

NEWSLTR

PLAY AI

Theatre Director Matt Bond discusses his groundbreaking new production developed with ChatGPT and BA Acting students.

GAMES JAM

Vikaas Mistry discusses how Games Jam creates opportunities for the next generation of game developers.

SHÂN WAREING

Deputy Vice Chancellor discusses how UON is keeping pace with technology and its place in leadership and health.

STUDY SMART AI

Kelly Lea, Learning Technologist reflects upon her involvement in the Study Smart AI project at the University.



Jane Mills talks
Generative AI
imagery
and fashion

WELCOME



Rob Farmer, Learning Technology Manager

Welcome to the second edition of the Learning Technology Team's termly newsletter. This issue contains some great articles about the use of AI in education from UON Fashion lecturer Jane Mills and theatre director Matt Bond, along with a review of the Study Smart sessions by Learning Technologist Kelly Lea. This term's issue also includes an interview about technology with UON's outgoing Deputy Vice Chancellor, Shân Wareing, and with the University's current Student Digital Skills Ambassador about a new post in which students who are confident tech users support other students to develop and improve their digital literacy. As ever, NILE continues to receive regular upgrades, with new features and enhancements to existing ones being added on a monthly basis.

Ultra courses have come a long way since we first introduced them at Northampton in 2020, with many staff and students appreciating the various ways that courses can be brightened up via the use of images, and the recent options to use AI generated images and to access a licenced photo library from within NILE. Analytics are also proving increasingly popular, and staff now have far greater ability to understand how students are using their NILE courses than was ever possible with Original courses. You can keep up to date with news about NILE upgrades and case studies about the use of educational technologies on the [LearnTech Blog](#). And NILE training is always available from your [learning technologist](#).
Rob.

GAMES JAM 24 PANAM FEST

This January, UON hosted the Winter Game Jam 'PanAm Fest', a four-day games development event where UON Games Design students battled it out with a brand new challenge: the REXY Wheel, a new digital controller designed for training professional camera operators who are working in the film industry.

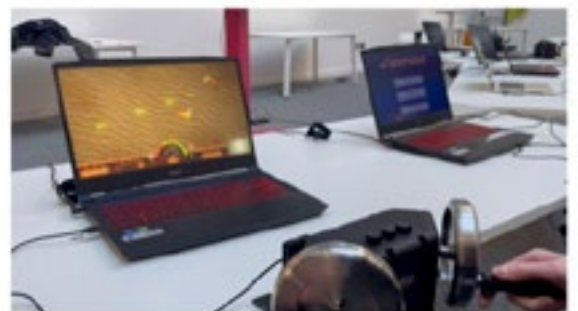
Games lecturer Vikaas Mistry explained that Game Jam is "an opportunity for the students to create a game quickly and learn some side-skills that they wouldn't learn in sessions. It also allow students to experiment and play around with new technologies and untraditional platforms" which helps prepare students for

changes in the games industry.

Of the event he said "It's been fantastic, we have five great games that with a little bit of tweaking we're hoping to take to [the international games trade show] EGX this year"

Rob Portus, the REXY Wheel's inventor, met the UON games team at EGX and was excited to be involved in the Game Jam. He said "We brought up 8 sets of wheels and it's fantastic to see what they've come up with in just four days, all the different teams have developed a unique concept, I think with a bit of fine tuning these will be games that people will buy."

[Watch the Game Jam film here.](#)



BLACKBOARD UPDATES

There have been a number of updates to Ultra courses since the last edition of the newsletter. Notably, the expansion of the AI Design Assistant's capabilities, which now offers the ability to auto-generate authentic assessment prompts for Blackboard assignments, discussions, and journals. Importantly, the auto-generated prompts are designed specifically to generate assessment ideas that are difficult for students to create by using AI tools. And, addressing user feedback, the January 2024 upgrade provided improvements to the AI Design Assistant's rubric generator, which is now more user friendly. Finally, auto-generated test questions now offers a context picker, allowing staff to tell the AI Design Assistant which parts of the course should be used when auto-generating test questions. Full guidance on all aspects of the AI Design Assistant is available [here](#).

February saw the addition of a new forms/surveys tool, enabling staff to collect information from students where grading and feedback is not necessary. The new forms tool supports various question types, such as essays, Likert scales, multiple-choice, and true/false questions.

Further improvements to course activity reports in Ultra courses include more detailed data on days since each student last accessed an Ultra course, along with total number of hours spent in the course, and number of missed assessment deadlines. And staff can now set flags for missed deadlines in their course alert settings..

See [more on the LearnTech blog](#)

H5P MASTERCLASS & WORKSHOPS

E-Learning/Multimedia Resources Developer Anne Misselbrook is offering virtual workshops for 2024 focusing on H5P which is a dynamic content creation platform integrated into NILE.

This platform enables staff to craft interactive e-learning content. In a recent masterclass for staff on the uses of H5P, attendees explored various content types, gaining insights into creating quizzes, interactive

videos, drag-and-drop activities, and presentations. The session also showcased the work of several tutors who shared their experiences of using H5P with students.

Notably, Yvonne Yelland and Bianca Harris, Lecturers in Nursing, demonstrated the platform's impact in creating a branching scenario with videos, providing an immersive experience where students explored different approaches

to crisis situations in mental health nursing. Yvonne Yelland explained, "We filmed a scenario of a patient on a ward and used that to help students examine different alternative approaches to a crisis situation using branching scenarios." Student feedback praised the clarity, interactivity, and effectiveness of this learning approach.

[Read the full article on the LearnTech blog.](#)

NEW WORKSHOP: DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN NILE



Richard Bytes and Belinda Green from the Learning Technology Team are excited to announce a new workshop for staff: 'Developing Collaborative Learning in NILE'.

This online workshop will be conducted in Collaborate, the virtual classroom tool of NILE. Participants will experience first-hand the role of both student and teacher in task-based online activities, using collaborative tools such as Blackboard discussions, Collaborate, Office 365, H5P word cloud, and Padlet.

Participants will be able to discuss the opportunities and challenges of facilitating collaborative learning online.

They will examine learning models and underpinning

pedagogical principles and plan to develop effective collaborative learning in their own courses. This workshop could be used towards HEA Fellowship applications.

Feedback from the pilot course 'Collaborative Learning Experiences Online' showed that most participants found it extremely useful to have experienced and played an active role as both student and as teacher in the workshop activities. And they would now be more likely to use collaborative tools with their students.

Workshops are two and a half hours long and can be booked here: <https://staffdevelopment-ac-uk.libcal.com/event/4194184>

IT UPDATES

Co-pilot is a newly released AI Companion by Microsoft. One fantastic feature is its integration with Dall-E 3, a text-to-image feature used to generate images. Previously, users would have had to subscribe to this feature separately. (Staff and students can log in using their university credentials at copilot.microsoft.com.) for more information and examples of use, please refer to the blog post: [Announcing Microsoft Copilot, your everyday AI companion - The Official Microsoft Blog](#)

The Bookings App is available within 365 and enables staff to create booking forms for meetings that seamlessly link to their university calendar. Learning Technologists have tested this for their support meetings with academics and have reported that it works well, allowing them to better manage their bookings.

See here for IT news: <https://blogs.northampton.ac.uk/it>

A SHORT HISTORY OF GENERATIVE AI IMAGERY WITH JANE MILLS

In a recent Vulcan Works session, Senior Lecturer and Deputy Head of Fashion, Jane Mills, took her audience on a journey through the development of text-to-image models, chronicling her explorations in GAI fashion, textile, and footwear imagery.

Beginning in 2022, Jane delved into her use of models such as Stable Diffusion and Midjourney. Initially encountering what she described as "odd and distorted" outcomes, highlighting the evolving landscape of the last two years, she noted a significant breakthrough in 2023 as the AI models began capturing intricate details and how in 2024, GenAI images have progressed to a point where they are virtually indistinguishable from professional fashion photography.

Her talk showcased not only her experiences with GenAI but also her expertise as a fashion specialist, discussing topics such as how text-to-image tools can create outstanding results emulating fabric textures, hand-rendered illustration techniques, and embellishments to stylise collections.

By employing GenAI as a catalyst for new ideas, Jane ventures into uncharted territories, creating new ideas and themes that are both visually astounding and thought-provoking. In her experiments with footwear, she demonstrates work that wouldn't be out-of-place in a sci-fi movie.

Importantly, Jane underlines the collaborative nature of working creatively with Generative AI tools and balancing these with the traditional skill-set of fashion designers and creators. She explains, "This isn't about replacing human expression but rather using AI as a tool to amplify creativity." Highlighting the importance of designing detailed prompts, she illustrated how specifying techniques, mediums, and styles could lead to incredible results, ranging from watercolour cityscapes to photo-realistic textures.

Jane describes Generative AI as "a collaborator that empowers human imagination. As students gain valuable experience using this transformative technology, they're not just designing

the future of fashion; they're shaping the way we think about its creation."

As a self-confessed advocate for the use of GenAI tools in teaching and learning, Jane champions how these tools can be used practically to inspire students to conceptualise runway shots, brainstorm intricate patterns, and develop textures and prints. She also suggests they can help students as a virtual assistant, providing not only inspiration but also answers to questions and discussions of ideas when tutors aren't available.

Working with students, Jane has introduced GenAI tools alongside a new digital logbook, through which students are able to document how they have used Generative AI in their work. You can hear more about this in the links below.

[Click to view Jane Mill's abridged talk from the Vulcan Sessions on 26/01/24.](#)

[CADE case study on the use of GAI tools by Fashion, Footwear, Textile & Accessories students 2024.](#)



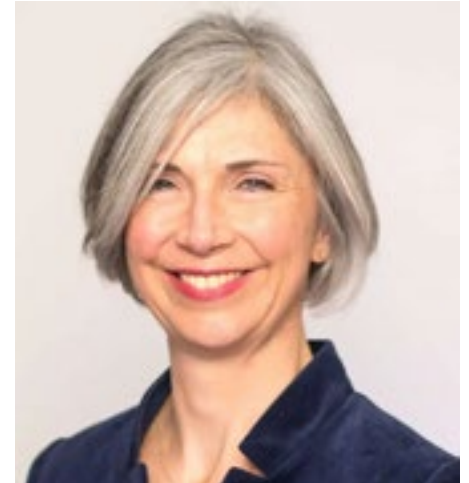
Left: 2022 examples demonstrate the naive nature of early GAI images.



Right:
2024 GAI
images are
now difficult to
differentiate
from genuine
photos.



KEEPING PACE WITH TECHNOLOGY



As Deputy Vice-Chancellor at UON, Shân Wareing met with us to discuss how she navigates the ever-evolving landscape of technology. As a regular writer for WonkHE, Shân has written extensively on the challenges facing universities such as financial turbulence, and the introduction of Generative Artificial Intelligence.

Leading the AI steering group in 2023-24 with Library, Learning and Student Services Director Chris Powis, she has had an exciting journey navigating within the AI revolution at UON, balancing concerns of widespread cheating with the opportunities that these new technologies present for learning and teaching.

Her approach to the introduction to AI? Collaboration, not control. "In such a fast moving field where we are all learning, we need to avoid leaping to regulation as a solution to challenges. We've had a great response from the UON community. The AI Forum, which I co-chair with Chris Powis and which is open to all, has attracted staff from diverse disciplines – law, journalism, fashion, psychology, computer science, and from across professional services – each bringing their unique perspective." The approach of open dialogue is far more important than top down mandates in preparing the UON community for AI. "Our approach to Generative AI isn't about setting rules", she explains, "it's about a vibrant conversation, and a collaborative exploration of how AI can enhance learning and our work, not replace it."

Reflecting upon her personal journey through education to leadership she explained how her path was influenced by the desire to see

others succeed.

Initially drawn to literature, Shân found herself delving into the fascinating world of language and linguistics in her PhD when dissecting the conversational structures of children's conversations. "I was looking particularly at how children's discussion skills were assessed in Scotland, and I was looking for evidence of gender differences in the children's conversational styles and at whether teachers showed gender bias in their assessments. Using real data was tremendously exciting, and the results led me to challenge some of the prevalent models of gender and conversation at that time." said Shân about transcribing in detail six hours of children's group conversations.

While research offered intellectual intrigue, she discovered a deeper fulfilment in witnessing the growth of students under her guidance. "The impact of that just seemed enormous," she reflects, "Seeing people find their voice, develop their skills, and flourish. It's always tremendously exciting."

Shân firmly believes in harnessing the power of technology to revolutionise learning experiences. Whilst working at London South Bank University she addressed the burden of cumbersome administrative processes by championing the use of digital tools to streamline the student journey. "Imagine spending countless hours manually re-entering marks," she points out, highlighting the inefficiencies she encountered. "It didn't make sense, and it certainly wasn't serving our students well." By implementing technology solutions, she streamlined processes, proving that technology could be a powerful ally. "Seeing that idea gain traction, attract support, and

ultimately lead to real change was one of the most rewarding experiences. It was like watching a puzzle come together, each piece contributing to a more efficient and ultimately, student-centered system."

Despite the demands of leadership and innovation, Shân prioritises maintaining a healthy balance by running, "It's my time to just be, connecting with myself and nature. There's something grounding about putting one foot in front of the other, watching the seasons change, and listening to the rhythm of my own breath."

Here technology also plays an important and assistive role in the form of a Garmin running watch. "I can track my progress, measure my heart-rate. Having goals and tracking my progress with the Garmin actually makes me want to do the training," she admits with a laugh. "It's like having a virtual coach, cheering me on and helping me stay accountable."

Discussing her use of a digital hearing-aid she underscored its potential to bridge gaps and improve lives. "It's like having a superpower," she says, describing the clarity in her hearing when using a hearing aid. "Being able to participate in conversations without straining or feeling isolated – it's made a world of difference."

Shân's story isn't simply a career narrative; it's a blueprint for embracing change, harnessing technology with discernment, and never losing sight of the heart of learning – the student, the teacher, the connection that sparks curiosity and ignites minds.

[Link to Shân's WonkHe posts](#)

PlayAI

Over a transformative four-week period, Theatre Director Matt Bond has worked collaboratively with UON BA Acting students to craft a new play written with Artificial Intelligence tools.

PlayAI delves into profound futuristic themes such as redundancy and belonging in the age of Artificial Intelligence, the complexities of forging relationships with digital avatars, and the conflicting dynamics of idealism and capitalism in a metaverse society where boundaries are unclear.

The work is the latest instalment of Matt's ground breaking AI theatre project PlayAI that launched at Riverside Studios in London in April 2023. The concept is for each instalment to be a new, original play created wholly by prompting using the AI tool ChatGPT.

The experimental nature of writing with AI challenges the traditional boundaries of playwriting through experimentation with Artificial Intelligence tools. With his work, Matt is chronicling the development and improvements of AI technologies.

The impact of the project transcends the realm of performance. In their exploration of using ChatGPT, the students have developed expertise in AI prompting, and understanding the creative boundaries of using Generative AI technologies.

Beyond this they have also explored the ethical boundaries of AI. Showcasing a profound commitment to understanding and navigating the intricate facets of this transformative technology.

[View the video interview with Matt Bond and the BA Acting students here](#)



Jorin Beaumont

"ChatGPT came out with some things that were genuinely, mind-blowing."



Richard:

"We've been researching documentaries about advancements in AI, it's insane."



Alex Hayes:

"It's incredible to have something like ChatGPT to bounce ideas off."



Sadie Douglas:

"I think the biggest takeaway from this is not to fear the technology."





STUDY SMART AI RESEARCH PROJECT

A REFLECTION BY LEARNING TECHNOLOGIST KELLY LEA

During this past year, I have been fortunate to work alongside a likeminded group of people within the University as part of a research group. The Study Smart AI project, co-led by Helen Caldwell with Rob Howe and David Meechan, was set up with the aim of fostering AI literacy among staff and students. The project also aimed to bridge knowledge gaps relating to AI tools and pedagogic strategies, with the goal of embedding AI to positively impact outcomes while maintaining high ethical standards. As part of this project, I was invited to produce a new learning resource for staff on how to use Generative AI tools and to help document the process, along with my colleague Richard Byles, by recording reflections on the sessions.

The main output of the project has been a series of workshops created and presented by an amazing cast of education professionals across the University which, along with Rob and Helen, has also included David Meechan, Jane Mills, Kardi Somerfield, Winnie Pui and guest speaker, Joyce Lim from Aston University.

In her reflections on the workshops, Helen explains: "We wanted to produce a series of workshops that covered various key areas of using AI. So teaching and learning assessment and feedback, creativity and employability, diversity and inclusion and research and ethics, we wanted to touch on the different areas that are going to be important within our profession and at the University, we were very keen to give people a mixture of some hands on, showing and telling and a chance to talk and share"

Apart from sharing specific skills, ideas and uses of various AI tools within each of the workshops, what became apparent was the desire to discuss AI and to have a forum to ask questions and openly discuss varying experiences, concerns and general queries about AI. Having an opportunity to address worries by directly responding to questions seemed to be such a valuable part of the workshop process. When reflecting on the Teaching and Learning session, Rob noted,

"it became clear that a lot of the people were really excited about some of the tools that they were seeing. And they could see some immediate application of what they were doing in their own work."

During Jane and Kardi's workshop on creativity and employability, there was a fabulous moment when participants had time to 'play' with chat bots by inputting creative and silly prompts which elicited some truly original outputs and allowed participants to engage with AI in a non-threatening and fun way. When reflecting on their workshop, Jane and Kardi noted how their session had given staff the opportunity to refute the idea that AI stops you from being creative but instead had shown that AI can be used "as a collaborative tool for synthesising ideas, creating novel ideas as well.....We wanted get them [staff] feeling comfortable about creating a few prompts, just to make people excited to go on their own journey".

There was a fabulous moment when participants had time to 'play' with chat bots by inputting creative and silly prompts which elicited some truly original outputs.

One of the most well attended workshops was AI and Assessment and Feedback. Helen explained that the focus of this session was for staff to think about what the implications of using AI for assessment and feedback might be. She went on to reflect that the session provided an

opportunity for lots of discussion from a wide variety of staffing roles about authenticity and authentic assessments and elicited thoughts about the need to maintain criticality in our students. The discussion also delved into how AI can be used to support students; to help them to engage with learning outcomes and to get beyond 'writer's block'. Attendees were given examples around how to use AI as an assistant when creating assessments and discussed the value in staff modelling AI use to help build better cognition around academic writing and writing processes.

As a participant in all but one of the workshops, it has been a real pleasure to be part of candid and reflective discussions about the use of AI at UON especially from staff in such varying roles and with vastly different experiences. The creation of an interactive resource to guide staff on AI use at UON has also been a reflective journey especially when trying to navigate the vast number of tools in an ever-changing AI landscape. The result has been a resource that not only supports staff in developing their skills with AI, but also provides information about ethics, UON guidelines and case studies about AI utilisation at UON.

Creating the resource has given me an opportunity to engage in a variety of tools including InDesign, Padlet, Genial.ly and H5P. It was the NILE tool H5P that won me over in the end. It was able to offer me both the design and interactive content that I was after, and had the added benefit of being a UON supported tool.

Upon reflecting on my own personal use of AI within my role at the university, I realise that my use of it is much more considered than it was last year. Rather than trying it for all sorts of things, I now use it more sparingly; taking time to consider if what I am about to use it for will really help me or whether I'm better off using my own brain. I am more aware of the limitations of AI and more sensitive to the privacy, copyright, ethical and environmental concerns that are very much present.



MSc Public Health student Faith Kiragu assisting students with digital skills.

DIGITAL SKILLS AMBASSADOR

In 2023 the University appointed its first student Digital Skills Ambassador (DSA), the purpose of the role being to allow students to get digital skills support from other students. While it's often assumed that most people are now confident and competent users of digital systems, especially young people (the so-called 'digital natives'), the reality is that some students come to university without the basic digital skills they need to flourish on their courses. The University of Northampton is rightfully proud of the excellent digital facilities that support teaching and learning here, but being mindful of the pernicious effects that the digital divide can have in education, chose to create the student DSA role in order not to leave any student in the digital darkness. To understand a little more about what it means to be a DSA, we spoke to the current incumbent, Faith Kiragu, and asked them to explain in their own words how the role works.

"As the Digital Skills Ambassador, my role primarily revolves around providing support and guidance to fellow students on various aspects of digital skills, with a focus on Microsoft Office packages, NILE (Northampton Integrated Learning Environment), the Student Hub, LinkedIn Learning, and related queries. Students seek my help by booking appointments with me, and during my session with them I address their queries, provide guidance, and offer practical assistance to help them navigate through any challenges they may encounter with digital tools. My aim is to empower students with the necessary digital skills to enhance their academic journey and future career prospects, and the support I offer not only enhances their digital skills but also boosts their confidence in engaging with coursework effectively. As a result, students experience improved academic performance and save valuable time by overcoming challenges efficiently. Furthermore, the support empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey, fostering independence and lifelong learning skills.

As an example of what might happen during an appointment, in one case a student asked for help with accessing their online classes on Collaborate via NILE. During our appointment, I guided them through the process of navigating to the correct module on NILE, locating the scheduled Collaborate session, and joining the virtual classroom. By the end of the session the student could successfully participate in their online class without further difficulties. Another example was when a student sought help creating a presentation on Microsoft PowerPoint, specifically needing guidance on how to add images and textboxes effectively. I provided a step-by-step demonstration of inserting images into slides, resizing and positioning them, and formatting textboxes for adding content and captions. Additionally, I shared tips on utilising PowerPoint's features for enhancing visual appeal and maintaining a cohesive layout throughout the presentation. I also supported the student in accessing LinkedIn Learning so that they could learn more about PowerPoint, and the student left the session equipped with the skills and confidence to complete their assignment using PowerPoint effectively, and able to use LinkedIn Learning to further develop their digital skills as and when they wanted.

For me, taking on the challenge of being a Digital Skills Ambassador has been very rewarding. The role has emphasised the importance of continuous learning, prompting me to stay updated on emerging technologies and digital trends. Overall, my experience has deepened my understanding of digital tools and platforms while enhancing my ability to support others in their learning journey, fostering a collaborative and empowering environment for student success."

[This article has been adapted from the original version on the Learn Tech Blog.](#)



Padlet updates:

There are some great new features for you to explore!

AI Padlet creation – use Magic Padlet to generate content for your subject, level, and specifications, such as lesson plans, timelines, activities, quizzes, and more

Template gallery - browse over 250 templates in an organized, searchable gallery

Freeze Padlet - particularly useful for student-created Padlets for assessment deadline

AI-generated images - "I can't draw" makes it easy to add AI-generated art to your Padlet

Pinned posts - Pin a post to the top of your Padlet

Customise post fields - editable placeholders, text fields, and attachment options

Interactive polls - Add a poll to your post to conduct a vote, quiz, or survey

Targeted links - Send links to a specific section of your Padlet, or send links that allow users to submit posts without seeing the rest of the Padlet

For more information, read the Padlet Gazette: <https://padlet.blog/>