessment types are needed to deliver on all economics degree ambitions, recognising the significant scale of many cohorts and heterogeneous student groups.

Ethics Integration: There must be discussion on incorporating ethical GenAI use, alongside wider discussions on ethics and data use, into the economics curriculum. Students need to make informed choices about when and how best to use GenAI within organisation-specific guidance contexts. This requires answering the question: what does ethical use of GenAI mean in economics?

Scaled Staff Development and Support: Successful GenAI integration requires high-quality training and support for all staff, from teaching assistants to Programme Directors, on ethical and effective GenAI use in classrooms and practical guidance on designing assessments for a GenAI world. We need ambitious scaling of training and sharing opportunities through the Economics Network, CTaLE, and regional networks. These organisations require financial support to push these initiatives forward at the required scale and evaluate their impact.

Student Support: Economics students need training and support on learning effectively with GenAI, developed by departments to reflect their degree specifics, potentially supported by resources from professional organisations. Discover Economics would be a useful partner in working with students to co-create this support.

THE PATH FORWARD

While this list of recommendations is extensive, we recognise that economics academics already operate under significant pressure with limited time for change and substantial financial constraints in many institutions. However, we can make changes together to retain the value of our degrees and ensure they remain attractive to students. This is why working together to find ways forward is crucial - putting our collective expertise together to reach solutions more quickly and sharing ideas and resources to limit duplication and reduce costs.

Although this report focuses on assessment adaptation, this represents one piece of a larger puzzle. Moving forward requires a holistic whole-curriculum approach, accounting for academic, student, employer, and pedagogical perspectives. A review of what economics graduates need to know and be able to do will be necessary as their future world changes, with consequences for what and how we teach and assess.

A co-ordinated effort across the UK higher education sector can help us integrate GenAI into economics education to enrich the educational experience for our students while maintaining the rigour and value that makes economics degrees among the most in demand in the UK. The challenge is significant, but so is the opportunity to lead in preparing economics graduates for a rapidly evolving world.

> “For economics academics and students, this technological shock has created both unprecedented challenges and opportunities that demand urgent attention.”

1 Introduction[1]

The Centre for Teaching and Learning in Economics (CTaLE) is an online-first community which connects economics educators from around the world through our shared interest in teaching and learning in economics. The authors of this CTaLE-Stone Centre-Royal Economic Society report for the Royal Economic Society (RES) are an experienced group of economics educators connected through CTaLE with the aim of starting a sector wide conversation to develop our collective response to the launch and growth of GenAI[2]. Following the launch of ChatGPT 3.0 on November 30th, 2022, and its fundamental impact on higher education this report focuses on how best to adapt what and how we assess in economics.

In 2023/24, CTaLE launched our Communities of Practice with the idea to provide a mechanism for people to group together under themed research areas with a volunteer coordinator. The aim was to support economics educators to find others interested in the same area to create research projects together. The Community of Practice attracted significant interest especially topics on the impact of GenAI on assessment and feedback. It was clear from the discussions that whilst there was a lot of interest in this topic there were also a lot of unknowns about the impact of GenAI. This uncertainty was adding pressure within many economics departments for a movement back to 100% in-person exams post-COVID which provided the illusion of having fixed the GenAI problem. Discussions showed however that we as a sector were not confident that the in-person exams were the only solution, just that they were part of any response.

The purpose of this report is to provide a snapshot of how economics academics in the UK have responded to this technological transformation in their assessment design and propose next steps for such degrees. In doing so, we are seeking to crowd-source initial evidence of the current response to GenAI, seeking to learn from each other and provide evidence to start a sector-wide conversation that builds a collective and considered response to the impact of GenAI on assessment design in economics. This system thinking approach seeks to understand the impact of GenAI on assessments within the context of the changes in terms of what students of economics need to know, what employers would like them to know and how individual institutional responses may constrain our choice of solutions. Our work addresses a critical need: ensuring that economics graduates remain attractive to employers and that our degrees retain their value in an GenAI-transformed world. This is not merely about adapting to new technology; it represents a fundamental rethinking of what a degree in economics should be in terms of preparing students for their future lives and careers.

The selected methodology seeks to rapidly build an evidence base to start this sector-wide conversation. The current literature from economics education is dominated by empirical studies of individual modules, using module level data to consider the impact of innovation by individual academics in terms of approaches to embedding GenAI within assessment (Gerald et

1 We would like to thank our Project Manager, Vaishnavi Gondane (UCL), and our Research Assistants Janice Go (UCL), Himanshi Gupta (Imperial Business School), Maryam Haghighi Naeej (UCL), Vlad Midoni (UCL), and Cathy Wu (UCL), for their help organising and running our workshop and for their support with analysing the two pulse surveys and the literature review for this report. We are also grateful to Tom Aldred (Government Economics Service), Kathleen Armour (Vice Provost Education and Student Experience, UCL), Ylva Baeckstrom (King's College London), Alvin Birdi (Bristol University and Economics Network), Edwin Ip (University of Exeter), Cezary Klimczuk (Finalto), Petar Stankov (Royal Holloway), Peter Postl (UCL), Maria Psyllou (Imperial Business School) and Swati Virmani (DeMontfort University) for presenting at and assisting with our workshop. This was definitely a project that required many hands and we were fortunate to have such excellent support.

2 Throughout this report, we use GenAI as a general term for the generative AI tools most widely used by academics and students in higher education to date. We acknowledge that the range of tools likely to be adopted in the near future in higher education and the wider labour market will extend well beyond current GenAI applications.

al. 2025 (US), Badiglio 2024 (Italy)) and feedback strategies (Nguyen et al. 2023 (Vietnam) Lu et al. 2025 (US)) strategies. Beyond the module, there are just two pieces found about degree programmes, both using a similar empirical strategy. Firstly: Brose et al. (2025) makes use of CORE-Econ foundation economics concepts and associated multi-choice questions to assess the effectiveness of ChatGPT 3.5/4.0 as a tutor in economics. Secondly, Balytska et al. (2024) seek to understand the key motivation for undergraduate students to use AI. They make use of institutional data and additional student survey data of 264 students in the Faculty of Economics at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. This approach limits the ability to assess the impact of GenAI on assessment and feedback strategies to module/programme level study.

In this report, we take a more exploratory approach which includes two pulse surveys of economics educators and employers of economics graduates that produced the initial evidence base for a workshop entitled "AI & Economics: Rethinking Assessments for the Future" funded by UCL Stone Centre and hosted by CTaLE on June 10th, 2025. At this workshop the findings of the two pulse surveys were shared, alongside expert panels and following on from these, small group discussions were held with observations recorded from all these sources. A team of research assistants also undertook a detailed literature search of the assessment landscape in economics, based on the three themes emerging from the workshop. We are grateful to colleagues at the Developments in Economics Education Conference in September 2025 for further input in various workshops and presentations that informed the finalisation of this report.

The findings of this report bring together the results from the pulse studies, the thematic analysis of the workshop notes and the literature survey to set the scene of the current state of the art in terms of GenAI and assessments in economics. We also show the need for a collective response to co-create robust and effective assessments in economics for a GenAI enabled world.

> "We are seeking to learn from each other and provide evidence to start a sector-wide conversation that builds a collective and considered response."

2 The impact of GenAI on the Higher Education Sector

The rapid integration of GenAI into higher education and the workplace is reshaping the expectations placed on university graduates and those who teach them. As tools like ChatGPT, Claude and others become ubiquitous, universities face a dual imperative: to ensure assessments remain meaningful in a GenAI-rich environment, and to prepare students for a changing labour market. This is a global challenge for higher education and one that academics, collectively and independently, are grappling with.

In this section, we provide a brief overview of how the university sector in the UK has responded, so far, and summarise some of the emerging lessons from education research on the impact of GenAI. This discussion provides important sectoral context to the rest of the report, which hones in on economics education and considers assessment as one of the most pressing, though not the only, aspects of higher education that needs reform.

Developing sector-wide policies

Policies and guidance on GenAI and education in the UK have largely been developed bottom-up by individual institutions, discussed further in Section 5. These sit alongside sector-wide developments. Russell Group universities have coordinated on a set of *principles on the use of generative AI tools in education* (Russell Group, 2025). These emphasise the value of working across institutions and the need to embed GenAI ethically in education, to protect academic integrity and to provide support for students and staff to use AI tools effectively. Many universities have based their own policies on these principles. Jisc (2025a and 2025b) has also developed a set of principles, targeted primarily at further education colleges, and provided a guiding framework for Responsible AI use. The Office for Students has not issued any formal guidance or change in regulations. However, in a June 2025 blog post, the Director of Strategy and Delivery expressed broad support for universities to experiment with integrating GenAI to benefit students while managing potential risks (Office for Students, 2025). The discussion of how to adapt economics education in a GenAI world builds on these broad frameworks.

Prolific student use

Students in the meantime are working out for themselves how to adapt their approach to learning for a GenAI world. They are using tools extensively and for a wide range of purposes as part of their learning. The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) *Student Generative AI Survey 2025* found that 95% of students were using GenAI, up from 66% in their 2024 survey (HEPI, 2024). 39% of respondents used it for editing work and 36% used it for summarising, note-taking or quizzing (HEPI, 2025a). The Jisc report on *Student Perceptions of AI*, also found that students are using GenAI for a wide range of tasks including summarising articles, generating flashcards, devising challenging questions, filling knowledge gaps and deepening understanding (Jisc 2025c). PhD students also reported using GenAI tools as a "digital colleague" to spar ideas and refine thought processes. These findings suggest that GenAI is being used as a learning assistant by students, helping them to save time on routine tasks. Students see it as a way to enhance their learning in a more targeted and engaging manner.

Students are also using it as a co-creator of academic work. HEPI (2025a) reports that 64% of respondents generated texts through platforms like ChatGPT, while 15% analysed data or crafted computer codes using tools like GitHub Copilot. 18% of students reported including AI-generated text directly in their submission form of

plagiarism according to most universities' academic integrity policies as discussed in Section 5.

When deciding how to adapt assessments, we need to recognise that students are using GenAI extensively and they need support to help them to critically identify when it is appropriate to use the tools and when it is not.

Exploration of opportunities and challenges in the literature

Education researchers are also considering how learning and teaching need to change in a GenAI world. Mollick and Mollick (2022 and 2023) argue that GenAI is not just a tool but a "force multiplier" for learning—capable of enhancing creativity, productivity, and engagement when used thoughtfully. In their research, they found that students who use AI as a collaborative partner—rather than a shortcut—tend to produce more sophisticated work and develop a deeper understanding. They advocate for a shift from banning AI to teaching students how to use it responsibly and reflectively. Liu and Bates (2025) similarly emphasise the importance of embedding AI literacy into curricula. Their work highlights the need for "pedagogical co-design," where students and educators collaboratively explore how AI can support learning, feedback, and assessment. They warn against punitive approaches that alienate students and instead call for inclusive strategies that bridge the emerging digital divide.

Recognition of the potential benefits of GenAI for learning and assessments in the literature is quite extensive. Rodriguez-Ascaso et al. (2024) highlight the potential of personalised AI-supported learning environments for students with disabilities that tailor both learning materials and assessment tasks to individual needs. Swiecki et al. (2022) describe how adaptive algorithms, such as Item Response Theory, can calibrate question difficulty based on students' responses, providing more personalised and appropriately challenging assessment experiences. Similarly, Hooda et al. (2022) show how real-time learning analytics can be used to identify learning difficulties and emotional distress early on, allowing for timely and targeted support to be provided. Well-designed AI-enhanced assessments can also be more authentic, reflecting the nature of work in a GenAI world. Swiecki et al. (2022) argue that AI can enable simulations that mirror complex, real-life professional scenarios with in-built opportunities to experiment, make decisions, and reflect on performance. Owan (2023) emphasise that AI-driven simulation-based assessments help students build practical and transferable skills, including those related to communication and emotional awareness, which are vital in client-facing or policy-related roles.

The literature also discusses the potential risks of students overrelying on GenAI and the loss of skill development opportunities if assessment mix is narrowed due to academic misconduct concerns. Whilst the boundaries for acceptable AI use are unclear (Rudolph et al. 2023), students need to learn how to use the tools effectively, ethically and transparently (Gamage et al. 2023) and academics need to ensure that students develop a broad mix of skills through assessments. The increased use of AI and the shift to more analytical-focused assessments may promote superficial learning (Swiecki et al. 2022) and could narrow the opportunity to develop creativity, originality, and deeper critical engagement skills (Smolansky et al. 2023; Rudolph et al. 2023).

Rudolph et al. (2023) advocate for moving away from conventional written exams and towards more innovative and authentic forms, such as oral presentations, policy briefs, reflective writing, or data storytelling. However, Kofinas et al. (2025) warns that most adaptations to coursework assessments are not addressing serious academic integrity concerns. Woon (2025) meanwhile emphasises that exams help students develop a deeper understanding of the content of their degree. There is no clear recommendation on one way forward, but a clear call for change.

"When deciding how to adapt assessments, we need to recognise that students are using GenAI extensively."

Adapting by building on existing principles of assessment design

Incorporating all these considerations when designing assessments is clearly challenging. However, this is not the first time we have had to make changes to our assessments and we have a solid foundation of principles for assessment design to build on.

We need to start with, and not forget, existing guidance and policies for best practice curriculum design. For example the QAA Economics Subject Benchmark Statement's (2023) recommendations on what and how to teach and how to assess remain valid and can provide a foundation for adaptation to GenAI. We also need to revisit core questions about the role and design of assessment, particularly ensuring assessments are both inclusive and pedagogically meaningful (Paredes-Fuentes, 2024). Existing principles and frameworks provide a structure for the change that is needed to catch up with the rapidly evolving GenAI world. This report provides insights on what the nature of the change needs to be and suggestions on what is needed to move all those responsible for economics education in the UK forward.

“The QAA Economics Subject Benchmark Statement's (2023) recommendations on what and how to teach and how to assess remain valid and can provide a foundation for adaptation to GenAI.”

3 How employability skills are adapting in a GenAI world

In this section, we share what we have learnt about how the world of work appears to be changing, and is expected to change, as the economy and labour market adapt to GenAI. This work is based on our pulse survey of professional economists, an expert employer panel and focus group discussions at our workshop, and desktop research on labour market developments.

Learning from previous industrial and digital economic shocks, we can be certain of the disruptive impact of AI[3] on the economy and labour market, although unsure of the exact nature of this disruption. Media headlines in summer 2025 suggest significant disruption in the graduate labour market in particular (The Economist, 2025a; Financial Times, 2025). Employers have for some time been moving to a skills-based approach to hiring (Deloitte, 2022), epitomised by, for example, PWC's 'New World, New Skills' programme and the Financial Services Skills Commission Skills Based Organisation Framework (The Institute of Student Employers, 2025). This trend has accelerated with the rapid advances in AI, and the skills that employers are prioritising are changing (World Economic Forum, 2025).

We are seeing technical tasks, which previously graduates from degrees such as economics were sought after to provide, being delegated to AI, and it is anticipated that there is more to come, including in areas such as data, analytics, business intelligence and finance (Digital Education Council, 2025). This is a world where AI is not necessarily replacing graduate jobs but where the nature of those jobs is expected to change. Being a success at work and in the recruitment process is expected to involve being confident working in an environment with AI (The Economist, 2025b). Rather than doing the technical tasks, graduates could be expected to be working with and running teams that include AI agents (McKinsey Global Institute, 2025). This requires a different skillset, and mindset.

Changing skills in the labour market

The type of skills that are highlighted as important in recent studies of employer expectations include analytical and critical thinking, communication and story-telling, ethical awareness, leadership and adaptability (World Economic Forum, 2025; Microsoft, 2024; Digital Education Council, 2025). These are not new, aligning with previous studies on skills that employers of economics graduates value (Jenkins and Lane, 2018), but they come with a new nuance in an AI world. Critical thinking now involves being able to know when to use AI and how to evaluate its output. Similarly, analytical thinking is shifting toward higher-order skills, with the understanding that AI can handle lower-level tasks and humans can build on the AI's output with creativity and originality (Digital Education Council, 2025). As the nature of AI changes at pace, graduates need to be able to adapt quickly, have an entrepreneurial mindset to find ways to improve and be willing to continuously skill-up and reskill to effectively embed AI (Hoteit et al. 2024; Microsoft, 2024).

Beyond critical and analytical thinking, the rise of AI makes AI fluency a crucial skill. This means being able to use AI tools effectively while understanding their capabilities, limitations, and ethical implications (GMAC, 2025; PWC, 2025). This includes being able, for example, to write prompts, carry out analytical tasks including data analysis and use tools for text analysis. It is not just about knowing how to use AI but

3 The literature on the labour market and the questions in our survey of professional economists refer to 'AI' to capture all broad applications. We therefore use this term in this Section but continue to use 'GenAI' when considering implications for economics education.

knowing when to use AI, being able to evaluate and build on the information produced by AI, and identifying how best to manage AI systems (Frontier Economics, 2025; Digital Education Council, 2025). This requires awareness of ethical considerations, as well as familiarity with organisation, sectoral and national policies and regulations[4]. This is a lot for workers to learn, and there is an increasing expectation that graduates will be confident working effectively and ethically with AI.

Snapshot of experiences of professional economists

Of course, employers and their employees are, like academics, still working out how to embed AI effectively in their organisations. It is not possible to be definitive on how future economics graduates will be using AI in their jobs, or indeed their lives (World Economic Forum, 2025). We ran a pulse survey of professional economists to get a sense of how AI is impacting work for them. We also discussed how AI is impacting recruitment and work at our workshop, with an expert panel of professional economists followed by focus group discussions. More detail can be found in Nassehi et al. (2025).

Our 114 pulse survey respondents, largely economics graduates working in professional economist roles inside and outside academia, shared that they were using AI for a wide range of purposes at work. Respondents are using common tools, such as ChatGPT, with most paying for subscription versions. A small number of respondents were using organisation-specific bespoke tools, and these were emphasised as important in the financial sector in our workshop employer panel.

As shown in Figure 1, the respondents find GenAI to be an important tool to help with coding, drafting, literature review, summarising and brainstorming. This idea of GenAI tools being used in a wide variety of ways was reinforced by the expert panel at our workshop, with the tools being compared to a research assistant and being considered part of collaborative and organisational processes.

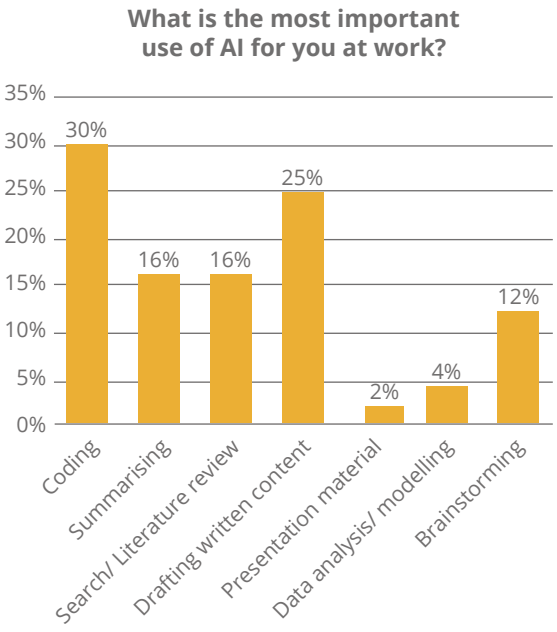

Figure 1 Different uses of AI in the workplace – survey responses

The sense, from survey respondents and workshop discussions, is that AI can help free up time allowing professional economists to achieve more. This comes from being able, as illustrated in Figure 2, to delegate tasks like error checking, summarising and information gathering to AI tools and being able to automate routine tasks. Interestingly, respondents to our survey of professional economists also highlighted using AI tools for idea generation and collaboration, an area which warrants further research on how the tools help in these tasks.

4 These policies include for example the EU AI Act 2024, the UK Government 2025 AI Opportunities Action Plan, the Financial Conduct Authority 2025 AI Review and the UK Government 2025 AI Playbook.

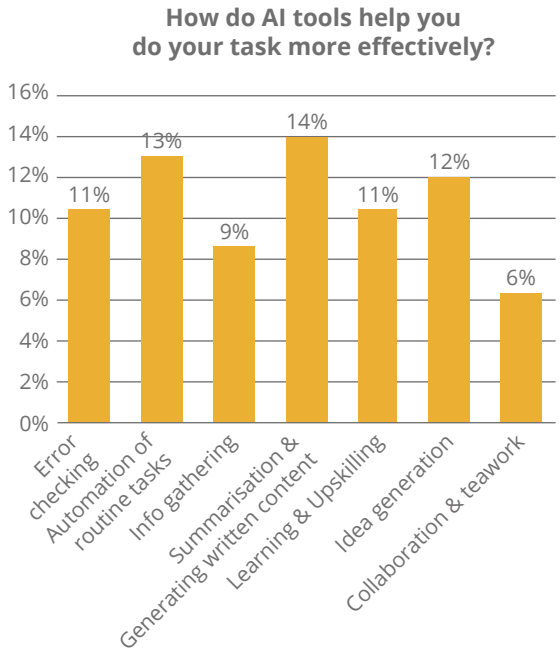

Figure 2 How AI can help in the workplace - survey responses

The survey respondents also emphasised that there were challenges to using AI at work. As shown in Figure 3, these include concerns about the quality of output and the risk of workers becoming overreliant on AI without considering how best to use it. The workshop employer panel also noted the risk of human judgement and creativity being eroded by overuse and noted concerns about privacy and wider ethical considerations. There were also comments about not having access to the full range of potential tools, limited available training and being held back by risk-aversion in the workplace. These are concerns familiar to academics considering similar issues for both students and staff. Today's workers are navigating these challenges themselves. The hope would be that future workers would have explored these issues at university to some extent.

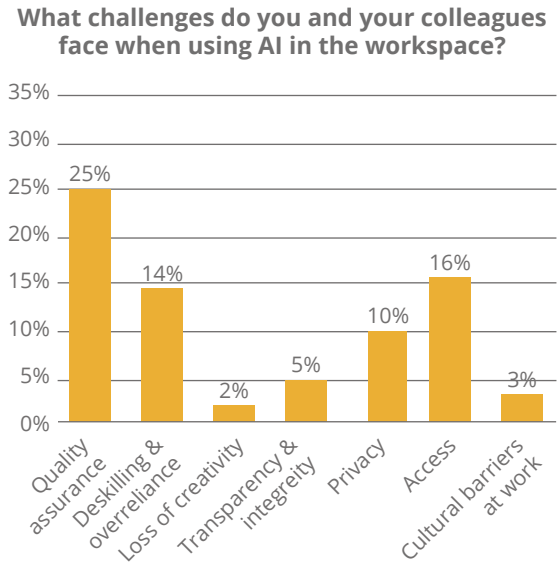

Figure 3 Challenges of using AI in the workplace - survey responses

Some of these challenges might, potentially, be mitigated or managed through organisational policies. However, as shown in Figure 4, 25% of respondents to our pulse survey of professional economists were often working with AI in the absence of any guidance on AI usage. Others are working under some organisational restrictions on use - either on what tools can be used or on how they can be used – although we did not ask how these are enforced.

Does your organisation have any restrictions on the use of AI tools?

Guideline	Percentage
No official guidelines have been established by the organisation yet	25%
Only approved AI tools can be used	31%
AI can be used for some sensitive activities (eg, emails) but not to produce content	9%
AI can be used to produce content but must be reviewed by a human before use	17%
AI tools are banned entirely in the workplace	1%
Other	8%

Figure 4 AI-usage guidelines in the workplace – survey responses

The survey also investigates what skills future economics graduates would need for the labour market, and we discussed this during the workshop. The responses indicate that they need to be confident working with AI in many different ways and be able to evaluate when it is useful to build AI into working processes and practices. Survey respondents suggest that it is important for graduates to know what AI is and how tools, for example Large Language Models, work. They need to be able to use AI to carry out tasks, for example coding and analysis of large data sets, and to be willing to try using AI for different purposes. A lot of emphasis was placed on the need for graduates to know what to use AI for, to be able to recognise the limits of AI and to be able to use AI ethically and responsibly, with a critical human eye. This snapshot from our pulse survey of professional economists aligns with the wider research on the graduate labour market discussed earlier.

Implications for assessments in economics degrees

The GenAI shock means that we need to maintain momentum on work to embed skill development in our curriculum (eg, Jenkins and Lane, 2019). As part of this objective, we should review and adapt the skills that economics students develop. This review needs to consider a broad mix of skills, across a range of cognitive tasks. This includes for example:

- ensuring minimum training to develop GenAI literacy-related skills,
- continuing to prioritise the human skills - team working, leadership, communication,
- providing opportunities for critical analysis, problem solving, coding in ways that take account of the interplay with GenAI, and
- embedding wider skills around ethical use of GenAI and ethics of data use more widely.

We focus on consequences for assessment, but it is crucial to recognise that in the context of preparing students for a rapidly evolving labour market, and indeed social and economic life, research is also needed on what we teach and how we teach in economics degrees.

Honing in on the interplay between skills development and assessment there are two angles to consider. We need to provide opportunities for students to develop the skills that are valued in the labour market, and identify how best to do this through formative and assessed in-class and out-of-class activities. We also need to be mindful of the impact of assessment changes being made for other reasons - notably academic integrity - on skill development opportunities. We do not want to lose one whilst protecting the other. With these dual objectives in mind, the academics at our workshop emphasised the importance of having mixed assessment strategies which we discuss further in the next section.

> “The GenAI shock means that we need to maintain momentum on work to embed skill development in our curriculum.”

4 How economists are adapting assessments in a GenAI world

Drawing on a second pulse survey focused on academic economists and workshop discussions, this section provides a snapshot of how the profession is currently adapting assessment design in response to GenAI. More details can be found in Cortinhas et al. (2025). These findings offer a basis for reviewing the current state of play and planning next steps to achieve two key goals: protecting the academic value of economics degrees and preparing students for life after university.

Designing assessments that embed AI use

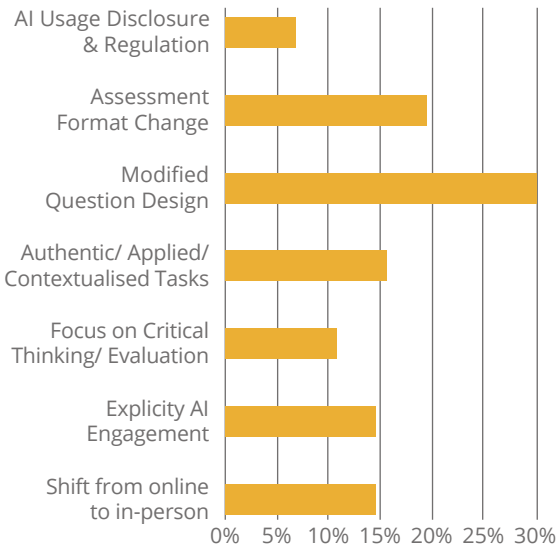

Figure 5: Report assessment changes

Around 80% of our academic survey respondents, covering both UK and non-UK universities, have made some form of change to their assessments in response to GenAI. As shown in Figure 5, a variety of adaptations have been made. Modifying question design, changing the assessment format and introducing more authentic, applied and contextualised tasks are the top 3 responses. Discussions from the workshop revealed that there is even more variation sitting beneath these categories, for example with different interpretations of what is meant by 'contextualised tasks' and 'evaluation' involving GenAI use or not.

Academics at our workshop, and survey respondents, shared creative examples of how they were proactively adapting coursework type assessments for a GenAI world. These are shown below.

- **Hybrid Assessments:** Assessments that include some parts requiring the use of GenAI and others forbidding it. For example, GenAI can be used to generate datasets, and students have to use the data to investigate complex problems without GenAI; or students can use GenAI to support coding or regression analysis, but submitted work must include detailed explanations and critical justification of what was created.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Students compare GenAI outputs with their own analysis to develop critical evaluation skills; or students use GenAI to create a first draft of an answer and build on it.
- **AI-Enhanced Assessments:** Examples include GenAI added as a team member in group work, assessments requiring extended Socratic dialogue with GenAI tools that act as "devil's advocates" questioning the student's approach, or requiring students to reply "to prompts that challenged their economic reasoning."
- **Synthesis Projects:** Tasks requiring students to "synthetise data analysis and theory" with multiple theoretical perspectives, allowing GenAI assistance.

Designing assessments that don't allow AI use

Given the need to protect the academic value of economics degrees, there will be contexts where students need to demonstrate their achievement of certain learning outcomes without using GenAI. In the UK almost 20% of respondents to our pulse survey of economics academics have moved their assessments from online to in-person. This includes in-class presentations, quizzes and traditional invigilated exams replacing "take-home" essays or reports. In our workshop discussions, concerns were raised about how scalable options like presentations or oral exams (viva voces) were for large cohorts as well as for students with reasonable adjustments, leading to a sense that invigilated written exams (on computers or paper) were the way forward in such situations.

Workshop participants raised concerns that a move back to invigilated exams could, if not part of an intentional programme-wide assessment design, mean that students are not adequately exposed to GenAI, and therefore do not get the opportunity to develop the skills that employers value today and in the future. It was noted that there was scope to bring GenAI use into invigilated written exams, either through question design that required reflecting on GenAI use in the module or by allowing use of GenAI for some sections of computer-based exams. Some workshop participants suggested that professional skills, such as the ability to retrieve information quickly and to problem solve, can be developed through in-person exams. The discussion was a useful reminder of the importance of careful and intentional design of assessments, and the need to be open to assessing in new and different ways even with well-established assessment formats.

Inclusivity considerations

There is a need to reflect on how adaptations to assessments and the entire curriculum can affect student experience and outcomes across all students, particularly traditionally marginalised or minoritised groups. Moving to online assessments at scale during Covid had many implications, one of which was a narrowing of the gap and evidence that some students perform better with mixed assessments (Cagliesi et al. 2023). Increasing in-class assessments may, if not done with careful consideration of these effects, reverse some of this improvement and increase other risks for vulnerable students (Hamer, 2025). This is particularly important if changes are being driven at module level by individual academics and there is little or no oversight of the programme-level mix of assessments.

Despite the enhanced focus on inclusivity in the sector in recent years, we found, as shown in Figure 6, 45% of respondents in the UK, and 60% in the non-UK, and 60% in the non-UK, did not consider inclusivity or awarding gaps when making assessment changes.

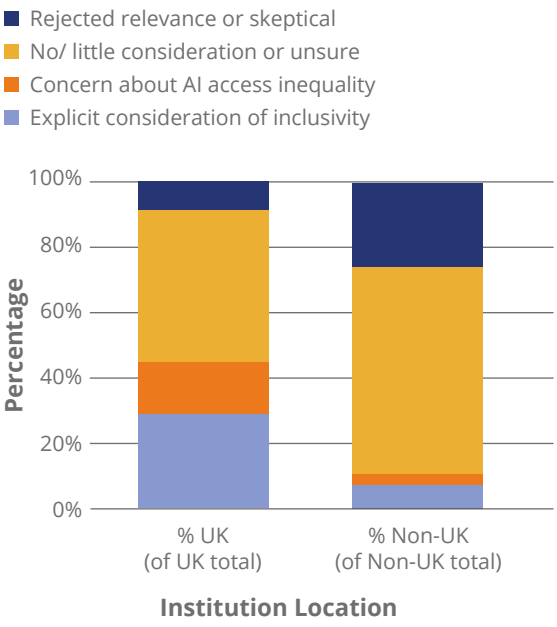

Figure 6: How are considerations of inclusivity and awarding gaps considered when making assessment changes?

Workshop discussions highlighted that GenAI might exacerbate existing inequalities due to variation in access to paid-for tools, both at individual students level and at institutional level. In this context, some participants pointed out that in-person exams may be considered more equitable by design. Workshop participants discussed how AI use may be a new element of the 'hidden curriculum', with some students being confident users and others very unsure how to use it effectively and ethically. It was noted however that AI can also help with some learning gaps, for example

by providing more personalised and timely learning support for neurodivergent students. These benefits arise when the tools are introduced in an intentional way, with support available to students and staff.

A case for balanced mixed assessment strategies

Working out how to account for, or incorporate GenAI, into our assessments and curriculum is new for all of us. For every trailblazer experimenting in this area, there are many others unsure, potentially unwilling, to make changes. Many are not confident in taking forward changes, particularly training students on how to use GenAI effectively when they are unsure themselves. The only way we can progress in this particular aspect is by supporting academics' experimentation and sharing what we learn from these experiments.

There is a need for a mix of assessments: some that embed GenAI, helping students to develop skills using GenAI, and others not allowing GenAI to provide opportunities for students to showcase what they can do without it. As always, this requires a programme-wide review of assessment formats to ensure appropriateness for the content and learning outcomes of the modules and programmes. Any such review needs to be undertaken with an eye on inclusivity, skill development and academic integrity. The QAA Economics Subject Benchmark Statement provides a sector-wide framework for such a review. Institutional policies, discussed in the next section, can also provide structure and provide economics departments with the parameters within which they can develop their own assessment strategies to protect the value of their degrees, as required by the regulator (Office for Students, 2022).

“The only way we can progress....is by supporting academics' experimentation and sharing what we learn from these experiments.”

5 How institutional policies are adapting to a GenAI world

In this section, we explore the current landscape of institutional policies and guidance. Our pulse survey of economics academics finds that across the US and UK, universities are in various stages of developing and implementing policies to address the integration of GenAI into education. As discussed in more detail in Chaudhury et al. (2025), the published literature in this area and our comparative review of UK university policies reveals a fragmented yet evolving landscape, with institutions adopting diverse approaches ranging from outright prohibitions to frameworks that encourage responsible GenAI application (Atkinson-Toal and Guo, 2024). Where universities do have a clear policy approach to the use of GenAI in assessments, most tend to adopt the "traffic light" system, though there are interesting developments relating to the "two-lane" system (Corbin et al. 2025) which indicate to students and staff the two or three different levels of GenAI use allowed in assessment. This variability underscores the dynamic nature of GenAI and the challenges institutions face in keeping pace with technological advancements.

Uncertain institutional policies

Our pulse survey of economics academics identified that whilst 72% of UK-based respondents reported knowing what their university policy on GenAI use for assessments was, many were unsure how to interpret and use these policies (Cortinhas et al. 2025). As Figure 7 shows there is significant variation in what policies allow, and much is open to interpretation. There is also quite a lot of emphasis on permitted use with restrictions and/or self-declarations of usage. This grey area of allowing but not encouraging student use of AI leaves academics unsure whether they should, or how they should, engage with AI in their classroom. These middle ground policies also raise the question of how the restrictions and declarations are monitored and enforced. As a result academics may be holding themselves back from exploring ways to adapt their assessment, and wider curriculum, because they are unsure what is allowed. Others are experimenting but in a backdrop of uncertainty about institutional rules and regulations, and often with a lack of appropriate training for staff and students alike.

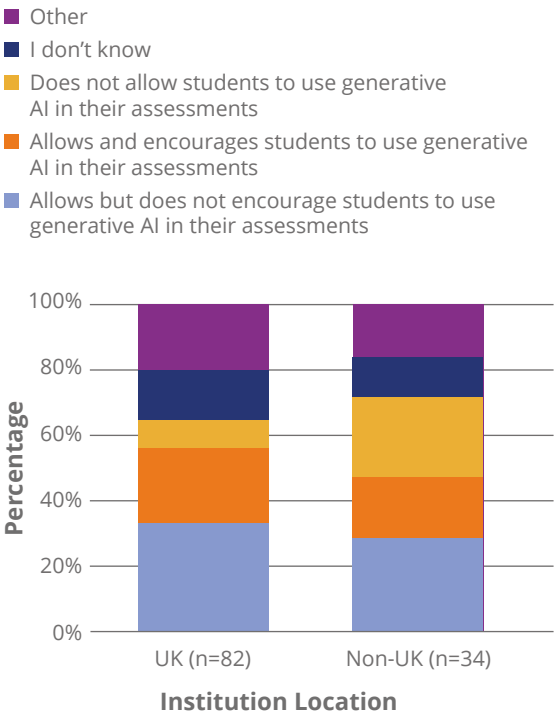

Figure 7: Policies on GenAI use by students

Our workshop participants and panel felt that this uncertainty around institutional policy parameters and the fuzzy distinction between guidance and regulations were the biggest challenges for developing their approaches to the use of GenAI in assessment. They also noted that there was inconsistency across institutions, despite existing frameworks such as the Russell Group (2025) Principles, making it hard to identify how

best to develop pedagogical engagement with GenAI tools. The panel of academics in programme leadership roles suggested a cross-institutional approach, potentially led by disciplinary learned societies and accreditation bodies, in addition to university groups such as the Russell Group and Universities UK is needed to address these issues.

Snapshot of academic integrity policies

To further explore the details of institutional policies and to provide a snapshot of the UK landscape in this area, we undertook a desktop research exercise. The scope of this review included the regulatory and guidance information regarding the use of GenAI in assessment available in the public domain. Detailed findings and methodology are provided in Chaudhury et al. (2025). Not surprisingly, given the nature of the challenge, universities are still navigating the issues and developing their approaches. When exploring the range of available information, ranging from good practice examples to formal policies, we focused on academic integrity policies specifically and reviewed their coverage of GenAI use.

The unacknowledged or unauthorized use of GenAI-generated content is largely considered a form of academic misconduct, usually falling under existing definitions of plagiarism, false authorship, or contract cheating. Some policies specifically mention "AI-generated content" or "generative AI" as prohibited tools if used without permission or proper citation. The underlying principle reinforced by these policies is the importance of originality, critical thinking, and proper attribution of all sources, including GenAI tools if their use is sanctioned.

> "Academics are largely left to navigate change for themselves, sometimes in isolation. They need more support and guidance to move forward."

More broadly,we find that UK universities tend to address academic integrity with shared principles around:

- Honesty: Submitting one's own work and acknowledging all sources.
- Fairness: Equal treatment and avoiding unfair advantage.
- Responsibility: Understanding and adhering to academic rules and regulations.
- Respect: For intellectual property and academic standards.
- Trust: Between students, staff, and institutions.
- Courage (explicitly mentioned by only one university): Upholding integrity even under pressure.

Whilst it is hard to disagree with these principles, it is also difficult for an academic to apply them directly to their own module without further specifics. While most universities provide guidance, this is often at a very high level. Academics are largely left to navigate change for themselves, sometimes in isolation. They need more support and guidance to move forward.

The need for credible enforceable policies

In general, institutional policies are quite clear in terms of what is not allowed. What is less clear is how, if at all, academics and programme leaders can detect GenAI use by students. In our pulse survey of economics academics, 48% of UK respondents said that their institution allowed Plagiarism Detection software to be used (Cortinhas et al. 2025). Usage by non-UK respondents was even higher at 62%. As Figure 8 shows, according to respondents the most common approach to detection in the UK is using tools like Turnitin. 32% of UK respondents use oral exams if there is suspicion of misconduct. 12% of UK respondents report running student work through GenAI tools themselves to check for GenAI use.

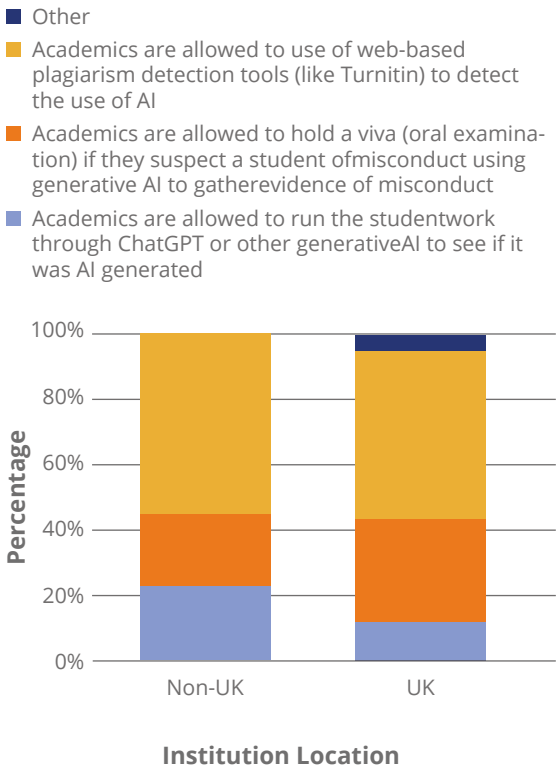

Figure 8: What Plagiarism Detection Tools can you use?

There are limitations with all these approaches to detection. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (2025) emphasised in a June case work note that tools that claim to detect GenAI usage are prone to errors, in both directions. They may have biases for example against international students and disabled learners (Corthinhas and Szabolcs, 2023; Havergal, 2025). Other solutions like vivas to check student understanding are difficult to scale to the large cohorts in economics. Uploading student work to GenAI to check if GenAI has been used raises questions around data privacy and ethical and consistent use of GenAI by academics. The reality is that when assessments are undertaken away from the classroom - in the "open" lane - we cannot stop students from using GenAI and we are not able to identify when they have. There is a need to move away from trying to prove cheating to incentivising students to use GenAI tools responsibly and to use in-person assessments judiciously to ensure at least some outputs are produced by students themselves.

Being transparent with students about when they can and cannot use GenAI is particularly important, with institutional policies providing the overriding framework and processes. Many universities are using either the traffic light system or the two-lane system to signal to students and staff when and how it is appropriate to use GenAI. This brings us back to the importance of assessment design itself, at module and programme level. As emphasised in Section 4, we need a mix of assessments, designed based on what is appropriate for the module and programme learning outcomes, and we need institutional policies and guidance that facilitate this. There also needs to be a discussion around what resources are needed to ensure changes in line with institutional policies are feasible.

"Being transparent with students about when they can and cannot use GenAI is particularly important."

6 Call for action

GenAI is changing how we live and work at a remarkable pace. This presents both opportunities and challenges for higher education in general, and economics in particular, requiring a review of what we teach, how we teach and how we assess. The biggest challenge is to find ways to protect the value of degrees - ensuring their academic integrity - whilst supporting students with their learning and to develop skills to prepare them for their life after university.

This report presents recommendations for the type of changes that will need to be considered in economics assessments for a GenAI world. Our findings on changes in employability skills provide a sense of what knowledge and skills students will need for their futures (Nassehi et al. 2025). We also provide a parallel snapshot of the situation in economics assessments, as a baseline to consider what further adaptations are needed (Cortinhas, 2025). Such adaptations need to be considered in the context of institutional and sector policies, which should aim to provide clarity and operational support for academics (Chaudhury et al. 2025).

This is a representation of the current state of play, focused only on economics and only on assessments. More work is needed on the questions we have considered, and there are many more questions to work on around how to adapt economics degrees more holistically. We do not have the answers on what the best way forward is but we do know that we cannot delay making changes. Our research, and the collaborative methodology used, also demonstrate that structured support is needed, for academics and students, to move forward in a GenAI world.

> “We do not have the answers on what the best way forward is but we do know that we cannot delay making changes.”

There is much that we need to do as a discipline to continue on this journey of discovery and adaptation. We present our proposed next steps here.

1. **Recognise the need for change to protect the value of our degrees:** Heads of Departments, programme leaders and individual academics need to recognise and be open to making changes to assessments and the curriculum more widely. The focus needs to be on meeting the dual objectives of helping students develop skills for a GenAI world and protecting the academic value of their degrees. This is an essential first step to exploring what changes are needed.

2. **Continue to engage with employers:** as the world of work is changing rapidly, it is important that we understand how the skills that our students need for a GenAI World are changing so that we can adapt assessments in a way that aligns. We have provided a snapshot of the current situation but there is more to investigate and a need to keep up-to-date as things continue to change. A collaborative approach, updating previous Economics Network Employer Surveys for example, would allow for a common and shared understanding.

3. **Facilitate collaboration, co-creation and sharing amongst academics:** this is a world of experimentation for all academics and there is real value in people working together on trying things out and evaluating them. Through our pulse survey of economics academics and our workshop discussions, we uncovered many examples of colleagues adapting their assessments, and there are no doubt many more to uncover in the sec-

tor. Within Departments, this can be facilitated by Heads of Departments and Programme Leads; and indeed by universities more generally, given the value of cross-discipline work. For the economics discipline as a whole, the Royal Economic Society, the Economics Network and CTaLE can provide more opportunities for sharing, through, for example, Communities of Practice, handbooks and case studies.

4. **Be mindful of the need for wider reform in the curriculum:** our research has only touched on what might be needed to adapt assessments for a GenAI world. This is only one part of the curriculum reform needed. Heads of Departments, programme leaders and individual academics need to engage in a bigger discussion on how to change the economics curriculum for a GenAI world, in terms of what and how we teach.

5. **Provide clarity on what is and is not permitted from an academic integrity perspective: academics are finding it hard to eval**uate what is permissible, or not, under their institutional and indeed national policies and guidance. This could be holding some back from making changes, or of turning to traditional options like 100% exams, because they are unsure of what else could be tried. Universities need to provide clearer guidance for both academics and students, to help them understand what guardrails they should take into account when trialling out new approaches.

6. **Stick to established principles for assessment design:** whether designing assessments where GenAI is not available to students or assessments where they are embracing GenAI, the principles of how to design assessments do not change. In particular, the need to ensure that the assessments are connected to the learning outcomes and that they are inclusive and authentic. It is worth recognising that for some of these criteria, for example, inclusivity, adapting assessments to incorporate GenAI can be a help. As departments adapt assessments at pace, it is important that Programme Leads and any Education Committees continue to use these principles as the basis for making decisions. External Examiners working across departments also have an important role to play here.

7. **Ensure there are mixed assessment methods within economics degrees:** the value of having a mix of assessment types has become even stronger in a GenAI world. The debate is not between having all exams or having no exams, but rather how best to design a mix of assessment types. There is a case for some assessments where GenAI cannot be used, including presentations and exams, and a case for assessments where GenAI is used to allow for skills needed for a GenAI world to be developed. In line with the QAA Economics Subject Benchmark Statement, programme leaders and academics need to work together to find the appropriate mix for their degree.

8. **Define what is meant by ethical use of GenAI and provide training to academics and students on its importance:** our review of employability skills identified ethical use of GenAI as increasingly important. Academics are also concerned about whether students are using GenAI ethically for their learning and there are potential questions about how academics are using GenAI for teaching and research. We clearly need to have a conversation about what 'ethics' means in a GenAI world. This is relevant to student use in their assessments, academic use in their teaching and research, university staff use in day-to-day delivery of higher education and workers across the economy. It is also not an issue that is specific to economics degrees. Heads of Department, Directors of Education and Programme Leads in economics Departments can put forward proposals for universities to develop a shared understanding of 'ethics', something for everyone to build on. There is also a case for building ethics into the curriculum in economics degrees and providing wider support to academics, staff and students on using GenAI ethically.

9. **Provide support to students on how to use GenAI effectively:** Students are using GenAI extensively for a wide range of purposes. Professionals we heard from emphasise the need for graduates to think about when to use GenAI and for

what purpose, to recognise the limits and to use it ethically and responsibly. Universities and departments need to support students to learn how to learn with GenAI with a critical eye.

10. **Provide training and support to academics on how to adapt:** existing and new continuing professional programmes need to be updated to account for the adaptations that are needed to teaching and assessment for a GenAI world. This includes training and guidance provided at the department level, RES continuing professional development seminars and PhD training, and courses for GTAs, new lecturers and mid-career lecturers delivered by the Economics Network. The challenge of adapting economics degrees for GenAI also provides a reminder of the need for professional development support for Programme Leads and those in similar roles. Revising the training provision will take significant resources and require funding.

There is a lot to do to navigate the necessary journey of change in a GenAI world. We need to move away from discussing the problem and apparent quick fixes to meaningful collaboration and co-creation of solutions. As economists, we can use our evaluation techniques, understanding of behavioural economics and incentives, and research on the labour market to lead the discovery of new ways of teaching and assessing, working in collaboration with other disciplines. This requires support from Heads of Department, through CHUDE, and research funding for collaborative projects.

“There is a lot to do to navigate the necessary journey of change in a GenAI world. We need to move away from discussing the problem and apparent quick fixes to meaningful collaboration and co-creation of solutions.”

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