UNIR 2025 Declaration for an Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education

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Introduction

Humanity has been experiencing an exciting and unstoppable digital transformation over the past decades. The latest stage of this revolutionary process is undoubtedly the widespread implementation of services, products and devices that place Artificial Intelligence (AI) within reach of the general public, with applications in everyday contexts.

Although the origins of Artificial Intelligence date back to the 1950s (Turing, 1950), its mass adoption and democratisation have only consolidated during the last decade. This advance has been made possible by the combined development of data-processing capacities and the global availability of vast amounts of data to feed AI models. At present, almost all devices, software programmes and information-access systems already use this technology, either directly or indirectly.

AI is already an essential part of our digital lives, with positive aspects such as the processing of unstructured data, but also with risks such as the introduction of bias and the potential for privacy intrusion. Likewise, AI can expand access to information, knowledge and education across any economic or cultural sector.

The impact of AI is already tangibly affecting every productive sector and, in the coming years,

will significantly reshape the labour market, causing some jobs to disappear, new ones to emerge and the vast majority to change in some way.

This effect is particularly noticeable in the field of education, where AI has the potential to complement and/or replace many teaching and assessment activities, while also providing students with resources and tools that enhance their academic performance. In this respect, higher-education institutions must play a key role in facilitating the transition towards new employment demands as labour scenarios evolve and AI becomes more pervasive.

The International University of La Rioja (UNIR), together with the other universities and companies that make up the Proeduca educational group, must adapt to the needs of a world in constant development. For this reason, as members of an institution that produces and disseminates knowledge and culture, we face the challenge of reconciling the most beneficial aspects of AI with our teaching and research realities.

This declaration aims to establish a set of consensus-based principles to guide all members of the group (lecturers, students, management staff, governing board, researchers, and others) in the use, application and even development of AI-based solutions. It first provides a general definition of AI and an overview of its most current applications. It then describes several interesting—but also risky—uses of AI. Finally, it outlines UNIR's role in striving to become a benchmark for applying global regulations on AI or any other technology that poses a social challenge, through its student-centred ecosystem.

What Is Artificial Intelligence Really?

To define AI, one can turn, among many others, to the interpretation given by UNESCO (2021), which states that *AI systems are information-processing technologies that integrate models and algorithms and provide the ability to learn and to carry out cognitive tasks. These lead to results such as prediction and decision making in both material and virtual environments. AI systems are designed to operate with varying degrees of autonomy through knowledge modelling and representation, as well as by exploiting data and computing correlations.*

Another definition comes from the renowned computer scientist and one of the founders of the field, John McCarthy (McCarthy, 2007), as cited by IBM, one of the leading global technology companies (IBM, 2023): *artificial intelligence is the science and engineering of making intelligent machines, particularly intelligent computer programs. It is related to the similar task of using computers to understand human intelligence, but AI does not have to confine itself to methods that are biologically observable.*

Within AI there is a special reference to general or strong AI, defined as machine intelligence

that enables machines to understand, learn and perform intellectual tasks in a way very similar to humans (e.g., generative AI). General or strong AI emulates the human mind and behaviour in order to solve any type of complex problem (Goertzel, 2007). A further development is the concept of singularity and its associated risk, which would involve AI eventually surpassing human intelligence through the recursive application of its own capabilities (Von Neumann, 1958).

Foundations and Current Applications of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence can be applied in a wide range of areas, such as natural language processing, computer vision, robotics, speech recognition and many others. The common goal of all these applications is to perform tasks autonomously or to assist humans in decision-making and problem-solving. At present, any AI system could normally perform two main functions: classification and/or prediction. From these two functions derive others, such as summarisation, interpretation and the generation of new outcomes not directly inferred from historical data.

A *classifier* organises new information into previously known classes or groups. A *predictor*, on the other hand, refers to an AI-based algorithm capable of generating new values from a historical dataset. Both functions in turn rely on several complementary computational foundations, including neural networks, *deep learning*, *machine learning*, data mining and *feature extraction*, among others.

Building on these foundations, increasingly refined and specialised solutions have been developed over time and made accessible to the general public (via the web, APIs, desktop or mobile applications), such as *generative pre-trained transformers* (GPT), *natural language processing* (NLP), *image recognition* (typically with *support vector machines* or SVM), or *generative inference* (for example, in images or texts).

Responsible Use of AI: A Challenge for Society, a Challenge for the University

Information technology, statistics, information systems, communication systems, social networks and robotics based on AI permeate the digital landscape far more extensively than we often realise. In this context of legitimate yet indiscriminate AI use—where humanity seems united around a kind of unreflective usufruct of the technology—several organisations of thinkers and activists have raised the alarm.

A notable example is the open letter from the founders of the Future of Life Institute (FLI) (Future of Life Institute, 2023), which advocates an active pause in AI development to allow reflection on the large-scale deployment of public-facing query systems. Likewise, black-box models are

widely used; these are opaque and highly non-deterministic, which can introduce biases that are impossible to trace and/or produce seriously erroneous outcomes, entirely unnoticed by both users and creators (He & Tao, 2025).

Currently, there are also other initiatives such as the European Union's Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI (EU, 2019) and UNESCO's *AI and education: Guidance for policymakers* (UNESCO, 2021a). Among them, the Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 deserves special mention. This regulation establishes harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amends Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 as well as Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (the Artificial Intelligence Regulation) (EU, 2024). Better known by its Spanish acronym RIA (Artificial Intelligence Regulation), it complements the EU AI Act (EU, 2024), which entered into force on 2 February 2025. The Regulation establishes a uniform legal framework ensuring that the use of AI is consistent with the values of the Union, is human-centred and guarantees a high level of protection for health, safety and fundamental rights. In any case, common sense imposes the following limitations, which we can all endorse: AI must be lawful, meaning that it complies with all applicable laws and regulations. It must also be ethical, ensuring respect for ethical principles and values. Finally, it must be robust, both technically and socially, since AI systems—even when programmed with the best intentions—can cause accidental harm.

It is the responsibility of each institution, stakeholder group, collective and individual to define the scope of AI technologies within their specific context and to conduct audits to ensure compliance with existing legislation. Such a framework may take the form of a code of conduct, a set of guidelines, a manifesto or a declaration of principles. At UNIR, as well as within Proeduca as a student-centred educational group, the latter format has been chosen, starting from a Declaration on the Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education, which in turn serves as a basis for a series of practical guides tailored to target groups, such as the Guide on the Use of AI in Research (Proeduca, 2024).

UNIR 2025 Declaration for an Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education

UNIR's approach to AI can be summarised in the following declaration, which applies to any company, foundation, university or institution of any nature that belongs to the same educational parent group, Proeduca. This manifesto has been drawn up taking into account the documentation, guidelines and frameworks referenced in this document. The 2025 version represents a revision of the original declaration published in 2023 (UNIR).

The following principles are fully compatible with current legislation, such as the *Ethics Guidelines*

for Trustworthy AI (EU, 2019a), the *European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* (ALLEA, 2023) and the *AI Regulation* (EU, 2024). These principles underpin the design, development and application of AI solutions and tools at UNIR. Nevertheless, this declaration of principles does not constitute an internal set of regulations or operational procedures, which are detailed in specific documents such as the *Guide for the Responsible Use of Generative AI in Research Activities* (Proeduca, 2024).

The order of the list does not indicate any hierarchy of importance: all principles are addressed and implemented with equal significance.

1) **Principle of Social Contribution: alignment will be ensured between the specific interests of scientific projects and technical efforts related to AI and those of society at large**, or of the sectors in which it is applied—whether industrial, educational, service-oriented or any other.
2) **Principle of Fairness: the use of AI systems will be emphasised without any discrimination towards users or target audiences.** The use of AI products, technologies and services will not stigmatise, incriminate or discriminate on the basis of sex, ethnicity, belief, religion, age, disability, political affiliation, sexual orientation, nationality, citizenship, marital status, socio-economic status or any other personal, physical or social condition (UNIR, 2020). **Sectoral or any other categorisation biases will therefore be avoided**, as far as possible, in the configuration and development of AI products and services. Algorithmic bias inherent in the discipline today will also be avoided, both in UNIR's own developments and in third-party AI products used at any level of the educational group (executive management, academic management, teaching, student support, etc.). Measures will be taken to ensure that AI neither perpetuates nor amplifies existing inequalities but rather serves as a tool to promote equity and inclusion in society.
3) **Principle of Capacity Building: training will be provided in the use of AI systems.** Employees, students, lecturers and other professionals will be trained to follow responsible practices in the use, distribution, dissemination and production of AI-based technologies and services, in line with the group's ethical standards. Awareness of these practices will likewise be promoted at every level and in every sector of the educational ecosystem. In addition, specific training will address the risks associated with the use of generative AI in order to minimise potential negative effects on learning, teaching and assessment.
4) **Principle of Human Oversight: the use, configuration and implementation of AI will remain under the control of competent personnel**, with the final decision on

any related matter resting with them and not delegated to AI systems that make fully automated decisions. In this way, users (students, lecturers and support staff) will retain active control over the decisions and actions carried out with the assistance of AI, always preserving human autonomy and decision-making capacity; that is, using AI as a support tool and not as a substitute for individual responsibility.

5) **Principle of Confidentiality: the security and privacy of data will be respected in the use and development of AI systems.** For both the configuration and use of in-house or external products, and for developments carried out within the educational group (such as research or support products), the confidentiality of individuals or organisations will be upheld and the privacy of personal data safeguarded. This includes any data stored, automatically retrieved or collected through explicit fields, in full compliance with Proeduca Group's[1] privacy policy and with current legislation (specifically Spanish Organic Law 3/2018 of 5 December on the Protection of Personal Data and the Guarantee of Digital Rights). Likewise, Proeduca's data and documents will be protected against any unauthorised external exposure.
6) **Principle of Transparency and Identification: the identification and traceability of AI-generated content will be guaranteed.** Every generative AI system developed or used by UNIR will clearly indicate its artificial origin and the associated traceability in an unequivocal way, whether dealing with images, videos, texts or any other format or product.
7) **Principle of Sustainability**: when selecting or developing AI-based systems, an innovative and collaborative approach will be adopted to minimise environmental impact and energy consumption. Every effort will be made to leave the smallest possible ecological footprint and to apply the DNSH (Do No Significant Harm) principle (EU, 2021a).

Furthermore, this set of principles is overseen by an effective **internal audit and monitoring system**, aligned with the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2024/1689. It operates under a multidisciplinary committee responsible for the development and use of in-house processes, services and products (or the integration of third-party ones). This committee periodically assesses the degree of compliance with the commitments established in this manifesto and proposes corrective and transparent measures whenever any significant deviation is identified.

Scope and Integrity

[1] PROEDUCA – UNIR (2019). GDPR Legal Clauses

At UNIR we recognise the transformative impact of AI on our environment and are fully aware of the immense potential it offers to facilitate and enhance quality education for all. UNIR is committed to using artificial intelligence ethically and responsibly, to advancing knowledge, promoting innovation and benefiting society as a whole, while always respecting current legislation.

UNIR also encourages shared responsibility among different scientific disciplines so that, in an area of knowledge as interdisciplinary as Artificial Intelligence, collaboration is fostered across all fields, professional categories and academic levels. The aim is to balance the technological weight inherent in AI with possible shared areas of action, such as the various branches of science and the arts.

The manifesto presented here seeks to establish the fundamental principles that will guide decision-making in this rapidly evolving field of human knowledge, across all universities, companies and entities within the Group, including every layer and role involved: lecturers, researchers, students, academic managers, governing boards, middle management, experts and any other relevant actors.

Through the regulations developed from this manifesto and the actions of the university's competent bodies (such as the Research Ethics Committee, the Compliance Department or the Legal Services), UNIR promotes an approach centred on social benefit, transparency and collaboration, while at the same time fostering ethics, education, compliance with applicable legislation and responsibility at every stage of AI use.

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