UK universities draw up guiding principles on generative AI

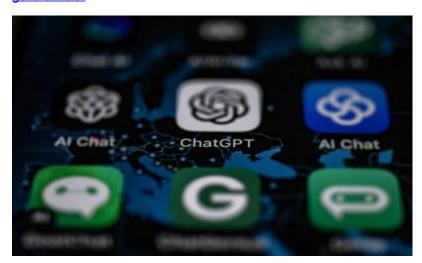UK universities have drawn up a set of guiding principles to ensure that students and staff are AI literate, as the sector struggles to adapt teaching and assessment methods to deal with the growing use of generative artificial intelligence. Vice-chancellors at the 24 Russell Group research-intensive universities have signed up to the code. They say this will help universities to capitalise on the opportunities of AI while simultaneously protecting academic rigour and integrity in higher education. While once there was talk of banning software like ChatGPT within education to prevent cheating, the guidance says students should be taught to use AI appropriately in their studies, while also making them aware of the risks of plagiarism, bias and inaccuracy in generative AI. Staff will also have to be trained so they are equipped to help students, many of whom are already using ChatGPT in their assignments. New ways of assessing students are likely to emerge to reduce the risk of cheating. All 24 Russell Group universities have reviewed their academic conduct policies and guidance to reflect the emergence of generative AI. The new guidance says: "These policies make it clear to students and staff where the use of generative AI is inappropriate, and are intended to support them in making informed decisions and to empower them to use these tools appropriately and acknowledge their use where necessary." Developed in partnership with experts in AI and education, the principles represent a first step in what promises to be a challenging period of change in higher education as the world is increasingly transformed by AI. The five guiding principles state that universities will support both students and staff to become AI literate; staff should be equipped to help students to use generative AI tools appropriately; the sector will adapt teaching and assessment to incorporate the "ethical" use of AI and ensure equal access to it; universities will ensure academic integrity is upheld; and share best practice as the technology evolves. Dr Tim Bradshaw, the Russell Group chief executive, said: "The transformative opportunity provided by AI is huge and our universities are determined to grasp it. This statement of principles underlines our commitment to doing so in a way that benefits students and staff and protects the integrity of the high-quality education Russell Group universities provide." Prof Andrew Brass, head of the School of Health Sciences at the University of Manchester, said: "We know that students are already utilising this technology, so the question for us as educators is how do you best prepare them for this, and what are the skills they need to have to know how to engage with generative AI sensibly? "From our perspective, it's clear that this can't be imposed from the top down, but by working really closely with our students to co-create the guidance we provide. If there are restrictions for example, it's crucial that it's clearly explained to students why they are in place, or we will find that people find a way around it." Prof Michael Grove, deputy pro-vice chancellor (education policy and standards) at the University of Birmingham, said: "The

rapid rise of generative AI will mean we need to continually review and re-evaluate our assessment practices, but we should view this as an opportunity rather than a threat. "We have an opportunity to rethink the role of assessment and how it can be used to enhance student learning and in helping students appraise their own educational gain." Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, launched a call for evidence on the use of generative AI in education last month, which asked for views on risks, ethical considerations, and training for education workers.