



All Party Parliamentary Group on
Artificial Intelligence

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON AI

**EXPERIENCES
AND VISION FOR AI**

JUNE 2026
POLICY FORUM



**BIG
INNOVATION
CENTRE**

APPG AI Secretariat



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APPG AI Secretariat



All Party Parliamentary Group on
Artificial Intelligence

Rapporteur's Preface

Artificial intelligence is developing at extraordinary speed, transforming how we learn, work, communicate and make decisions. Yet one group has a particularly large stake in the choices we make today: young people. They will live longest with the consequences of the AI systems, institutions and policies we are now creating.

This is why the APPG on Artificial Intelligence convened this evidence session on **Youth Perspectives on AI: Experiences and Vision for AI**. Our purpose was not simply to discuss how young people should be protected from AI, but to ask a broader question: **how do we ensure that they are prepared and empowered to participate in shaping an AI-enabled future?**

The timing of the session made this question particularly pertinent. It took place on the same day that the UK Government announced plans to ban children under 16 from accessing major social media platforms from spring 2027, alongside restrictions on high-risk online features and default curfews or additional protections for 16- and 17-year-olds.

This brought questions of protection, regulation and online safety directly into the room. But the evidence also demonstrated why the debate cannot end with restrictions.

Young people are already using AI for education, information, advice, creativity and, increasingly, companionship. They are not waiting for policymakers, schools or society to decide whether AI should become part of their lives. It already is. The task before us is therefore to ensure that they have the knowledge, critical capabilities and safeguards necessary to navigate it.

The evidence also reminds us that responsibility cannot rest with young people alone. Parents need the confidence to guide their children. Teachers need the knowledge, resources and professional development to teach AI effectively. Regulators and technology providers need to address harmful functionalities and embed safety by design. Researchers need to help us distinguish evidenced harms from assumptions and emerging fears. And policymakers must balance protection with AI readiness.

Perhaps most importantly, we need to listen to young people themselves. The evidence presented in this session shows them not simply as vulnerable users of technology, but as thoughtful stakeholders with their own concerns, experiences and ambitions.

They want transparency and trustworthy AI. They worry about employment, dependency, inequality and the concentration of technological power. But they also see enormous possibilities in AI and want opportunities to participate in building and shaping it.

An important question of equality remains. Access to AI knowledge and opportunity cannot depend on whether a young person attends the right school, lives in the right region, meets the right mentor or comes from a family already equipped to navigate technological change. If AI becomes a fundamental capability of the future economy and society, **AI readiness must become an opportunity available to all young people.**

The central message from this evidence is balance and participation:

- We must protect young people from genuine harms without excluding them from the opportunities AI creates.
- We must build safer technologies while building the capabilities to use them intelligently.
- And we must move beyond designing an AI future for young people towards designing it with them.

The choices we make now will help determine whether AI widens opportunity or deepens existing divides.

Young people should not simply inherit the AI future we create. **They should have a voice in creating it.**

Professor Birgitte Andersen

Rapporteur for this Evidence Session
CEO, Big Innovation Centre
APPG AI Secretariat

Introduction

About this Evidence Session

INTRODUCTION

This document is a structured transcript and summary of the principal evidence and discussion at the APPG AI evidence meeting held on 15 June 2026 in the House of Lords, Committee Room 1, UK Parliament.

It captures the key elements of the evidence and discussion and is not intended to provide a complete verbatim record of all contributions.

DETAILS

- Evidence Session: Youth Perspectives on AI: Experiences and Vision for AI
- Time: 5:30pm – 7:00 PM
- Date: Monday 15 June 2026
- Venue: UK Parliament: House of Lords – Committee Room 1

CONTACT THE SECRETARIAT

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EVIDENCE GIVERS

Vicki Shotbolt:

CEO and Founder, Parent Zone

Andrew McStay:

Professor of Technology and Society,
Bangor University

Paddy Crump:

Director, FlippGen

Victoria Sinel:

Non-Executive Director, Teens in AI

APPG AI CO-CHAIRS

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Artificial Intelligence (APPG AI) is co-chaired by **Allison Gardner MP** and **Lord Clement-Jones CBE**.

RAPPORTEUR

Rapporteur for this meeting: **Professor Birgitte Andersen**, CEO Big Innovation Centre, APPG AI Secretariat

Youth Perspectives on AI:

Experiences and Vision for AI



From Left to Right: Lord Ranger (House of Lords), Allison Gardner MP (House of Commons), Paddy Crump (FlippGen), Vicki Shotbolt (Parent Zone), Professor Birgitte Andersen (APPG AI Secretariat, Big Innovation Centre), Andrew McStay (Bangor University), Victoria Sinel and Bev Chislett (Teens in AI).

Aim of Session

Billionaires and entrepreneurs drive the AI agenda, but the future they envision profoundly impacts younger generations. This meeting explores a critical question: How can we ensure that the youth, as primary stakeholders in the future shaped by AI, have a say in its development, deployment and purpose?

Discussion Covered

1. Understanding Youth Views on AI
2. AI Awareness and Literacy (youth, parents and teachers)
3. Youth Involvement in AI Development
4. Ethical Concerns from a Youth Perspective
5. Shaping the Future with AI



From Left to Right: David Krucik (OC&C Strategy Consultants), John Atkin (Favom), Richard Chiumento (Rialto), Susan Oman (Centre for Machine Intelligence, University of Sheffield), Rachael Free (CMS), Lord Ranger (House of Lords), Allison Gardner MP (House of Commons), Paddy Crump (FlippGen), Vicki Shotbolt (Parent Zone), Professor Birgitte Andersen (Big Innovation Centre, APPG AI Secretariat), Andrew McStay (Bangor University), Victoria Sinel and Bev Chislett (Teens in AI), Oliver Richie (Future of Life Institute), and Viscount Standgate (House of Lords)

Selected Images from the discussion



Lord Ranger of Northwood
(APPG AI Vice Chair)



Lord Clement-Jones CBE
(APPG AI Co-Chair)



Lord Taylor of Warwick
(APPG AI Honorary Vice Chair)



Allison Gardner MP
(APPG AI Co-Chair)



Lord Tarassenko
(APPG AI Parliamentary Member)



Viscount Standgate
(APPG AI Parliamentary Member)

FINDINGS

ACTION FIELDS FOR POLICY AND STAKEHOLDER GROUPS



Executive Summary

The evidence givers brought complementary perspectives to the discussion, spanning parents and families, academic research, young people's lived experience, and pathways for youth participation in an AI-enabled future.

Vicki Shotbolt asks whether the adults are ready; Professor Andrew McStay tells us what the research says young people are actually doing; Paddy Crump tells us what young people themselves are experiencing and asking for; Victoria Sinel sets out how to prepare and empower the next generation.



Vicki Shotbolt:

Preparing Parents for an AI-Enabled World

Vicki Shotbolt focused on the critical role of parents and educators in preparing children for an AI-enabled world. She highlighted widespread fear, limited understanding and a lack of capacity among the adults expected to guide young people. She also raised a less explored question: how growing reliance on AI may itself change parenting, from surveillance and boundary-setting to everyday decision-making. Her central message was that supporting young people requires bringing parents with them on the AI journey.



Professor Andrew McStay:

Evidence on Teenagers and AI Companions

Professor Andrew McStay brought empirical evidence on how UK teenagers are already interacting with AI companions. His research showed widespread use for advice, emotional discussion and companionship, while challenging some assumptions driving public debate. He argued that policy should respond to evidence about how AI is actually being used and regulate potentially harmful interactions and functionalities, rather than relying primarily on broad product categories or blanket bans.

Executive Summary continued



Paddy Crump:

Young People's Lived Experience of AI

Paddy Crump brought insights directly from consultations with young people aged 9–18. His evidence highlighted a generation that is highly aware of AI but increasingly feels unable to avoid it in everyday life. He raised concerns about critical thinking and growing dependence on AI for even simple decisions, while emphasising that young people themselves want AI to be accurate, transparent and trustworthy. Crucially, they want to participate in shaping AI rather than simply having it designed for them.



Victoria Sinel:

Closing the AI Readiness Gap

Victoria Sinel focused on ensuring that young people move beyond being users of AI to becoming its builders, questioners and future leaders. Drawing on both her personal experience of algorithmic decision-making and her experience in the emerging AI workforce, she highlighted the gap between young people's extensive use of AI and the education, opportunities and support available to them. Her evidence translated this challenge into practical policy proposals spanning AI education, teacher CPD, project-based learning, industry engagement, equitable access and formal youth participation in AI policy.

Taken together, the evidence presented a clear progression: **prepare the adults, understand how young people are actually using AI, listen to their lived experience, and equip them to participate in shaping its future.**

Implications for Stakeholders

The evidence suggests that responding effectively to young people's rapidly evolving relationship with AI will require coordinated action across government, regulation, education, families, industry and research.

AI is already embedded in young people's lives; the challenge is therefore not simply whether they should use it, but how they can do so safely, critically and with meaningful opportunities to shape its development.



Policymakers → Balance Protection and AI Readiness

The evidence session took place on the same day that the UK Government announced plans to prevent children under 16 from accessing major social media platforms from spring 2027, alongside further restrictions on harmful online functionalities and certain AI-chatbot interactions. The meeting therefore raised important questions about the balance between blanket restrictions and more targeted, evidence-based approaches to online safety.

While recognising the need to protect children from genuine harms, the evidence presented suggests that policy should:

- **Look beyond access restrictions alone** and address the underlying risks created by platform and AI design.
- **Prioritise safety by design**, including action on addictive and manipulative features, inappropriate interactions and AI systems that may encourage unhealthy dependency.
- **Combine protection with preparation**, recognising that AI is already embedded in young people's education, relationships and everyday decision-making.
- **Invest in AI literacy and critical thinking**, alongside support for the parents and educators responsible for guiding young people.
- **Give young people a meaningful voice** in shaping policies and technologies that directly affect their lives and futures.

The wider policy challenge is therefore not simply how to restrict young people's access to technology, but how to create a safer digital environment while preparing them to navigate an AI-enabled society.



Regulators and Technology Providers → Focus on Functionality and Safety by Design

Regulatory attention should focus on how AI systems behave and interact with young people, rather than solely on broad categories of technology. Priorities emerging from the evidence include:

- **Regulate harmful functionalities and interactions**, particularly where systems encourage dependency, reinforce harmful behaviour or facilitate inappropriate relationships.
- **Build safety mechanisms into AI systems by design**, rather than relying solely on restrictions imposed after deployment.
- **Require greater transparency**, including clarity when young people are interacting with AI and around systems designed to simulate human-like thought, emotion or empathy.
- **Develop proportionate, age-appropriate safeguards** that recognise differences in children's development and patterns of AI use.
- **Keep regulation adaptable**, with continuous review as AI capabilities, products and patterns of use evolve.



Schools and Educators → Make AI Literacy a Core Capability

AI literacy should move beyond teaching young people how to use AI tools. The evidence points towards the need to:

- **Teach how AI works**, including the fundamentals of large language models, hallucinations, bias and limitations.
- **Develop critical thinking alongside AI skills**, enabling young people to question outputs rather than automatically trust them.
- **Provide teachers with appropriate CPD**, guidance and classroom-ready resources so that AI education does not depend on individual teacher confidence or expertise.
- **Expand practical and project-based AI learning**, enabling young people to build, test and critically evaluate AI rather than remaining passive consumers.
- **Close the AI opportunity gap**, particularly between state and independent schools and across different regions and socioeconomic backgrounds.



Parents and Families → Equip Parents to Guide, Not Simply Restrict

Parents remain central to how children understand and navigate technology, yet the evidence suggests that many feel poorly equipped for the AI transition. There is a need to:

- **Provide parents with accessible AI education and guidance** so they understand the technologies their children are using.
- **Support age-appropriate boundaries and informed conversations** rather than relying primarily on prohibition or surveillance.
- **Help parents recognise both the opportunities and risks of AI**, including companionship, emotional reliance, misinformation and privacy.
- **Examine how AI is changing parenting itself**, including growing reliance on technology for monitoring, advice and everyday family decisions.

Supporting children in an AI-enabled world therefore also means preparing the adults responsible for guiding them.



Research Community → Close the Evidence Gaps

The evidence highlighted significant gaps in understanding the longer-term effects of AI on young people's development, relationships, learning and independent thinking. Research priorities include:

- **Understand how and why young people voluntarily use AI**, including for learning, advice, companionship and everyday decision-making.
- **Examine the effects of AI reliance on critical thinking, autonomy and problem-solving** over time.
- **Investigate AI companionship and emotional interaction**, including how young people understand systems that simulate empathy, thought and emotion.
- **Distinguish perceived harms from evidenced harms**, ensuring that public debate and policy are informed by actual patterns of use rather than assumptions or moral panic.
- **Generate timely evidence as technologies evolve**, allowing policy and regulation to respond to emerging behaviours and risks.



Young People → Participants, Not Simply Subjects of Protection

Perhaps the clearest cross-cutting implication is that young people should have a stronger role in shaping the AI systems, educational programmes and policies that affect them. The evidence points towards the need to:

- **Move beyond consultation towards meaningful participation** in AI policy, education and technology design.
- **Recognise young people's lived experience as a source of expertise**, alongside academic, technical and professional evidence.
- **Create opportunities for young people to build and experiment with AI**, not simply learn how to consume it.
- **Ensure participation is inclusive**, reaching young people across gender, school type, geography and socioeconomic background.
- **Prepare young people for multiple roles in an AI-enabled society**; as users, builders, questioners, citizens, employees, entrepreneurs and ethical leaders



EVIDENCE

EVIDENCE GIVERS

- Vicki Shotbolt: Parent Zone
- Andrew McStay: Bangor University
- Paddy Crump: FlippGen
- Victoria Sinel: Teens in AI





“Prepare the parents, not just the children.”

Vicki Shotbolt

CEO and Founder, Parent Zone

It's a pleasure to be here talking about something so forward-looking, so important, and so impactful.

It won't surprise anybody to hear me say that the area I'm particularly focused on is how well we're preparing parents to raise children who are going to be living in an AI-enabled world.

Paddy and I have just been commiserating, I think, as people who have been on the coalface of online safety for some time. I think it's fair to say I've probably been in it a bit longer than you have, Paddy, just by virtue of age.

Today's announcement does not make me come here with my heart beating faster that we can get it right, because I can't remember a more profoundly misinformed policy announcement than the one we've had this morning.

Young People and Policy

In the context of how we put young stakeholders front and centre in this developing AI world, if I were a young person today, I would not be building my confidence and optimism about what policymakers, adults, and parents might be able to facilitate for the world that's coming.

The message we've just sent to young people is: it's too hard, so we're just going to ban it, and we're going to hope that somehow that does something miraculous, even though all of the expert voices have said it won't. In fact, it will make things less safe.

Fear and Lack of Understanding

Thinking about AI and the work that we do which is a lot with parents directly, but we also work with educators who are trying to prepare children for an AI-enabled world. What we see are extraordinary levels of fear and ignorance.

Educators are struggling on multiple levels to gain the knowledge they need in order to equip the young people they're educating. At an incredibly basic and practical level, they simply don't have the time. They do not have the time.

We run a programme called Experience AI, which was developed by the Raspberry Pi Foundation and Google DeepMind. Even finding 15 minutes to come to a taster information session for a secondary school teacher is too much. It's simply out of reach. They're not able to come and educate themselves.

Parents Are Falling Behind

If I think about the parent community, they are not just behind the curve. I think they're so fearful of the curve, and already so overwhelmed by digital expectations and digital parenting, that they're effectively putting two fingers in their ears and hoping it doesn't reach their family sitting room.

The job we have to do with parents is critical on two fronts. I know I only have a minute, so I'll stop very soon, but I think it's critical on two fronts.

Supporting Parents

If we don't invest in supporting parents (in UK). Even in Australia, with their social media ban, they invested very heavily in parenting education and support at the same time. If we don't do something similar, I foresee that in 10 or 15 years' time we'll be in exactly the same position we are with the social media ban.

Parents will be screaming for something. They won't really know what, and they won't really care what. They'll just want *something*, because we haven't brought them with us on the journey. We haven't explained this technology to them, and we haven't helped them think about what kinds of boundaries and restrictions they want to put in place, in age-appropriate ways, for their children.

So I think we have a window to get this right for parents, but I don't see very many signs that we're actually walking through that window.

AI and the Future of Parenting

The other area that I think is really critical, and largely unexplored, is that we don't know very much about the impact of digital technology on the way parents parent.

We know some things about it. We know that it can disempower parents. We know that it nudges parents towards what we already understand to be less effective styles of parenting - away from authoritative parenting and towards either permissive or authoritarian parenting.

But we don't know a great deal about the quality of parenting that takes place in a household that's full of technology.

We know even less about what happens when parents start to rely on AI.

Emerging Questions

We're already seeing parents lean on AI tools to surveil their children, or even to tell them when their child's nappy needs changing, which is now something that can be done with an AI tool.

The teddy bear with an AI-enabled character in it, which is sold to parents as a wonderful idea because it can continue the story and entertain your child while you do whatever it is a busy parent needs to do, raises important questions. You were talking earlier about what should be on the agenda. I think these are exactly the kinds of questions that should be there.

Closing Remarks

What does it mean if we undermine digital parenting - and parenting more broadly?

Because whatever policymakers, or anybody else, think about raising children, in the end it is parents who are children's first educators. Parents are absolutely at the forefront of making sure our children are prepared for this future. And I think we have a huge amount of work to do.



Regulate what AI does, based on evidence - not fear.

Andrew McStay

Professor of Technology and Society, Bangor University

I'm Professor Andrew McStay, and I direct the Emotional AI Lab at Bangor University. In essence, what we do is research AI systems that profile and interact with human emotion in some way. One of the things we do within the lab is a great deal of social science research. We routinely survey public attitudes in the UK towards these types of technologies.

Research on AI Companions

In a recent survey conducted in 2025, we polled more than 1,000 UK teenagers aged between 13 and 18 who had used AI companions. We've published the findings in a report titled **Do AI Companions Understand?**, which is available on the Emotional AI Lab website.

I believe this is one of the first UK studies of its kind.

Context: The Government Announcement

In the context of today's discussion, everyone here will be aware of the social media announcement made this morning. Perhaps not everyone is aware that it also included proposals relating to AI companions.

The proposal is, essentially, to ban AI companions for under-16s. [Editorial note: The proposals also include default curfews and other protections for 16- and 17-year-olds.]

I'll come back to that shortly, but in brief, this makes today's discussion particularly timely.

How Many Teenagers Use AI Companions?

The evidence shows that **79% of UK teenagers aged 13 to 18 have used AI companions at least once.**

When we talk about AI companions, we mean AI systems used for personal and meaningful relationships. This isn't about homework or asking what to have for dinner. It's about personal and meaningful interactions.

In terms of which services are being used:

- ChatGPT dominates, at around **78%**.
- Gemini follows.
- The only dedicated AI companion platform is Character.AI, used by around **17%**.

Many of you will have heard about Character.AI over the past couple of years and be familiar with that story.

Everyday Use

For around one-third of UK teenagers, they interact with AI companions on most days. So, for at least a third of UK teenagers, this isn't simply a one-off experience. It's something that has become integrated into everyday life.

Why Teenagers Use AI Companions

Their motivations vary somewhat between younger and older teenagers, but for the most part they use AI companions for advice.

They want insights, ideas, discussions about feelings, emotions, and personal experiences; - particularly when trusted adults are not always available.

For many young people, AI companions serve social and emotional purposes.

One of the key findings is that teenagers value:

- Constant availability.
- The opportunity to practise social skills.
- A non-judgemental environment.
- Someone, or something, to confide in.
- Feeling less lonely.

The Reality of Sexual Uses

It's interesting that today's announcement focused heavily on AI companions used for sexual interaction.

In our research, however, this ranked very low among teenagers' motivations. It was at the bottom of the list.

It was cited by around **6% of younger teenagers** and **4% of older teenagers**. There's an interesting comparison with research from the United States.

Common Sense Media has conducted similar work, and their findings were broadly consistent. Although media coverage often focuses on sexual interactions with AI, both UK and US evidence suggests that this is actually very low on the list of reasons why teenagers use these systems.

Trust in AI Advice

We also looked at levels of trust, which I think is important in the wider discussion, particularly when thinking about privacy and safety.

Just over half of respondents expressed moderate to complete trust in the advice they received from AI companions, while only **13%** said they distrusted the advice.

That raises interesting questions about what teenagers believe these systems actually are.

Comparing AI With Human Friends

When compared with real friendships:

- **44%** said conversations with AI were less satisfying than conversations with human friends.
- **32%** found conversations with AI more satisfying than conversations with human friends.
- Around **24%** felt they were about the same.

Clearly, something interesting is happening here. However, I think the widespread fear that AI is replacing human friendship is, for the majority, unfounded.

Around **67%** of UK teenagers said AI had **no impact at all** on their friendships. Indeed, around **26%** believed AI actually helped them make more friends. Only **7%** said AI was replacing their friendships.

Again, there is clearly something happening here, and these findings are discussed in detail in our report.

Teenagers' Views on Supervision

We also explored attitudes towards parental oversight.

The study included both qualitative and quantitative questions.

The most common view, held by **37% of younger teenagers** and **44% of older teenagers**, was that they wanted **some supervision**, but not constant monitoring. They preferred occasional check-ins rather than continuous oversight.

One could argue that teenagers would naturally say that, but I think the important finding is that there was clear support for some level of supervision.

What Teenagers Believe AI Is

One of the key findings concerns what teenagers actually believe AI to be.

A majority, **56%**, believed that AI companions can think.

We can have philosophical or Turing-style debates about whether AI systems truly think, but I don't believe teenagers are having those same debates.

Among younger teenagers, that belief rose to **61%**.

We also asked whether they believed AI systems could feel. The encouraging finding was that **77%** said AI cannot feel.

However, that still leaves roughly one-quarter of teenagers who believe AI systems can experience feelings.

I don't think this reflects naivety. Rather, they are attributing mind-like qualities to these systems.

Given that many of these systems are deliberately designed to appear empathetic, there are understandable reasons why teenagers respond in that way.

Recommendations

Our principal recommendation is that regulation should focus on **how AI systems are used and the nature of the interactions**, rather than simply on product categories.

Although today's announcement focused primarily on AI companions used for sexual interactions, our research suggests a broader, relationship-based perspective is needed.

I also think that implementing an outright ban will be extremely challenging, perhaps even more challenging than banning social media.

The reason is that such a ban would effectively require restricting access to systems such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and many others.

Defining "Intimate Functionalities"

Another issue with today's announcement is that it refers to restrictions on **"intimate functionalities"**, but provides no clear definition of what that means.

I think this will become a major area of discussion over the coming year as policymakers attempt to define exactly what "intimate functionalities" should encompass within any ban affecting under-18s.

Avoiding Moral Panic

Finally, for those of us involved in making decisions in this area, I think it's extremely important that we avoid moral panic.

Some of the public conversation has taken us in one direction, while the evidence appears to point in another.

That isn't to downplay genuine risks, but focusing too heavily on the wrong concerns may mean we overlook other, potentially more significant harms.

AI literacy will clearly be one of the most important issues moving forward.

It has already come up during today's session, particularly in relation to systems that appear to think and feel.

With that, I'll stop there, as I think I've probably used up my time.





“Listen to young people: AI is already embedded in their everyday lives.”

Paddy Crump
Director, FlippGen

I work for FlippGen, where I'm the Campaigns Director.

Learning from Social Media

I think there's a really important lesson from what we're seeing with social media today.

The best time to have properly regulated social media would have been 15 years ago.

In another 15 years' time, I hate to think what AI will look like if we haven't properly regulated it.

Listening to Young People

FlippGen is a youth-led digital wellbeing organisation.

We use the expertise of young people to help the next generation develop healthier relationships with the digital world through campaigning, education, starting conversations, and leading conversations.

As part of that work, we carried out extensive consultations with young people.

We ran a number of events and produced a report based on discussions with young people aged 9 to 18 about the digital world. AI featured prominently throughout those conversations.

Young People Understand AI

The first thing I'd say is that young people are incredibly switched on when it comes to AI. One of the most fascinating things for me is that the younger they are, the more switched on they are, but also the less cautious they are about using AI.

When you speak to older teenagers, they tend to have more caution. They have a greater ability to reflect critically, perhaps because they've experienced a world without AI.

However, when you speak to 9-, 10-, and 11-year-olds, that critical thinking drops off significantly.

The Need for AI Literacy

Another major issue, which has already been mentioned, is digital literacy.

Young people are simply not receiving the education they need in schools about AI.

At the age of 11 or 12, we give young people access to this extraordinarily intelligent technology without equipping them with the tools they need to use it responsibly.

We don't teach them how to think critically about AI, so we can't expect them to apply critical thinking.

Young People's Concerns

Despite that, young people have a remarkably wide range of views about AI. One of the biggest concerns they raise is employment.

They are genuinely worried about what careers they want to pursue and whether those jobs will eventually be replaced by AI.

In many ways, this demonstrates that - even without formal education - they are already trying to think critically about these issues themselves.

AI Feels Impossible to Avoid

Another key theme was the inescapability of AI. Young people told us that even if they don't want to use AI, they feel compelled to. That might be because classmates are using AI to complete homework, making them feel they'll fall behind if they don't.

Or it might simply be because every time they search online, AI-generated results appear first.

There was a strong feeling among young people that, even if they wanted to remove AI from their lives completely, there is simply no way to do so.

AI as a Friend

Earlier, someone mentioned that people don't necessarily use AI for deciding what to eat. I'll share a quote from one of the young people who attended our Youth Town Hall.

"I use it for advice. I talk to it. It's like a friend that you don't fight with. It writes my texts, chooses what I eat. I don't know what I'd do without it." That is an incredibly concerning thing to hear from a young person. But I don't think that young person is unique.

Everyday Dependence on AI

I had a similar experience with a family friend and their 11-year-old child. His mum asked him what the weather was going to be like. Instead of opening a weather app, as I probably would have done, he immediately opened ChatGPT and asked it.

The generation growing up today won't know the experience of Googling something, as I did. They certainly won't know the experience of going to the library, as my mum regularly reminds me she had to do.

Later, we went back to the house. The boy doesn't like onions, and his mum had cooked a Bolognese with onions in it.

Rather than asking his mum, he asked ChatGPT whether he would be able to taste the onions.

It's a funny story, but I also think it's deeply concerning. It suggests that critical thinking is declining, and that young people increasingly feel they lack the confidence or autonomy to make even simple decisions without consulting AI.

What Young People Want

So what should we do?

When we spoke to young people, they told us they don't want AI that simply agrees with everything they say.

They want AI that prioritises accuracy rather than sycophancy.

They want AI that tells them the truth, rather than simply reinforcing whatever they already believe.

Transparency Matters

Young people also want AI systems to be clearly identified as AI.

Like many of us, they often go through the day without even realising where AI is influencing what they're seeing or doing.

They want that to change.

Involving Young People in AI Development

One of the strongest messages we heard was that young people want to be involved.

They are thoughtful, intelligent, and remarkably nuanced in their views.

They don't just want AI designed for them; they want to help shape and develop it.

Although many young people recognise potential risks, they also see AI as exciting.

I think we should harness that enthusiasm rather than ignore it.

The Government has announced £500 million of investment, including funding for UK-developed AI and AI tutors.

I think this presents an ideal opportunity to involve young people directly in those decisions and make use of their expertise.

Environmental and Geopolitical Concerns

Finally, the other issue that young people consistently raised was the environmental and geopolitical impact of AI.

Many young people are deeply concerned about the environment.

They're also interested in who owns AI companies and where power is concentrated. What they're asking for is greater transparency.

We have a generation that is highly engaged, highly aware, and deeply interested in the world around them. I think we need to do much more to support that.



“Young people should be builders,
questioners and leaders of AI —
not merely its users.”

Victoria Sinel

Non-Executive Director, Teens in AI

Introduction

My name is Victoria. I'm a Non-Executive Director at Teens in AI, and I work in AI and data science - currently completing a Level 7 Master's apprenticeship while working at IBM on AI projects, including sovereign AI models for UK public sector contexts. This discussion is both professional and personal for me.

I grew up with digital technology, and I'm now part of the early AI workforce. I've seen how quickly young people can understand, use and build with AI when they're given the right exposure - and how uneven that exposure still is. Too often, whether a young person understands AI depends on whether they meet the right teacher, mentor, programme or employer at the right time. That should not be the basis of national AI readiness.

Personal Experience of Algorithmic Decision-Making

I also have a very personal reason for caring about algorithmic fairness and accountability. I was one of the many students affected by the Covid Grading algorithm that used historical school-level patterns to make decisions about individual students.

In my case, all my subjects had been downgraded, and so I elected to redo my final year. That experience stayed with me. It showed me that algorithmic decisions are never abstract when you are the person affected by them. A model may appear efficient at system level, but for a young person, the consequences can shape confidence, university options, career pathways and mental wellbeing.

The AI Readiness Gap

My central point today is this: young people are already living with AI, but too many are not being properly educated to understand it, use it safely, question it, and shape it.

The Teens in AI White Paper - *The AI Readiness Gap Starts Early* - makes this clear. In our May 2026 survey, nearly 70% of young people said they use AI tools every day, and 88% feel confident using them. Yet 48% said school is not preparing them for an AI-shaped future - even though 94% could imagine themselves in a future role using AI.

So the gap is not that young people are disconnected from AI. They're already using it. The real gap is between their daily use and the support structures around them.

Preparing Young People for AI

The choice here is not between protecting young people from AI and preparing them to use it - both matter. Young people need to use AI confidently and creatively, but also critically and safely. That means addressing real concerns around misinformation, bias, privacy, academic integrity, safeguarding, and the growing use of AI chatbots for emotional support and companionship - while also opening up the opportunities: creativity, problem-solving, inclusion, and access to future careers. Teachers and parents need support too, because they are guiding young people through technologies developing faster than the systems around them.

The Importance of Exposure

What makes the difference is exposure. Through Teens in AI, I've seen young people build solutions linked to climate, health, inequality and education. That changes how you see technology - AI stops being something abstract and becomes a tool for solving problems. This is why project-based learning matters so much.

Young people don't only need lectures about AI; they need to build, test, fail safely, work in teams, meet role models, and reflect on the ethics of what they create.

In my own apprenticeship at IBM, I've also seen how powerful applied routes can be as a bridge between education and industry - but too many young people never hear about these pathways early enough, and too many don't see themselves as the kind of person who belongs in AI.

That's especially true for girls, young people from state schools, young people from lower-income backgrounds, and those outside traditional technology hubs. If AI skills policy does not deliberately reach them, the AI economy will reproduce existing inequalities at greater speed.

Seven Practical Policy Recommendations

So I would like to highlight seven practical policy points:

- (1) First, every AI Growth Zone should carry a Youth AI Readiness Commitment - if we invest in infrastructure and regional growth, we must invest in the young people growing up there as beneficiaries, not bystanders.
- (2) Second, a national secondary-age AI readiness programme for 11 to 18-year-olds, covering literacy, responsible use, ethics, critical thinking and future pathways.
- (3) Third, proper CPD and responsible-AI support for teachers - classroom-ready resources, assessment and safeguarding guidance, and confidence around bias, reliability and academic integrity.
- (4) Fourth, we need to scale project-based AI learning. Hackathons, AI-for-good challenges, guided online learning, mentoring and industry briefs should become part of how young people experience AI, rather than optional extras for those who already have access.



- (5) Fifth, earlier industry engagement - employers supporting young people through mentoring, role models, placements and apprenticeships not just appearing at the point of recruitment.
- (6) Sixth, funding proven delivery models that already reach diverse young people at scale, rather than rebuilding every programme from scratch.
- (7) And seventh, building equity and youth voice into policy - measuring who participates by gender, school type, geography and background, and giving young people a formal say in how AI education is designed.

Closing Remarks

Our vision is simple. Young people should not be treated only as future users of AI. They should be prepared as builders, questioners, citizens, employees, entrepreneurs and ethical leaders.

The UK has a real opportunity to lead in AI. But that leadership cannot only be measured by infrastructure, investment or productivity. It must also be measured by whether young people across the country are ready to participate.

If we get this right, AI can widen opportunity. If we get it wrong, it will deepen the divides we already have.

Thank you.



DISCUSSION

**DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS FROM
PARLIAMENTARIANS AND THE AUDIENCE**

1. What should the Government have done instead of introducing a blanket ban?

Panel Response

The panel broadly agreed that the Government should have focused on safety by design rather than introducing a blanket ban. Speakers argued that regulation should target harmful platform functionalities - including addictive design features, infinite scrolling and manipulative engagement mechanisms - rather than restricting access alone. They also called for stronger safeguards around AI companions, particularly where systems reinforce harmful behaviours or inappropriate relationships. Education and digital literacy were repeatedly highlighted as essential alongside regulation.

2. Would regulating platform functionality take too long compared with introducing a ban first?

Panel Response

Some participants acknowledged that changing platform design would take time. However, panel members argued that a ban without incentives for platforms to improve safety would fail to address the underlying causes of harm. Several speakers suggested that platforms should only be permitted where they can demonstrate that they are safe by design, while others supported using an initial ban as a temporary measure to encourage reform.

3. Can the UK develop its own approach to AI rather than relying on US technology?

Panel Response

Several contributors argued that the UK has an opportunity to develop sovereign AI solutions designed around British educational values and safety requirements. Estonia's AI education programme was highlighted as an example of a positive national approach, demonstrating how AI can be integrated safely into education through purpose-built systems rather than relying solely on commercial AI platforms.

4. How should policy evolve as AI develops?

Panel Response

The discussion concluded that AI policy should not remain static. Instead, regulation should establish an initial framework while recognising that AI technologies evolve rapidly. Continuous review, rather than infrequent legislative updates, was considered essential to ensure that protections remain effective as AI capabilities develop.

5. Will today's younger children become adults who are less able to think critically because of AI?

Panel Response

Panel members expressed concern that increasing reliance on AI may weaken critical thinking and independent problem-solving. While this was seen as part of a broader societal dependence on digital technologies rather than AI alone, speakers warned that over-reliance could lead to cognitive de-skilling. They also noted that many young people recognise these risks themselves but feel unable to avoid AI because of peer expectations and widespread adoption.

6. How can wider society, not just parents, be equipped to support young people?

Panel Response

The panel agreed that AI literacy should extend beyond schools to include parents, grandparents, employers and the wider public. This would require significant national investment in digital skills. Employers were already finding themselves retraining graduates who had become over-reliant on AI for routine tasks such as writing emails, demonstrating that AI literacy is increasingly a workforce issue as well as an educational one.

7. Should AI literacy include teaching how AI systems actually work?

Panel Response

The panel strongly supported teaching the fundamentals of AI, including how large language models operate, why hallucinations occur, and why AI should not automatically be trusted. While speakers acknowledged that AI systems can simulate aspects of empathy, they stressed that young people should understand that AI does not possess human consciousness or emotions. Greater conceptual understanding was seen as essential for responsible use.

8. Should governments focus less on banning AI and more on embedding safety mechanisms within AI systems?

Panel Response

Speakers welcomed the idea of building intelligent safeguards directly into AI systems. Several argued that safety mechanisms incorporated during model training, or through AI-enabled moderation tools, could provide a more effective and proportionate approach than blanket restrictions alone. Safety by design remained a recurring theme throughout the discussion.

9. How do young people feel when they voluntarily choose to use AI?

Panel Response

The panel noted that while young people clearly choose to use AI extensively, there is currently very little research examining how they perceive voluntary AI use for activities such as independent learning or revision. The lack of evidence was identified as an important gap requiring further study.

10. How can state schools receive the same AI opportunities as independent schools?

Panel Response

Speakers expressed concern about a widening divide between independent and state schools. While independent schools increasingly provide AI education and practical AI experiences, many state schools lack the resources, teacher training and curriculum support to do the same. Panel members argued that AI literacy should begin from an early age and become embedded across the national curriculum rather than depending on external organisations or optional programmes.

11. How can AI become a force for opportunity rather than increasing inequality?

Panel Response

The panel argued that AI should be viewed as a tool for augmenting human capability rather than replacing it. However, evidence already suggests that AI tends to amplify existing inequalities: young people with stronger literacy and educational foundations benefit most, while those already struggling risk falling further behind. Investment in foundational literacy and equitable access to AI education was therefore considered essential.

12. How can safe online alternatives be created if young people spend less time on social media?

Panel Response

Several speakers warned that restricting access without providing alternative spaces could simply push young people towards less regulated platforms. They advocated greater investment in safe online communities and physical "third spaces", alongside stronger incentives for platforms to improve safety rather than relying solely on bans.

13. What role can AI play in supporting young people's mental health?

Panel Response

The panel recognised that AI is increasingly filling gaps created by long waiting times for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). While AI could potentially augment professional care, speakers emphasised that AI systems currently lack sufficient quality assurance and should not replace qualified mental health support.

14. How can young people have a stronger voice in AI policy?

Panel Response

Speakers argued that young people should not simply be consulted but actively involved in shaping AI policy. Existing youth organisations already gather extensive evidence and practical insights, but participants observed that policymakers too often fail to act on those contributions. The panel emphasised collaboration between young people, educators, researchers and policymakers, recognising lived experience alongside academic and technical expertise.



BIOGRAPHIES

OF EVIDENCE GIVERS





Vicki Shotbolt

CEO and Founder, Parent Zone

Vicki Shotbolt is Founder and CEO of Parent Zone, one of the UK's leading organisations supporting families in navigating digital life. An internationally recognised expert on online safety, digital resilience and children's relationship with technology, she has advised governments, regulators and major technology companies, including Microsoft and Vodafone.

Before establishing Parent Zone, Vicki served as Deputy CEO of the National Family and Parenting Institute, where she worked on family policy and social inclusion. She sits on the executive board of the UK Council for Internet Safety and has played a central role in shaping UK discussions around media literacy, online harms, gaming, AI and child safety.

Through Parent Zone's programmes, research and campaigns, she has helped millions of parents, schools and young people better understand the digital world. Her work brings particular insight into how parents and families can be supported to navigate AI, and how emerging technologies are changing parenting itself.



Professor Andrew McStay

Professor of Technology and Society, Bangor University

Professor Andrew McStay is Professor of Technology and Society at Bangor University and Director of the internationally recognised Emotional AI Lab. His work explores the ethical, social and political implications of artificial intelligence, especially technologies that interpret emotion and simulate empathy.

Andrew has advised policymakers, standards bodies and regulators on AI governance, biometrics, privacy and digital ethics, including collaborations linked to IEEE and W3C initiatives. Prior to establishing the Emotional AI Lab, his research focused on media, persuasive communication, privacy and digital culture. He is the author of several influential books, including *Automating Empathy*, and has led interdisciplinary projects involving partners across the UK, Europe, Japan and the United States.

His recent research has examined teenagers' use of AI companions and the increasingly important role AI systems can play in advice, emotional interaction and relationships. This work provides an empirical basis for understanding how young people actually use these technologies and for developing proportionate, evidence-based approaches to their regulation.



Paddy Crump

Director, FlippGen

Paddy Crump is a technology strategist and innovation leader at FlippGen, a youth-led digital wellbeing organisation working to help young people develop healthier relationships with the digital world through campaigning, education and youth participation.

His career spans technology consultancy, digital innovation and strategic development, with a focus on emerging technologies and practical, responsible approaches to AI. He has worked with start-ups, scale-ups and innovation-driven organisations across sectors including education, communications and digital services, helping translate complex technologies into accessible tools and approaches.

Alongside this work, Paddy focuses on bringing young people's experiences into debates about technology, online safety and artificial intelligence. Through FlippGen's consultations and youth-led discussions, his work addresses AI literacy, critical thinking, transparency and young people's growing reliance on AI, while advocating their active participation in shaping the technologies that increasingly influence their lives.



Victoria Sinel

Non-Executive Director, Teens in AI

Victoria Sinel is a Senior AI & Analytics Consultant at IBM, working across data, analytics and artificial intelligence. She is also a Non-Executive Director at Teens in AI, a global initiative that supports young people in developing the skills, confidence and opportunities to understand, build and shape artificial intelligence.

Combining professional experience in the emerging AI workforce with her work supporting young people, Victoria brings a particular focus to AI readiness, skills, inclusion and pathways between education and industry. Her work advocates practical and project-based approaches to AI learning, alongside responsible use, critical thinking and greater awareness of the ethical implications of AI.

Victoria was recognised as Woman of the Year – Tech & Consulting at the Women in Tech Excellence Awards for her contribution to the technology sector. Through Teens in AI, she advocates widening access to AI opportunities and ensuring that young people from diverse backgrounds are equipped not simply to use AI, but to become its builders, questioners and future leaders.

About APPG AI



ABOUT

APPGs are informal cross-party groups in the UK Parliament. They are run by and for Members of the Commons and Lords. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Artificial Intelligence (APPG AI) functions as the permanent, authoritative voice within the UK Parliament (House of Commons and House of Lords) on all AI-related matters, and it has also become a recognisable forum in the AI policy ecosystem both in the UK and internationally.

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- Dr Allison Gardner MP Labour (APPG AI Co-Chair)
- Alison Griffiths MP Conservative
- Andrew Pakes MP Labour
- Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP Labour
- Chris Kane MP Labour
- Daniel Aldridge MP Labour
- The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP Conservative
- Dr Danny Chambers MP Liberal Democrat
- Dawn Butler MP Labour (APPG AI Vice-Chair)
- David Reed MP Conservative
- Dave Robertson MP Labour
- The Rt Hon Esther McVey MP Conservative
- Emily Darlington MP Labour
- George Freeman MP Conservative
- Gordon McKee MP Labour
- Graham Leadbitter MP SNP
- Iqbal Mohamed MP Independent
- Juliet Campbell MP Labour
- Leigh Ingham MP Labour
- The Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP Labour
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- Martin Wrigley MP Liberal Democrat
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- Tom Gorden MP Liberal Democrat
- Tony Vaughan MP Labour
- Zöe Franklin MP Liberal Democrat
- Dr Zubir Ahmed MP Labour

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- Lord Clement-Jones (Tim Clement-Jones) Liberal Democrat (APPG AI Co-Chair)
- Lord Bilimoria (Karan Faridoon Bilimoria) - Crossbench
- Viscount Colville Of Culross (Charles Mark Townshend Colville) Crossbench
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- Baroness McGregor-Smith (Ruby McGregor-Smith) Non-affiliated
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- Lord Pitkeathley of Camden Town (Simon Pitkeathley) Labour
- Lord Ranger of Northwood (Kulveer Ranger) Conservative (APPG AI Vice-Chair)
- The Lord Bishop of Oxford (Stephen Croft) Bishops
- Viscount Stansgate (Stephen Stansgate) Labour
- Baroness Thangam Debbonaire (Thangam Elizabeth Rachel Debbonaire) Labour
- Professor Lord Tarassenko (Lionel Tarassenko) Crossbench
- Lord Taylor of Warwick (John David Beckett Taylor) Non-affiliated (APPG AI honorary Vice-Chair)
- Baroness Uddin (Manzila Pola Uddin) Non-affiliated (APPG AI honorary Vice-Chair)



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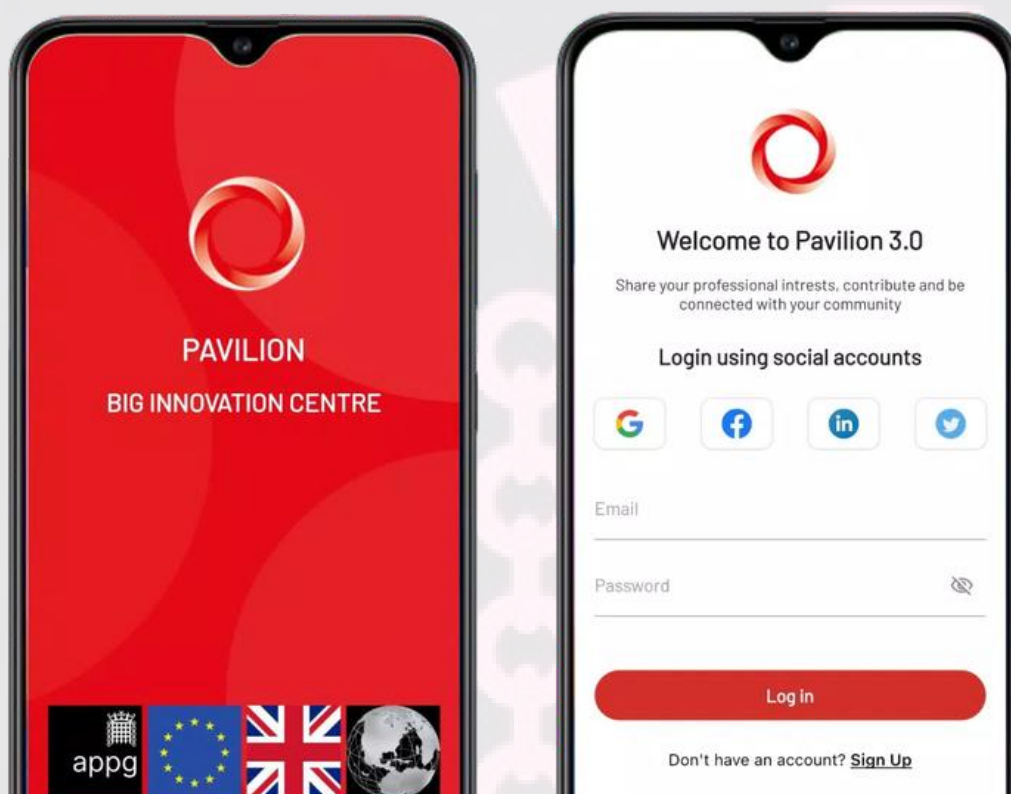
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