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Bridging institutional AI strategy and subject-level teaching practice: A school-level design framework for responsible AI-supported learning

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The rapid growth of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education has accelerated institutional investment in AI infrastructure, yet many universities continue to face difficulties translating institutional strategy into consistent subject-level teaching practice. This paper presents a School-level framework developed at an Australian university. The paper reports the design rationale, outputs and approved deployment model of the framework, including staff capability resources, configurable AI templates, disclosure mechanisms and governance processes. Informed by Educational Design Research and scholarship on organisational change in education, the paper argues that Schools can serve as meso-level environments that enact institutional AI strategy through resources and structures designed to support subject-level teaching practice. It contributes a meso-level governance model, six transferable design principles, and an operational framework intended to support responsible and human-centred AI-supported learning. Formal evaluation is planned following the pilot phase.

Keywords: generative AI, higher education, governance, academic integrity, AI-supported learning, educational design research

Introduction

Generative AI is reshaping higher education through new possibilities for personalised explanation, scalable learning support and AI-enabled teaching practice (Crompton & Burke, 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023). At the same time, universities face persistent concerns about academic integrity, assessment validity, transparency, accountability, privacy and the preservation of critical learning processes (Bearman et al., 2023; Lodge, 2024). These dilemmas are also visible in recent ASCILITE scholarship on the implications of generative AI for higher education practice (Creely & Blannin, 2023).

Institutional AI strategies and enterprise platforms provide important direction and infrastructure, but they do not automatically produce coherent implementation inside individual subjects. Educational change scholarship suggests that implementation depends on local capacity, implementation conditions and interactions across organisational levels, not simply on centrally issued policy (Fullan, 2007). For generative AI, this means that implementation is not only a technical matter but also an organisational and pedagogical design problem.

This paper addresses this implementation gap by presenting a School-level framework for responsible AI-supported learning. Drawing on Educational Design Research (EDR) and organisational change scholarship, it argues that Schools can play a critical meso-level role in enacting institutional AI strategy through resources and structures designed to support subject-level teaching practice. The paper contributes a potentially transferable governance model and six design principles for responsible AI-supported learning through capability development, transparency, academic oversight and reusable teaching resources. In doing so, it extends institutional AI policy frameworks such as Chan (2023) by focusing on the operational layer through which policy is enacted within subjects.

Educational Design Research-informed development approach

The framework was developed using an EDR-informed approach (McKenney & Reeves, 2018). EDR is suited to complex educational challenges because it supports the systematic design and refinement of practical solutions while generating transferable design knowledge. In this paper, EDR is used to frame the design rationale and approved deployment model, rather than to claim completion of a full research cycle. This paper reports the analysis and design phases, while formal implementation and evaluation represent the next phase of the work.

The design problem was how to support responsible, scalable and educationally focused AI-supported learning across diverse subjects while preserving academic authority and managing integrity, privacy and copyright risks. Development was informed by higher education AI literature, institutional AI and teaching strategies, academic integrity requirements, copyright and licensing considerations, professional accreditation expectations, and local teaching and learning governance discussions. Iterative refinement focused on four practical considerations: what support academic staff need before deploying AI tools; what behaviours and boundaries should be embedded into templates; how student transparency and copyright compliance should be implemented; and what level of School governance is needed without undermining subject-level autonomy.

Consistent with EDR, development occurred through three overlapping phases: analysis and exploration; design and construction; and governance review and refinement. The first phase mapped the problem against institutional teaching strategy, AI deployment conditions, academic integrity expectations, copyright and licensing requirements, and relevant higher education AI literature. The second phase focused on design and construction of the framework and associated artefacts, including staff capability materials, configurable student support and learning support templates, disclosure statements and governance documentation. These artefacts were iteratively refined to clarify assessment boundaries, reduce inappropriate reliance on AI, support local subject configuration and make student-facing expectations explicit. The third phase involved School-level teaching and learning committee and executive-level review, leading to refinement of deployment conditions, accountability roles, incident reporting, template change management and staged rollout arrangements. The resulting framework has been endorsed for pilot deployment. This endorsement is treated as evidence of implementation readiness rather than evidence of educational impact. Consistent with the EDR approach, future work will focus on evaluation and reflection to examine the educational value, governance feasibility and broader transferability of the framework across institutional contexts.

Framework design

The framework is underpinned by six design principles intended to support the responsible implementation of AI-supported learning and to provide transferable design knowledge for other institutional contexts. Consistent with the EDR approach, these principles emerged through iterative analysis, design and governance review, and reflect recurring tensions between educational innovation and integrity protection, standardisation and local autonomy, evaluation needs and privacy restraint, and subject-level flexibility and School-level accountability.

First, integrity-by-design safeguards are embedded into template behaviour, including prohibitions on rewriting student submissions, predicting grades or penalties, interpreting rubrics for grade optimisation, and providing inappropriate assessment assistance. Second, academic authority is preserved by positioning AI tools as support systems, not replacements for teaching judgement. Third, configurable and platform-independent templates allow local subject adaptation while maintaining a common governance baseline. Fourth, minimal-data governance avoids central collection of student conversation logs or individual behavioural analytics during the pilot, while still collecting subject participation, moderate incident counts and coordinator

reflections. This was a deliberate data-minimisation choice aligned with Australian Privacy Principle 3, which requires collection of personal information to be reasonably necessary for organisational functions (Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, 2019), and it reduces unnecessary surveillance risk during exploratory deployment. Fifth, copyright and licensing compliance is treated as a deployment condition, with coordinators responsible for ensuring that uploaded materials can lawfully be used within AI-supported environments. Sixth, controlled and iterative deployment supports ongoing refinement through governance review, staged implementation and continuous improvement.

These principles are operationalised through five integrated resources that collectively support capability development, student transparency, responsible AI-supported learning and School-level governance. The resources and their associated governance functions are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1
School AI teaching resources and governance functions

Resource	Purpose	Governance function
1. Staff capability development	Training and guidance for educational AI design, responsible deployment and behavioural safeguards.	Builds consistent staff understanding before template deployment.
2. Student support template	Configurable assistant for subject information, administrative clarification, referral pathways and academic integrity inquiries.	Provides bounded support aligned with institutional services and policies.
3. Learning support template	Scaffolded explanatory support for subject-specific learning content, including repeated and private access to conceptual explanation.	Supports learning while prohibiting assessment substitution, rewriting and grade prediction.
4. Staff guidelines and student disclosure	Deployment conditions, disclosure statements and guidance for communicating AI purpose, limits, optionality and student responsibility.	Makes transparency and student responsibility mandatory conditions of use.
5. Governance and controlled rollout framework	Defines accountability, custodianship, incident management, review and expansion pathways.	Connects subject implementation to School-level oversight and improvement.

School-level governance and rollout models

A governance model (Figure 1) and a staged rollout model are components of the overall framework. The six design principles guide the five resources: the governance model assigns responsibility, oversight and change workflow; and the staged rollout model enables pilot review and controlled expansion. Together, these components translate institutional expectations into subject-level implementation while balancing School-level coordination with local teaching flexibility.



Figure 1. *School-level AI implementation and governance structure*

Strategic governance is held by the School learning and teaching leadership, who define standards, boundaries and approved processes. The School teaching and learning committee provides oversight, review and recommendations for improvement. Subject coordinators are responsible for local implementation, including communicating expectations to students, managing disclosure, ensuring copyright and licensing compliance, and providing feedback into governance review cycles.

The governance model operationalises the framework's six design principles through defined responsibilities, accountability mechanisms and staged review processes. Template change management is tiered: minor wording or clarification updates can be managed by the School learning and teaching coordinator, while changes affecting scope, student-facing behaviour, integrity boundaries or deployment conditions require governance review through the School teaching and learning committee. Suspension authority is also distributed between local subject instances and broader template-level concerns.

Pilot deployment is intentionally staged. Phase 1 deploys staff capability development, student support and disclosure resources across the School, while the learning support template is piloted in up to 10 subjects selected for scale, conceptual learning intensity, discipline diversity and alignment with the university initiatives. Participating coordinators must use approved templates, provide mandatory disclosure, comply with copyright and licensing requirements, report moderate incidents and submit an end-of-semester structured reflection. Phase 2 expansion depends on demonstrated educational value and manageable implementation risk.

Discussion and limitations

This paper contributes to educational AI practice in three ways. First, it advances the position that Schools can act as meso-level governance environments that can enact institutional AI strategy through resources and structures designed to support subject-level teaching practice. Second, it proposes six design principles for responsible AI-supported learning. Third, it demonstrates how these principles can be operationalised through a governance framework that integrates capability development, transparency, academic oversight and staged deployment. Together, these contributions show that responsible AI implementation requires more than access to an AI platform; it also requires staff capability, clear student communication, academic oversight, privacy-aware evaluation, integrity safeguards and governance processes (Miao & Holmes, 2023; Selwyn,

2024). This is particularly important where enterprise AI infrastructure is available but academic staff require practical mechanisms for safe and context-sensitive use (Chan, 2023; Liu et al., 2023; McDonald et al., 2024). The design process highlighted several tensions. First, scalable implementation requires standardised templates, but educational legitimacy requires space for local subject adaptation. Second, AI tools can provide access to scaffolded explanation, but only if academic authority, assessment boundaries and student responsibility remain explicit. Third, copyright and licensing constraints can shape what counts as feasible AI-supported learning design, particularly where subject materials include third-party content.

The meso-level model also has limitations. A School can coordinate resources, establish review processes and support staff capability, but it cannot fully resolve enterprise licensing constraints, institutional policy uncertainty, platform behaviour changes or cross-School consistency. The framework should therefore be understood as a connective governance layer, not a complete institutional solution. While developed within a School context, the underlying design principles may also be adaptable to other Schools and to Faculty, Departmental or Program-level governance structures.

The current paper reports the analysis, design and governance phases of the work rather than formal implementation outcomes. Its potential adaptability will depend on institutional policy, licensing arrangements, staff capability, disciplinary needs and local governance structures.

Future evaluation will use a staged, minimal-data approach drawing on subject participation records, aggregated moderate incident counts, coordinator end-of-semester reflections, staff feedback on usability and workload, and optional student feedback on the clarity, usefulness and perceived learning value. Educational value will be judged through whether the resources support scaffolded explanation, clarify responsible AI use, reduce avoidable uncertainty for students and remain manageable for coordinators. Consistent with the framework's privacy position, the pilot will not involve central collection of individual prompts, outputs, conversation histories or behavioural analytics. Future expansion will therefore depend on evidence of educational usefulness, governance manageability and acceptable integrity, privacy and copyright risk.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that Schools can play a critical meso-level role in enacting institutional AI strategy through resources and structures designed to support subject-level teaching practice. In response to the growing challenge of operationalising responsible AI-supported learning, it has presented a School-level governance framework informed by Educational Design Research and organisational change scholarship. The paper contributes a meso-level governance model, six potentially transferable design principles, and an operational framework that integrates staff capability development, configurable support templates, student disclosure, integrity-by-design safeguards, copyright awareness, minimal-data governance and controlled rollout. Future work will examine the educational value, governance feasibility and transferability of the framework across different contexts.

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