



**ChatGPT Goes To School**  
**Interview with Mairéad Pratschke, University of Manchester**

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KENNEALLY: A new generation of research assistants has arrived at universities in the US, UK, and elsewhere. They are at work in classrooms and administrative offices, helping to prepare instruction and guidance for new and returning students.

Welcome to CCC's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content.

This year's corps of research assistants perform their tasks for professors and deans around the clock, but you wouldn't notice them on campus. They are found only online, the disembodied denizens of generative AI tools like ChatGPT.

The University of Manchester is the largest single-site university in the UK. From Manchester's School of Arts, Languages, and Cultures, Professor Mairéad Pratschke is chair in digital education. In lectures and conference appearances, Professor Pratschke urges her academic colleagues to recognize the reality that AI has come to school to stay. She joins me now on Velocity of Content. Welcome, Professor Pratschke.

PRATSCHKE: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

KENNEALLY: We're delighted you can join us. Given your experience working at the intersection of digital education, e-learning, and in the humanities and social sciences, how do you think universities should respond to the widespread arrival of generative AI technology in classrooms?

PRATSCHKE: I think the first and really overdue step in many institutions is to issue guidance – is to recognize the reality and issue guidance for staff and students as to how to use it. That's probably the most urgent need that I'm seeing, and there's a real variation in terms of how much is already out there from institutions in terms of guidance.

Also, enable access, in the sense of access to the technology, and also offer training or show people where training is available, because there's a lot of free training out there already. Universities I don't think have to create their own custom training, and in fact, I would say don't waste the resources on that right now. There's lots of great stuff out there already.



But within your own institution, I would say create a network of AI leads, champions, whatever you want to call them, but people who are going to be really the kind of intermediaries between your faculty and staff, your academics, and also administrators, professional staff – someone who’s going to be a link in every department or school who can talk up and down and across in every direction about what’s needed.

And really create a community of practice. Bring people together to test and try it. And that includes students – very much including the student voice and student input, because they are really filling the need, I think, for some guidance from us at this point as well. So I’d like to just stress that they should be part of the conversation as well, and they’re often leading it, as they do. (laughter) Yeah.

**KENNEALLY:** Professor Mairéad Pratschke, you say that we must accept the reality that students will use AI, and their teachers will use AI, too. So this means there will have to be an urgent need for AI media literacy on campus. What should students know when they are using AI tools?

**PRATSCHKE:** Well, most importantly, they should know what the rules are at their institution. This is why I started with guidance. Because the truth is it’ll change at every university.

If you’re teaching a writing course, it’s going to be very different in terms of what you need to change and what you’re going to accept or not accept compared to teaching a course in philosophy or teaching a course in computer science or teaching a course in, I don’t know, data analysis. If you’re teaching in anything to do with data science or anything to do with tech these days, of course you’re going to be teaching your students about AI.

**KENNEALLY:** For university administrators, what kind of policy concerns do generative AI tools bring up?

**PRATSCHKE:** Access is really, really important. Again, this is not new in terms of digital education. We’ve been talking about digital poverty, digital divide, for years. So if you’re in a course or a program where AI is required in order to do your homework, what if you don’t have the system in your home? Maybe you don’t have great internet access. You need to be on a campus or you need to have access to systems so that you’re able to do your work in the same way that your fellow students are doing their work. So that’s the first thing. Access and equity is really, really critical.

I really don’t love this phrase, but honestly, future-proofing is a phrase that gets thrown around. I will just use one that I prefer instead, which is learning agility. Because in my area, I think learning agility is the most important area. And we really need to kind of



practice what we preach in this area and help people learn to learn, play with new tech. So that means not just implementing new policies and new systems, but really encouraging people to experiment and play and see how it affects their roles, whatever their role is.

KENNEALLY: ChatGPT enthusiasts call for universities to embrace gen AI. Is that the right response as you see it, Professor Pratschke? And if not, how should universities approach this technology?

PRATSCHKE: Yeah, the word embrace is the one that I struggle with a little bit. The truth of the matter is most educators are really, really keen to learn everything about what they need to do to be better teachers and to help their students. That's why they're there. (laughter) I mean, they're always keen to do it. But they are also dealing with very real constraints in a lot of cases – often workload issues, often just lack of time, the systems integration issues I talked about, the resource issues.

Once teachers can learn how to use it to help themselves, maybe lighten that workload that a lot of ed tech companies are promising will happen right now. But the truth of the matter is there is a learning curve with anything.

So yes, educators will, I'm sure, embrace what's good in the right time and at the right pace for them. But again, it has to be in the right context. Teaching is about a lot more than technology. I'm a digital education professor, but teaching is about human relationships, and teaching is relational. In fact, all good learning design frameworks focus on things like collaboration and communities and creating that human connection. They might use technology, but the technology serves that purpose. The technology doesn't come first.

KENNEALLY: Professor Mairéad Pratschke, chair in digital education for the University of Manchester School of Arts, Languages, and Culture, thank you for joining me on the program.

PRATSCHKE: Thanks, Chris.

KENNEALLY: That's all for now. Our producer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. You can subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts, and please do follow us on Twitter and on Facebook. You can also find Velocity of Content on YouTube as part of the CCC channel. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for listening.

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