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for children



AI and Us

Young people's views and understanding of Artificial Intelligence

Introduction

We wanted to hear what young people think about Artificial Intelligence (AI), so we asked.

In 2024, our Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) shared their views on Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the first time in the Oireachtas. They told TDs and senators that AI is a priority for children in Ireland, as much as it is for adults. The OCO realised we had an important job: to make sure people with power consider children's rights when they're making big decisions about AI going forward. And so, our work on Artificial Intelligence began!

Over a year later, the YAP have been invited to speak in the Oireachtas again, this time at the Committee on AI. This opportunity arrived at the perfect moment. As part of a wider project at the OCO, we wanted to hear more views from young people about AI and how it impacts their rights. In short online sessions, 10 members of our Youth Advisory Panel told us their understanding of AI, what they like and don't like about AI, and shared their ideas for making sure children can enjoy AI in a safe way. These conversations led to the creation of this report. We are publishing it alongside our policy spotlight paper on AI, which can be read [here](#).

The OCO Youth Advisory Panel is a diverse group of young people aged 13-17 from across the country. The YAP share their views and experiences to inform our work on children's rights issues in Ireland. Under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), children have the right to have a say on things that affect them and for their opinions to be taken seriously.

We welcome the new Oireachtas Committee on AI's decision to have a special session on children. This is a wonderful opportunity for the YAP to share their views directly with politicians. Speaking to young people about AI is really important, because AI is already a part of children's lives. Children are the group most likely to be impacted by AI but at the moment, policies and laws have little or no focus on children and their rights. We want to ensure children's voices are heard when the Government develops policy, guidance and frameworks in this area.

The YAP's views on AI echo approaches taken by experts and the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child to this issue, highlighted in our spotlight paper. Young people we engage with routinely offer considered, rights-based solutions to problems, grounded in their lived experience, without even realising it. The value of listening to children and taking their views seriously on issues that affect their lives is not to be underestimated.

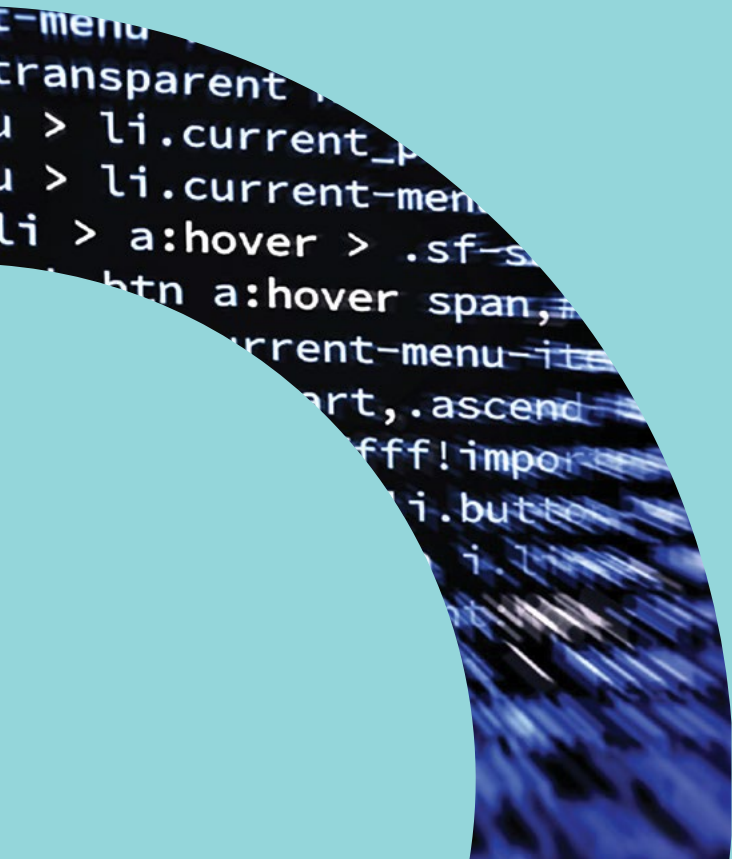
Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Children's Lives



Do young people know what AI is?

The first thing we asked the YAP was ‘What is AI?’ There were lots of answers to this question.

Many YAP members talked about different examples of AI, like Chat GPT, Image Generators, DeepSeek AI and OpenAI. They also mentioned Chatbots on WhatsApp and Snapchat, as well as Generative AI on Google’s search engine. When we asked the YAP if they thought algorithms counted as AI, they said they hadn’t really thought about it, but agreed that algorithms could be considered Artificial Intelligence.



“It looks at what you’ve seen and how long to give you new videos, so I suppose it is AI.”

Some young people explained the meaning of AI, for example:

“A tool that can help humans access information more readily.”

“Essentially a robot that tries to mimic human actions but has more information available.”

“It refers to machines or computers that are programmed to do human like tasks.”

“AI is a smart technology that assists humans or makes work easy.”

Different words were used to describe AI, like:

Efficiency

Scientific

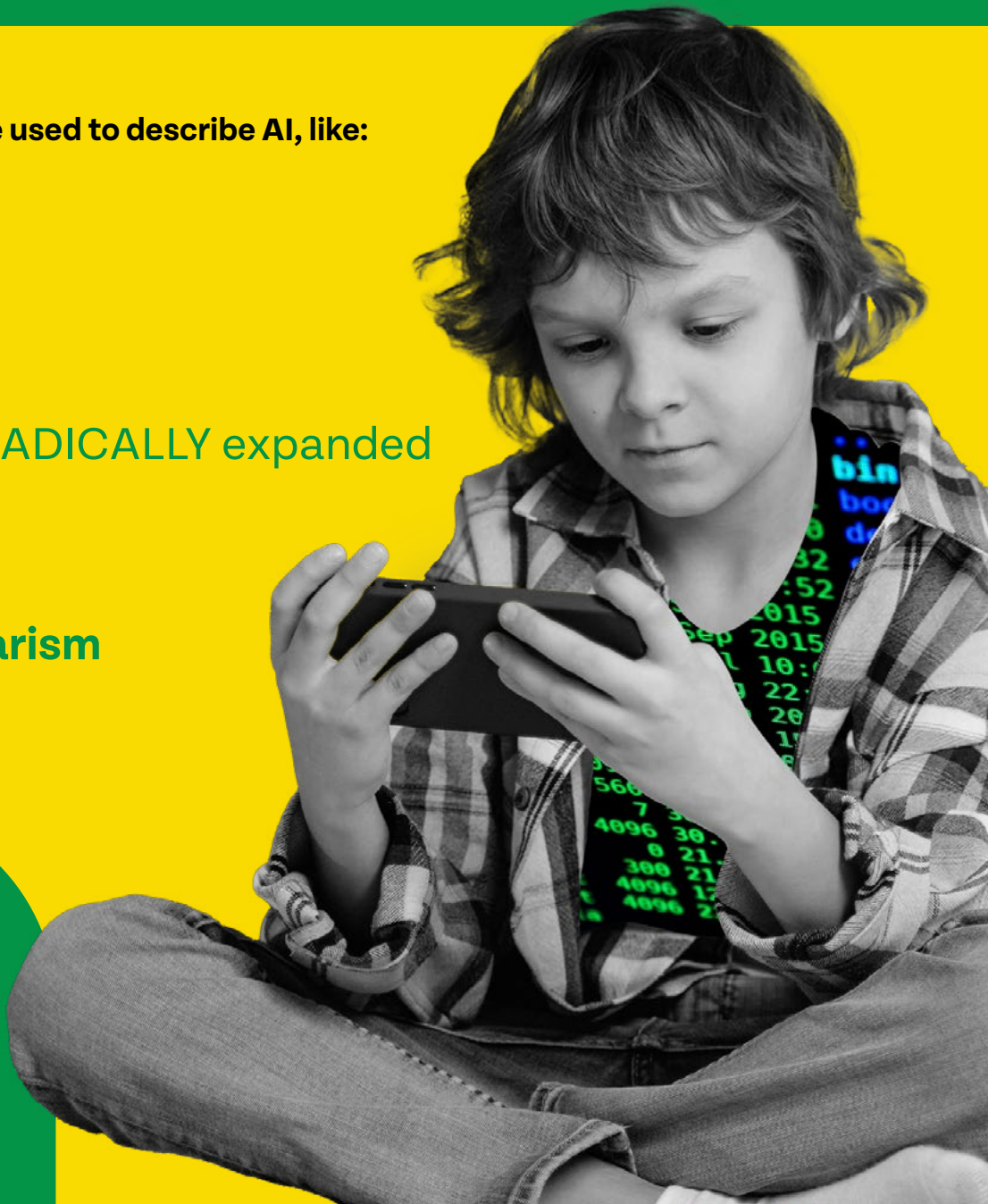
Helpful

Dangerous if RADICALLY expanded

Solution

Automation

Possible plagiarism



How are young people using AI?

We also asked whether they used AI and what they liked to use it for. Some YAP members used AI less than others, but everybody had used it at least once. While many felt they knew how to use AI responsibly, they worried that not everybody does, especially younger children.

The main things the YAP used AI for included:

- Schoolwork and study
- Getting information and fact-checking
- Engaging in hobbies and for entertainment
- Asking for advice, including physical and mental health support



What kinds of AI are young people using?

YAP members mentioned different kinds of AI that they preferred to use. The most used Chatbots were ChatGPT, Gemini AI and DeepSeek AI. The YAP called these “fancier AI”. These Chatbots gave better, longer answers that the YAP felt they had more control over. They could change their questions so that the Chatbot gave specific answers.

On the other hand, Chatbots on Whatsapp and Snapchat were not as good. The YAP only used these because they found them funny.

“Sometimes it’s used for a bit of craic, but it isn’t ever used for anything serious, people make fun of it because it’s a bit useless.”

Some young people said they liked that AI is now a part of Google’s search engine, but they warned that it wasn’t always accurate. They said it was important to scroll down through more search results. They preferred to use Chat GPT than traditional search engines because it’s “sleek, calm” and in their opinion, uses a wider range of reliable sources.

All YAP members were using free versions of these platforms.

AI and Children's Rights



AI and Children's Rights

The YAP talked to us about the different ways, good and bad, that AI affects their rights.

1. RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Lots of YAP members believed AI could improve their education. Many are already using AI to help with schoolwork. They use AI for things like:

- catching up on study or getting extra support
- better understanding topics
- writing essays or doing homework when they're short on time
- carrying out research and summarising information
- finding different words to use when writing (like a Thesaurus)

“If I have training and haven't had time to do homework, I might use Chat GPT instead.”

“There's always going to be people who need more education than what they get in school.”

“It can also help teach concepts that some people can't understand when their teachers are teaching them...”

They like how AI can help children to learn in ways that work for them, whether it's generating a podcast about a topic or shorter bursts of language learning. As well as that, they said that AI can help young people who have additional learning support needs, for example, students who have dyslexia or visual impairments.

They told us that AI could be used as a tool to reduce teachers' work, so they can focus on more important tasks. It can also help teachers to communicate more clearly.

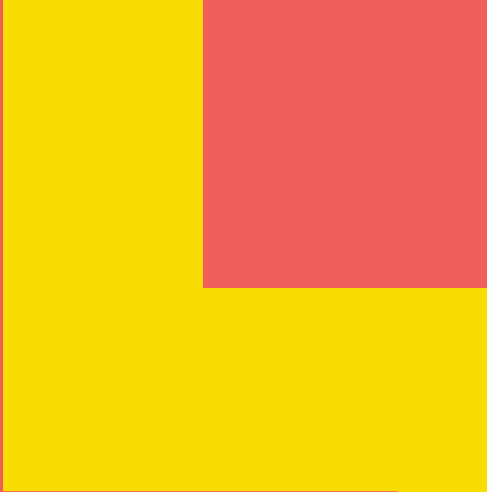
“It can help teachers when they are trying to teach a lesson and summarise things better and make it more understandable.”

Some of the YAP's teachers were using AI in the classroom. For example, one teacher instructed students to write a response to an AI-generated speech debating AI itself, as a learning exercise. Others have been showing students how to responsibly use AI and suggesting what it is appropriate to use AI for. Some YAP members mentioned examples from China, where teachers are using AI to track students' learning, monitor their attention, support teachers in their work, and alert teachers if students have a medical problem.


In most cases, however, the YAP are using AI on their own, not because teachers are asking them to or teaching them about it. They were aware that they have to be careful when doing so, like giving specific prompts to chatbots to get the information you need (e.g., write from the point of view of a Junior Cert student). Even though AI is helpful for essay writing, they said it can be “obvious when AI is used”, especially when a student doesn't normally write that way. They were also aware that detectors could be used by teachers to check for AI use.

“You can't give something that isn't living a living experience, you can't give a robot a 14-year-old's experience.”

The YAP also feared that over-relying on AI would affect their ability to learn important skills, think critically and do things on their own. Some mentioned that this was already quite common in their schools and they were worried that young people would lose the “ability to think for [themselves]”. This doesn't just put their right to education at risk. It also affects children's **right to have a say and express themselves.**



“You stop thinking for yourself if you become more reliant on it... It’s a loss of intelligence.”



“People say I’m good with numbers. If I rely on AI to do all my maths, I’m going to lose my skill: I’m only going to have the skill of a 14-year-old.”

“It takes away the creativity within some things, like if you were told to write an essay for your homework and you just take one straight off ChatGPT, it takes away all the work that you have to do with it and just learning how to do it yourself.”

“Each time if you want to answer a question or do homework, you’ll have to use AI for it instead of your brain.”

2. RIGHT TO INFORMATION

Many use AI in place of traditional search engines, like Google. They also use AI to check if information they've seen on social media is true or not. For example, one YAP member had used DeepSeek AI to verify if Donald Trump had died, after he saw a TikTok video about it. The chatbot gave him reasons why he might be seeing this kind of disinformation on his feed. Some felt that the information AI provided was reliable and in their view, included lots of reliable sources.

“It’s a fair, neutral mediator.”

They also liked that AI is available 24/7, while teachers and parents are not. At the same time, YAP members worried that information AI provides might not always be true. Young people gave examples where AI companies could have alliances with certain countries or political agendas and therefore, be biased. They also argued that AI could use unreliable sources or leave important ones out altogether. Relying on AI as the only source of information could be concerning. The YAP spoke about the danger of accepting information without question and losing traditional research skills.

“AI is just as similar as getting sources from Wikipedia.”



3. RIGHT TO PROTECTION FROM HARM

The YAP were aware that AI could impact their right to be kept safe. The information provided by AI could be harmful, especially for younger children. It could be easier for children to see and be influenced by violent or harmful content using AI. Not every chatbot has safety features in place to make sure their responses are age appropriate.

“Because a child’s brain is still evolving until you’re 25, habits you learn when you are younger are harder to break.”

Young people also worried that AI could steal their personal information and use it in a harmful way, like creating fake content with their images to cyberbully or spread false narratives.

“Nowadays AI can generate deepfakes, like fake videos and it could be of you or another person, and of what you’re saying as well, and I think that really affects the person emotionally.”

“They can generate harmful content about you, increase cyberbullying and damage a person’s personal reputation as well.”

4. RIGHT TO DEVELOP YOUR TALENTS AND ABILITIES

Many YAP members liked to use AI for entertainment and to take part in their hobbies:

- One YAP member used AI to download clips and create videos highlighting the best bits of a video game they play.
- Some YAP members used Character AI for fun with their friends. This chatbot pretends to be a character that you choose, responding to you as though they are that character.
- AI was also used to help young people with personal and creative writing.

“I love writing so much but sometimes stuff just doesn’t flow so I have to use it to enhance the ideas that I’ve written rather than completely write what I’m trying to write.”



YAP members spoke about how AI could support their creativity beyond being a useful tool. If more time-consuming tasks are automated, they argued, people could have more time to spend on creative work they enjoy.

However, the same members were disappointed that AI is often used to develop art in place of young people themselves. Dependence on AI could impact creative careers and skills, especially when there's already "not a lot of creative stuff in school..." Similar concerns were raised in relation to learning languages.

"The internet is a very important platform for promoting and displaying art and the vast amount of AI-generated artwork makes it harder for genuine artists to receive recognition for their work."

"AI does take over a lot of the creativity that we could easily have ourselves. Somebody might have an idea and rather than develop it on their own as their idea, it becomes AI's idea...people do lose their creativity when they are absorbed in technology."

5. RIGHT TO HEALTH

The YAP discussed how AI could be good for their health in lots of ways, be it designing a personalised fitness and nutrition plan, or seeking support for their mental health. As it's not a real human, some young people felt that AI could provide unbiased solutions to problems they faced. However, this advice isn't always reliable, especially if you don't understand how to use AI effectively.

“Take everything with a pinch of salt because it does depend on how you phrased it and your response to it and everything.”

Young people described how some AI could become quite addictive and impact children's ability to socialise, e.g., CharacterAI.

They also felt it was important that interaction with humans wasn't taken away from the healthcare system, and that healthcare staff and their skills should not be replaced by AI.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS

Many YAP members feared the impact that AI would have on the environment. They said the amount of water and electricity used to make AI work was “horrific”.



Looking Towards the Future

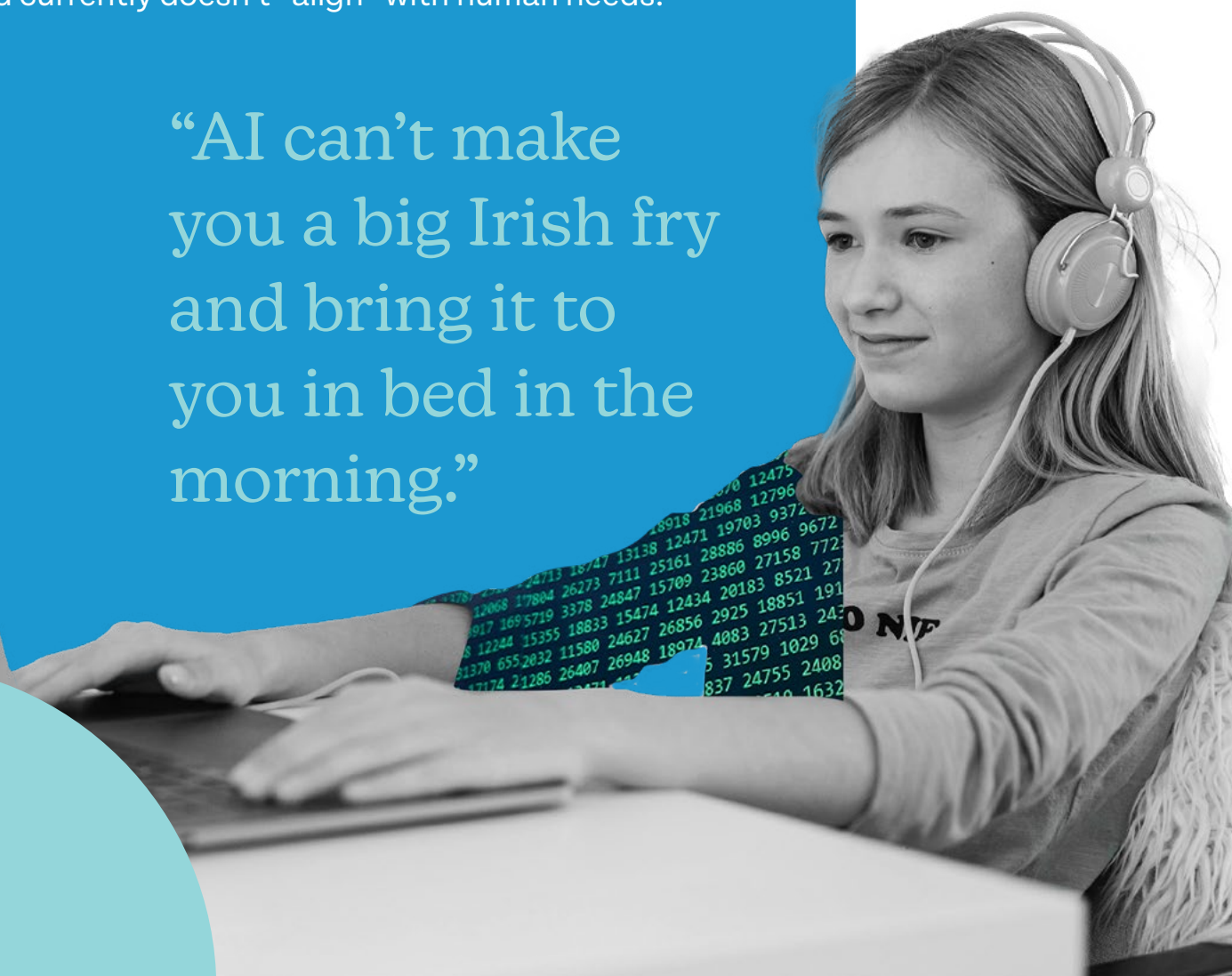


What can adults do to make AI safe for young people?

Given the positive and negative impacts of AI on children's rights, the YAP would like to see young people supported to use AI in a way that is safe. Some believed that fears around AI and its progression were "over-exaggerated" and that "we can't be so traditional that we don't want to move forward." AI holds a lot of potential to make life more efficient.

On the other hand, YAP members were cautious not to depend on AI for everything. They worried that without proper education, younger children would not learn how to use AI responsibly, which brings lots of risks. They also felt that the way AI is being used currently doesn't "align" with human needs.

"AI can't make you a big Irish fry and bring it to you in bed in the morning."



“When you’re against AI, it’s over exaggerated in a lot of ways how bad it can get, like some people still believe AI could turn against humans, but that’s not what’s going to happen at all, it’s more likely just going to provide better options for goals but their goals will just be misaligned with ours, so it’s about aligning our goals to create more peace.”

Going forward, the YAP would like to see a balance struck between AI that is accessible but safe, and works for, not against, young people and broader peace.

But how do we make sure this happens?

1. REGULATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

The YAP want AI regulations that protect their rights, at both the Irish and EU level. They want to see:

- Protection of children's personal data
- Harmful use of AI banned, for example: theft and misuse of children's personal data; accessibility of age-inappropriate content, misinformation and disinformation; political misuse of AI; and corporate fraud.
- Proper accountability mechanisms in place

They suggested consequences that the EU and Irish Government could put in place so that AI companies respect children's rights, including:

- Fines
- Bans from engaging in the Irish tech landscape
- The development of a complaints body, with specialist staff, to take complaints when AI is misused

The YAP were aware that it is difficult to hold international private companies accountable. Most of all, they want to see meaningful protection of people that companies can't "buy their way out of".

2. ONLINE SAFETY MEASURES:

The YAP talked about measures that AI platforms and tech companies could take to protect children's rights. For example:

- Clear warnings, content monitoring apps and ways to block inappropriate content
- Age-verification to access AI content and tools
- Clear notifications that AI is being used
- Blocking options, so you don't have to see AI-generated content unless you want to
- Opt-outs of AI harvesting, so that AI can't take and use content that children have developed themselves

3. EDUCATION AND AWARENESS:

The YAP spoke about the importance of education and awareness around AI. They want to learn about:

- the benefits and risks of AI, especially the impact on the environment
- how to tell when something has been AI-generated
- which AI platforms are safe to use
- the Government's work on AI
- how to use AI wisely: as a tool, not a crutch.

For this to happen, they want to see:

- AI education as part of the school curriculum, supported by consultation with schools, experts, AI and tech companies, and young people themselves
- Engaging public awareness campaigns around AI, that meets young people where they are

4. ADAPT, DON'T BAN:

“The best way is to have trust in people and keep these markets open and regulated so that people can safely use AI.”

The YAP want AI to be accessible to young people and not banned. They worried that banning AI would lead to unregulated markets that could be very unsafe for children.

Not all YAP members agreed that schools should be adapting to use AI in education. Different ways to strike the balance were mentioned, like:

- Teaching young people how to use AI responsibly
- Limiting what AI is used for in school
- Asking young people to be open about using AI
- Using AI detectors to stop plagiarism
- Making efforts to cultivate young people's creativity
- Developing clear policies so children know what's right and wrong

Given the differences between schools, the YAP want schools to create their own local rules around AI, informed by the Government, teachers, experts, parents and young people themselves.



5. SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AND SCHOOLS:

The YAP were clear that parents and schools have an important job, to educate children, monitor their use of AI and show them how to use AI as a resource without losing important skills.

However, they mentioned barriers that might make this harder, such as:

- Parents' understanding of AI
- Upskilling teachers who already have heavy workloads
- The cost of implementing AI infrastructure and mispending of public money

“They have to learn more before we get to AI, they still have to ask for help with the projector.”

“We’re afraid to spend money where it counts.”

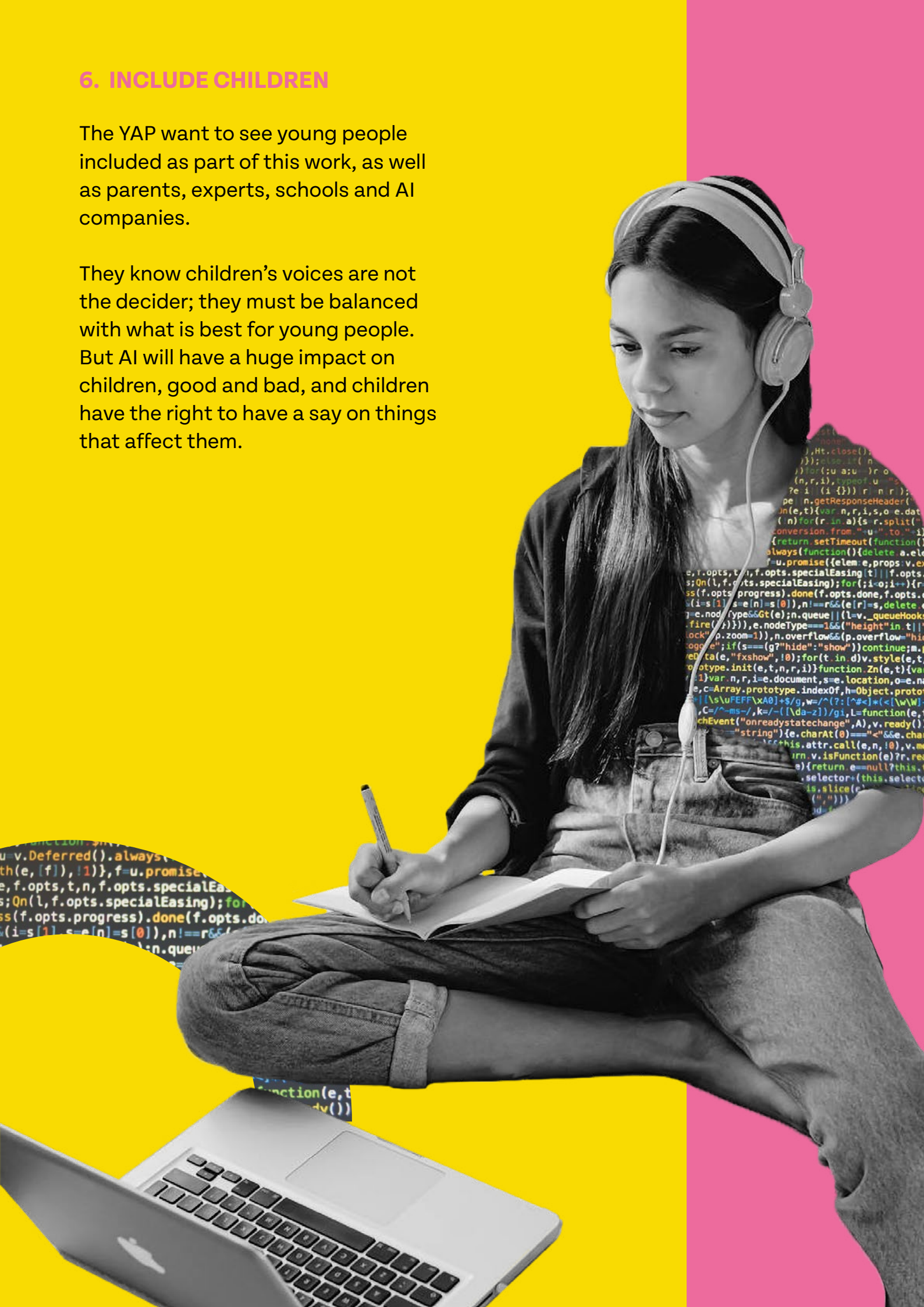
To make sure schools, parents and young people adapt to AI, the YAP want to see:

- Better investment in resources for schools
- Mandatory education for teachers and parents around AI

6. INCLUDE CHILDREN

The YAP want to see young people included as part of this work, as well as parents, experts, schools and AI companies.

They know children's voices are not the decider; they must be balanced with what is best for young people. But AI will have a huge impact on children, good and bad, and children have the right to have a say on things that affect them.





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