

# **The AI Pulse:** Public Sentiment in Northern Ireland on Artificial Intelligence

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# Executive Summary

- SPU considers AI to be of strategic socio-economic significance for NI due to potential productivity implications and benefits to public services and finances. This must be accompanied by an ethical framework and mitigation of risks.
- SPU has commissioned, via LucidTalk, the first comprehensive poll of AI sentiment in NI to establish a baseline, to provide an evidence base for government and to allow for early identification of policy implications.
- Poll results indicate a reasonably high level of self-declared awareness of AI in NI, with 83% being at least 'somewhat aware', and there is substantial evidence of current and potential future usage of AI. Respondents indicate a relatively even spread of ability levels, but only 15% say they are 'very able'.
- Responses demonstrate a stark deficit of training in AI (89% have had none), indicating a need for an urgent policy imperative regarding up/re-skilling. There is a clear AI readiness gap.
- **The NI public is ready to engage with AI, but are not trained in how to use it.**
- With regards to attitudes, perceptions, and policy preferences, there is a mixed and sometimes conflicted response profile, perhaps reflecting uncertainty and apprehension around the potential impacts of AI.
- The responses reflect public recognition and optimism for the potential for AI to improve the economy and public services. There is a significant recognition that AI will be beneficial for healthcare, science and education. However, this is softer compared to the degree of concern regarding actual or perceived risks.
- Respondents demonstrate particular sensitivity to risks that impact upon individual wellbeing. Public trust in AI is very low, and support for human oversight and an ethical framework is very clear.
- **People are not rejecting AI – they are demanding responsible, transparent, human-led governance. This has clear implications for policymakers, public services and industry.**
- Respondents' awareness, usage/willingness to use, self-identified skills competency, and attitudes and perceptions have significant differentials based on gender, age, and socio-economic status. There is evidence of an emerging digital divide regarding AI.
- Responses indicate support for a range of policy interventions, particularly those that mitigate risks, increase regulation, improve transparency and provide skilling opportunities.
- **Urgent upskilling and reskilling is central to capturing the opportunities from AI and being competitive.**

# Introduction

This report presents the results of the first comprehensive opinion poll assessing the views of the people of Northern Ireland on Artificial Intelligence in terms of usage, skill levels, attitudes and perceptions, and policy preferences.

This follows our recent paper entitled “AI for NI: A Strategic Overview for the Adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Northern Ireland” (May 2025) and should be read in conjunction with it.<sup>1</sup>

In this earlier report, we set out the potential role of AI in driving productivity gains within our economy and in transforming local public services. However, we also identified underlying issues relating to trust, transparency, risk and regulation. Furthermore, we stressed that AI adoption must be placed within a sound governance framework, with strong ethics, a commitment to open communication with citizens and provision of transparency in order to embed trust and mitigate risks.

We also highlighted how AI will drive demand for new skills and result in wider changes to the overall skills landscape, thereby necessitating pre-emptive investment in skills and adaptation within education at all levels. A prompt focus on driving AI literacy will be crucial for this region, if we wish to fully exploit associated opportunities.

As advocates for safe and ethical use of AI, we recognise the need to have a clear understanding and evidence base as to public sentiment regarding knowledge of AI, experiences and views on potential policy applications.

There are examples of AI-related opinion polls and surveys in other nations and regions, and some international comparative work. Given the potential for localised economic, public service and other productive interventions within Northern Ireland, we believe that there is merit in deriving Northern Ireland specific data on a wide range of AI-related considerations.

It is in this context that the Ulster University Strategic Policy Unit commissioned this poll to be undertaken by LucidTalk.

Polling was carried out online from 8th November (1pm) to 11th November (8pm) 2025, using the established LucidTalk Northern Ireland (NI) online opinion panel (16,772 members), which is balanced to be demographically

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ulster.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/1735992/AIforNI-AStrategicOverviewFullDocument.pdf](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1735992/AIforNI-AStrategicOverviewFullDocument.pdf)

representative of Northern Ireland (NI). 1,970 full responses were received, and these were then authenticated, audited, weighted, and modelled, into a 1,050/1,051 NI representative response dataset, which was used for analysis.

Weighting was carried out by age, gender, socio-economic group, previous NI voting patterns, NI residence area, NI constitutional position, political-party support, and community (religious affiliation), in order to produce a robust Northern Ireland representative opinion sample. All results are accurate in terms of being NI representative to within an error of  $\pm 2.3\%$  at 95% confidence levels. LucidTalk is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its regulations.

It is intended that this work will add to the already vibrant public discourse and ongoing policy development regarding the strategic adoption of AI in Northern Ireland and further afield.

It provides a baseline for future investigations into public opinion on AI and related issues and provides an evidence base for ongoing policy development.

In this report, we set out the responses to each of the poll questions, and present some of the more significant demographic breakdowns of the responses.

We have also included a sample of over 300 qualitative comments that we received as part of the survey and an associated word cloud.

We draw out some of the cross-cutting themes and highlight some of the arising public policy implications.

The poll indicates that there is a generally high level of self-declared awareness of Artificial Intelligence. Respondents also report using AI across for a range of purposes. With respect to respondents' self-assessed competency or literacy in the safe and effective use of AI, there is a relatively even spread of results. By contrast, there is a low level of training in AI, which suggests there is a need for significant intervention in up/re-skilling the population of NI.

In terms of attitudes, perceptions, and policy preferences, there is a relatively mixed and conflicted response profile. This perhaps reflects a degree of uncertainty and apprehension around the potential for changes to how people lead their lives, work, learn and engage in AI-related entertainment.

The results reflect a recognition and optimism regarding the potential for AI to improve the economy and better public services, but this recognition is softer relative to the degree of concern regarding actual or perceived risks. Trust levels are currently very low.

Respondents demonstrate a greater sensitivity to those actual or perceived risks that impact upon individual wellbeing, with a corresponding desire for humans to retain control.

Across many of the responses relating to awareness, usage/willingness to use, self-identified skills competency, and attitudes and perception, there are significant differentials based on gender, age, and socio-economic status. There are strong indications of a digital divide relating to AI which needs to be mitigated by policy interventions.

Responses indicate support for a range of policy interventions, in particular those that seek to mitigate risks, and also to provide greater skilling opportunities.

This report represents an initial presentation of results and associated to enable the presentation of crucial information in the public domain at an early opportunity. We intend to follow up with an additional report to further consider the results and to place them within a comparative context.

Undoubtedly, AI has the potential to be transformative in terms of how we live our lives, our economy, public services and wider society. However, it also raises some very profound ethical and philosophical questions, and, at a practical level, there are issues regarding the nature and scale of requisite guardrails.

The AI revolution is inevitable and thus needs to be effectively managed and controlled to maximise positive outcomes. Ultimately, progress in the adoption of AI within the economy and public services needs to be reinforced by broad-based popular consent in order to be trusted, sustainable and contribute to societal wellbeing.

Policymaking will shape the ultimate socio-economic outcomes associated with AI and there is a real urgency in this regard, to exploit opportunities while mitigating risks and safeguarding future outcomes.

## Approach to Poll

We have endeavoured to ask a broad range of questions regarding usage, skill levels, attitudes and perceptions, and policy preferences regarding AI.

A balanced approach was adopted in terms of length and level of detail. We chose not to ask a greater number of questions in terms of potential applications and benefits, risks and policies in order to keep the length manageable and minimise the risk of drop-off.

Artificial Intelligence covers a broad range of technologies, and we opted not to sub-divide it into different categories, including generative AI and agentic AI. This would have complicated the poll, added significantly to its length and introduced considerable repetition in questions. Ultimately, the objective of the poll is assessing individual experiences and perceptions of AI – essentially taking the pulse on these issues.

The ordering of the options in the multi-Likert scale questions was randomised to reduce the prospect of the order biasing poll responses.

The results of the poll have been broken down across a range of demographics including gender, age and socio-economic status. We have provided supporting tables to illustrate some significant differentials in those respects.

The data presented is rounded to the nearest whole number.

## Comparison to Other Polls

We are not aware of any comprehensive Northern Ireland focused opinion polls on AI to date.

By contrast, there have been a number of other opinion polls in the UK and other countries, plus some polls conducted internationally that seek to make comparisons.<sup>2</sup> Many others will undoubtedly follow.

AI is a very fast-moving area, and it is expected that opinions on AI-related considerations will be volatile.

Therefore, the timeframes in which polls are conducted are particularly pertinent when assessing AI sentiment in relation to various potential applications, and for making comparisons.

The nature and scope of questions asked in other polls is also relevant.

Nevertheless, opportunities should be sought to place results from Northern Ireland in a broader context and consideration should be given to repetitive polling over regular intervals to ascertain changing perception and usage and inform policymaking. In particular, any significant deviations within NI public opinion from the emerging international trends would be noteworthy.

In a future report, the Ulster University Strategic Policy Unit intends to analyse these results in light of other opinion polls and seek to make comparisons in sentiment between Northern Ireland and other jurisdictions.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of some relevant polls and surveys for consideration include:

Roshni Modhvadia, Tvesha Sippy, Octavia Field Reid and Helen Margetts, 'How Do People Feel About AI?' (Ada Lovelace Institute and The Alan Turing Institute, 2025) [attitudestoai.uk](https://attitudestoai.uk)

KPMG, UK attitudes to AI: A UK perspective on 'Trust, attitudes and use of artificial intelligence: A global study 2025' [kpmg.com/uk/en/insights/ai/uk-attitudes-to-ai.html](https://kpmg.com/uk/en/insights/ai/uk-attitudes-to-ai.html)

Public First, What does the public think about AI?, UK, 2024, [ai.publicfirst.co.uk](https://ai.publicfirst.co.uk)

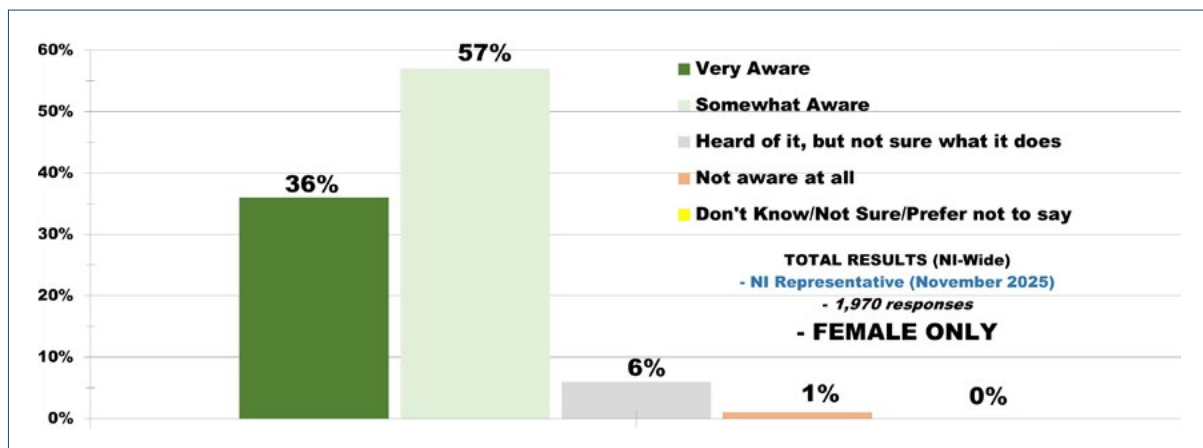
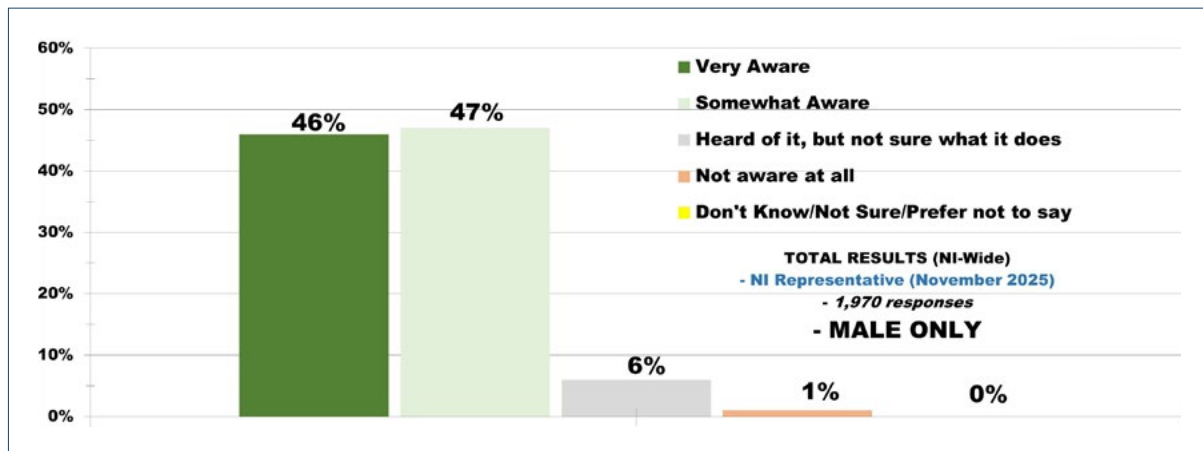
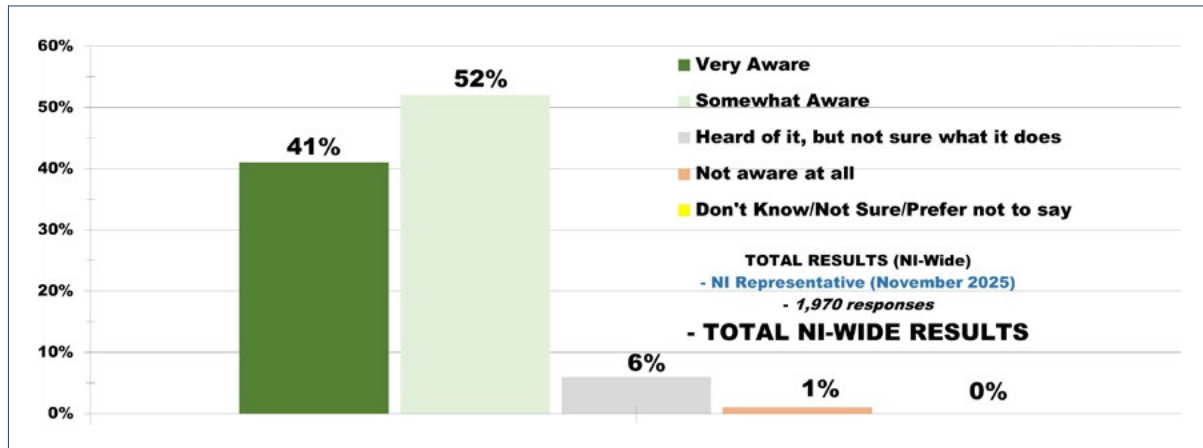
Tony Blair Institute, What the UK Thinks About AI: Building Public Trust to Accelerate Adoption, September 2025 [institute.global/insights/tech-and-digitalisation/what-the-uk-thinks-about-ai-building-public-trust-to-accelerate-adoption](https://institute.global/insights/tech-and-digitalisation/what-the-uk-thinks-about-ai-building-public-trust-to-accelerate-adoption)

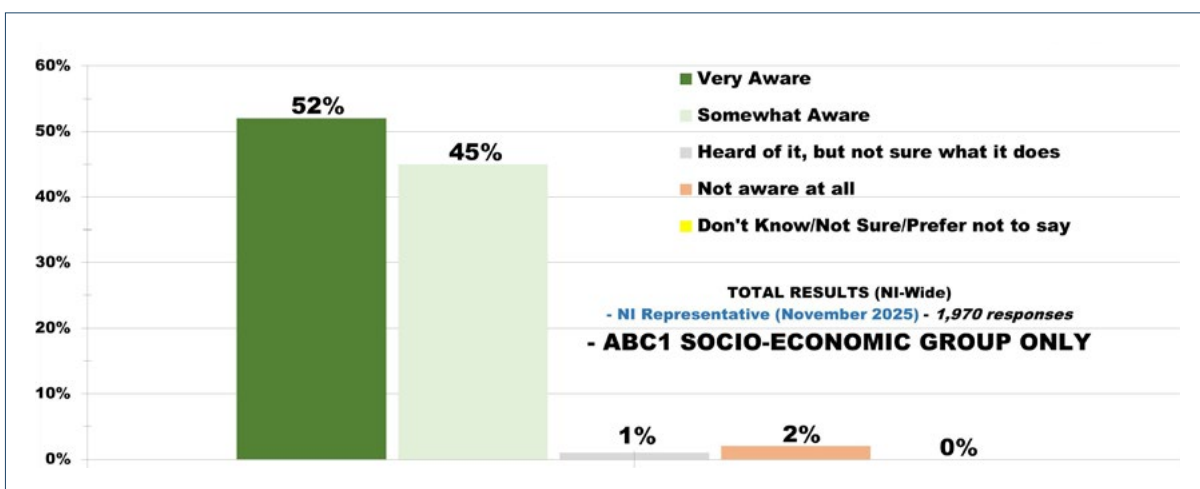
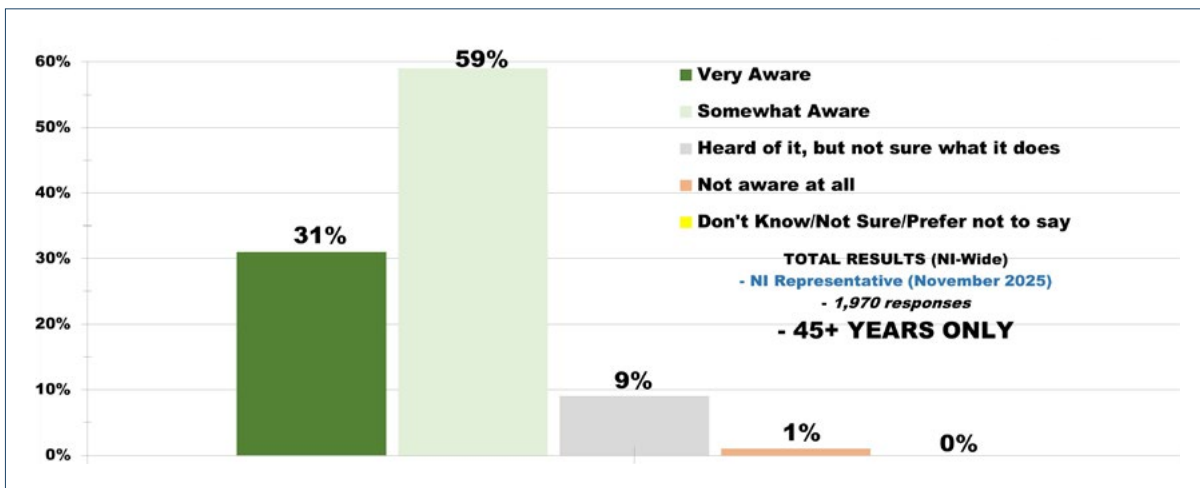
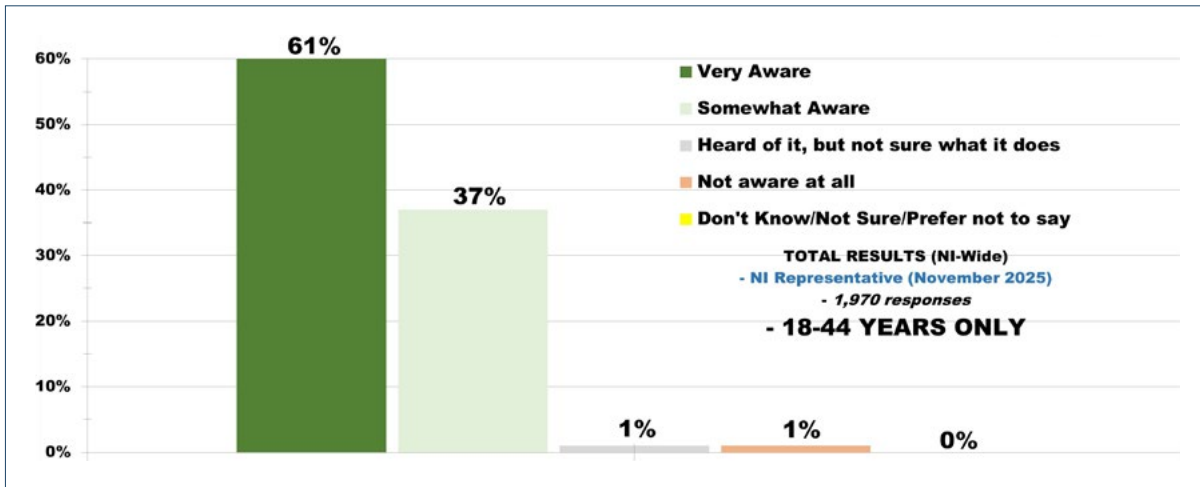
Pew Research Center, How People Around the World View AI, October 2025, [www.pewresearch.org/global/2025/10/15/how-people-around-the-world-view-ai/](https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2025/10/15/how-people-around-the-world-view-ai/)

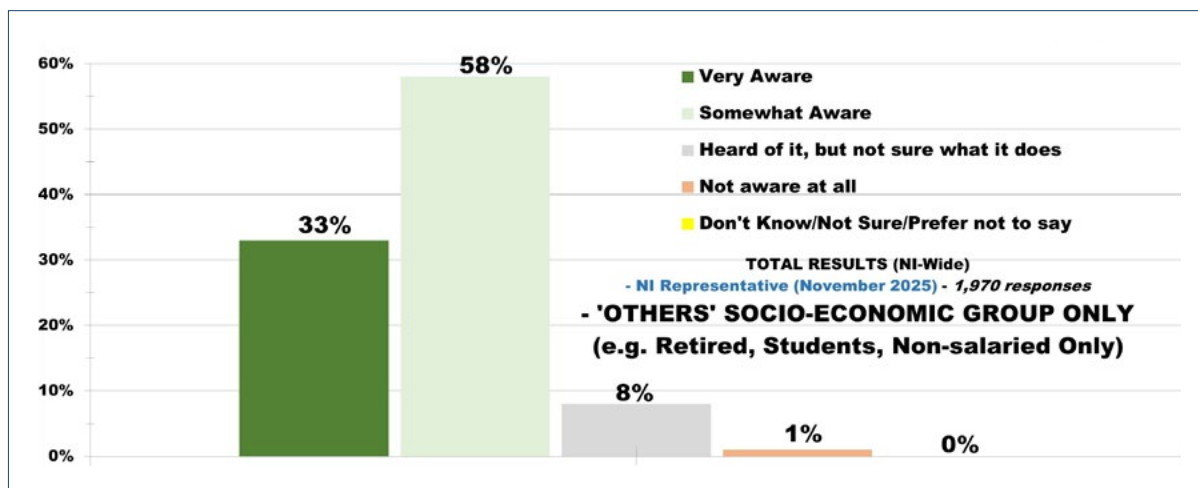
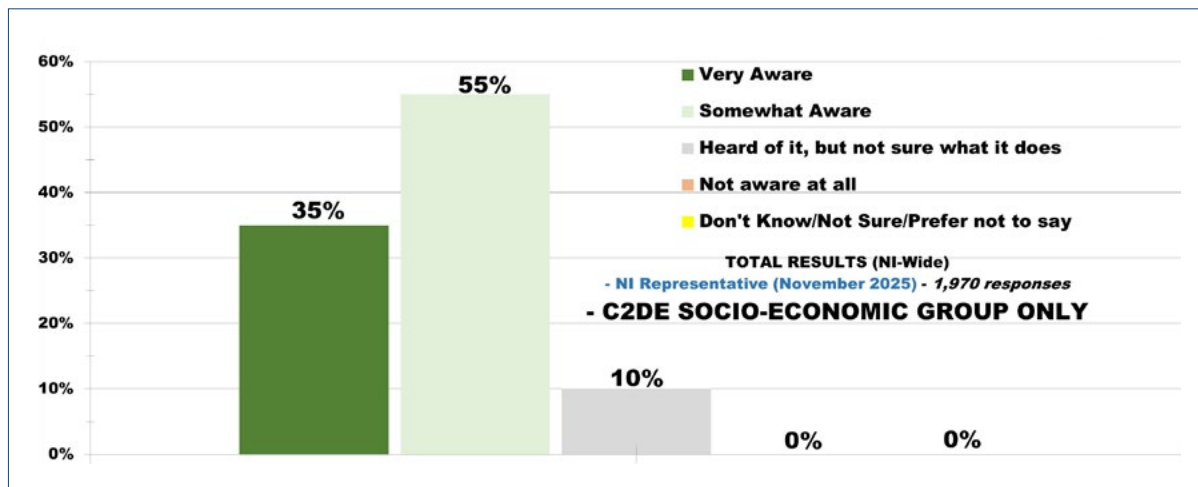


# Full Results & Commentary

## Q1. How aware are you of artificial intelligence (AI)?





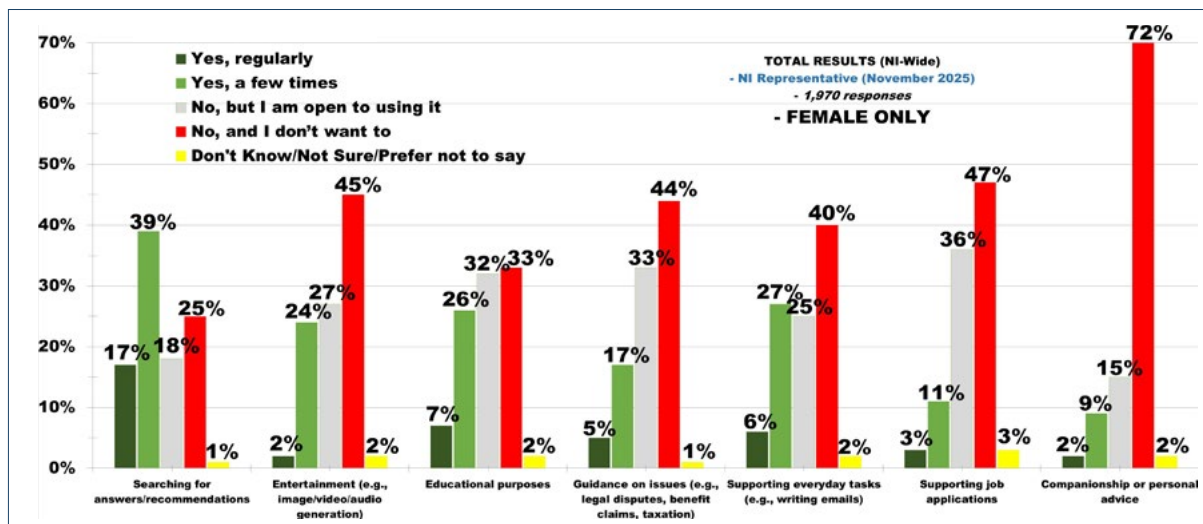
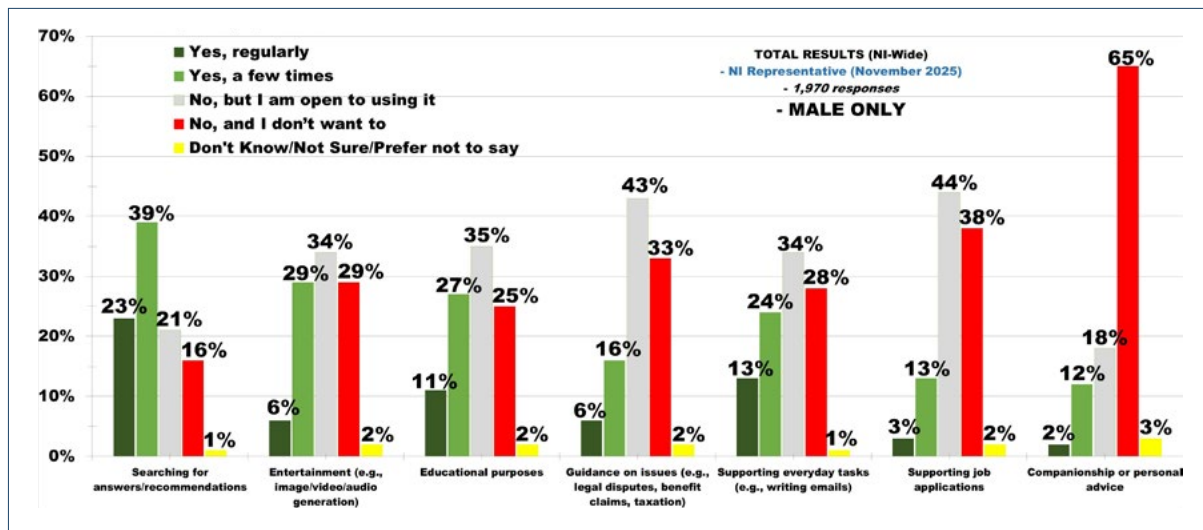
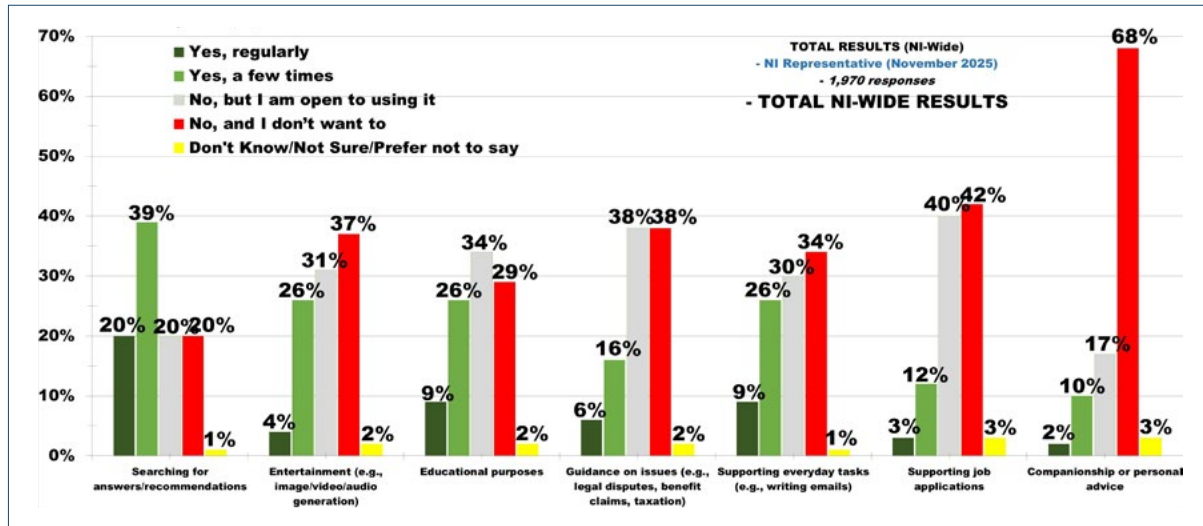


There is no single, agreed definition of artificial intelligence. AI can apply to a range of technologies. These responses should be understood in terms of individual perceptions and understandings of what constitutes artificial intelligence.

The combined figure for poll respondents who indicated they are 'very aware' and 'somewhat aware' is 83pc, reflecting a high degree of public awareness.

However, there are some notable demographic differences. In terms of gender, females tend to understate their level of awareness, with 36pc being 'aware' and 53pc being 'somewhat aware', relative to males, who are more evenly split at 45pc and 47pc respectively. Perhaps unsurprisingly, awareness tends to decline as age increases. There is a noted tilt toward being 'very aware' from participants in the ABC1 socio-economic group, whilst the response is predominately 'somewhat aware' in other socio-economic categories.

## Q2. Have you had any personal experience with using AI for the following tasks?



This question tests usage of AI for a range of different purposes and mirrors a similar question asked by the Ada Lovelace and Alan Turing Institutes. This will allow some comparisons to be made between NI results and those elsewhere. We will examine this in a subsequent paper.

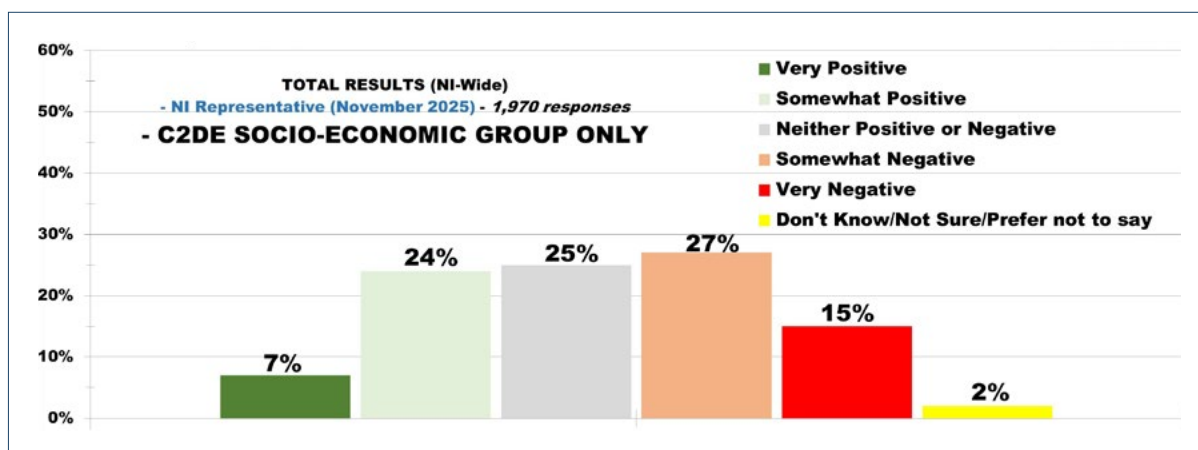
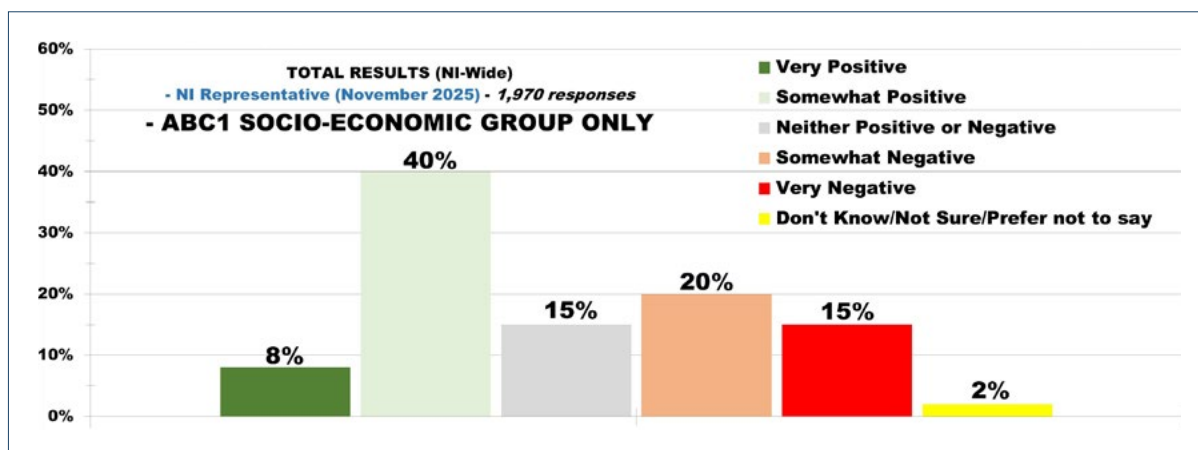
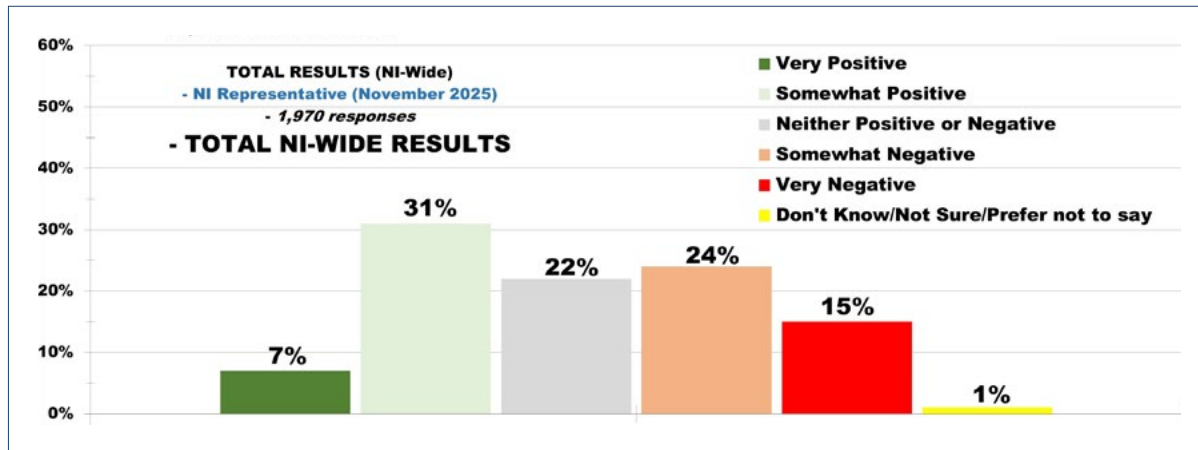
The most popular category of use, 'searching for answers/recommendations' indicates that just under 60pc of the population is using AI for this purpose. Other areas of application are less frequently cited as being used.

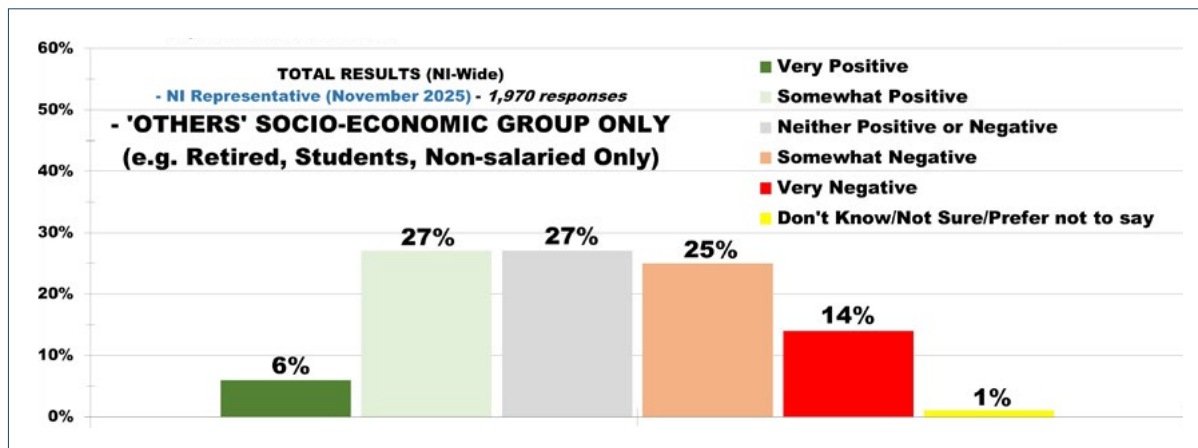
However, across most areas, with the exception of 'companionship or personal advice', there is at least a willingness from a majority of respondents to use AI, which combined with recorded actual use, implies an endorsement of these respective uses.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, responses to the use of AI for 'companionship or personal advice' question are the outlier in terms of relatively low engagement. Affirmative responses to this question may nevertheless indicate the need for further research in this area.

It is notable that there is a stronger pattern of use and willingness to use AI amongst males compared to females and a corresponding pattern of reluctance to use AI amongst females relative to males. This potentially reflects a higher degree of caution towards AI amongst women relative to men.

### Q3. What is your attitude towards Artificial Intelligence?



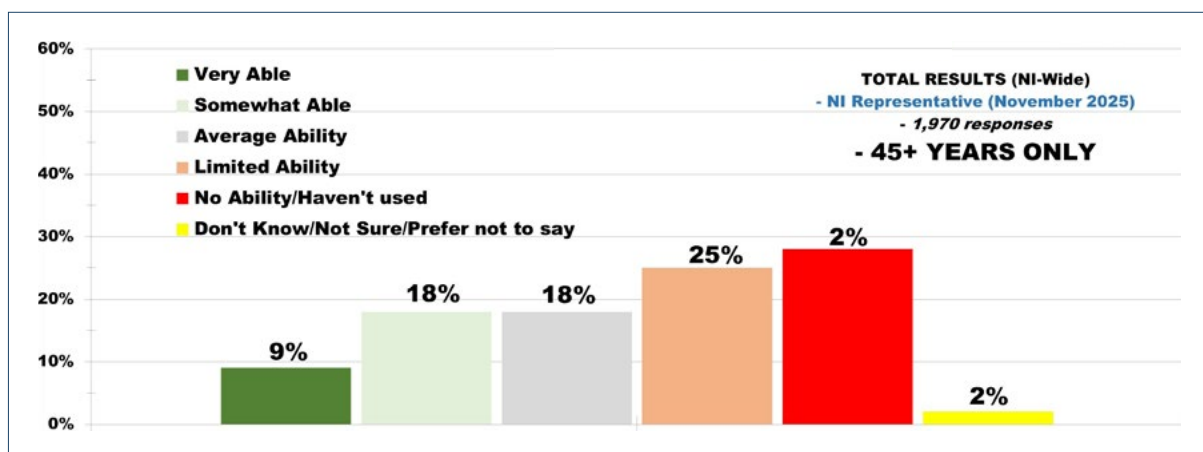
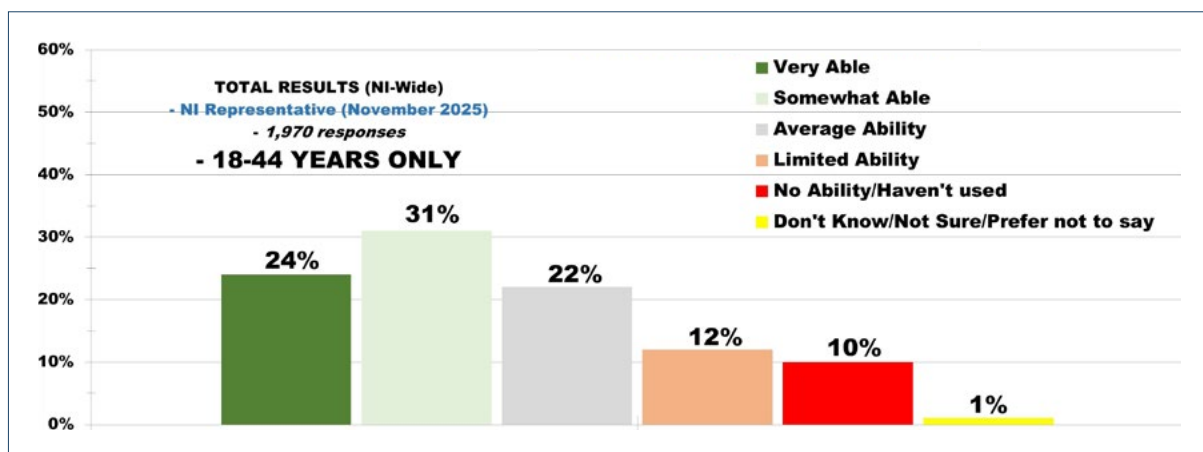
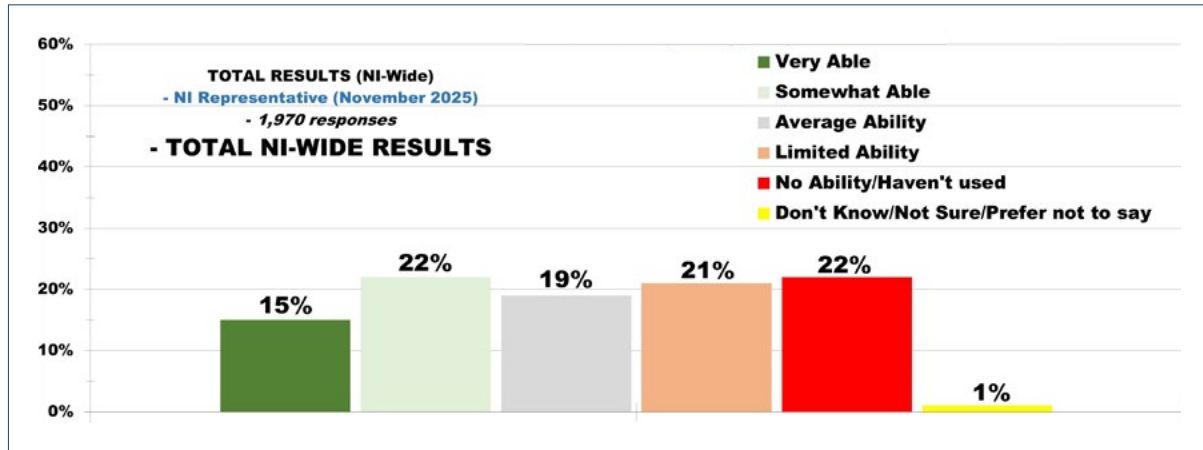


It is noteworthy that attitudes to AI are balanced at 38pc each for the combined figures of 'very positive' and 'positive' and 'very negative' and 'negative' combined.

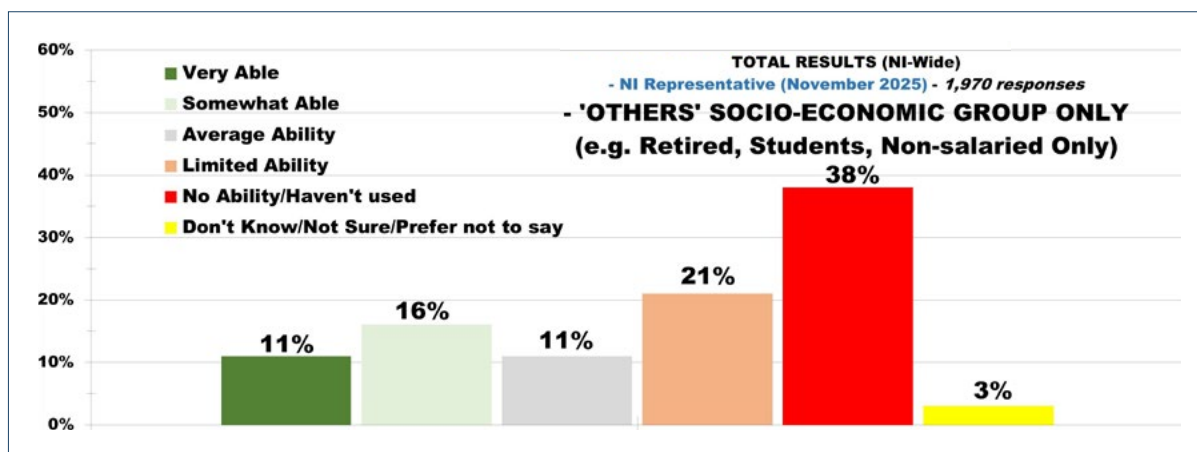
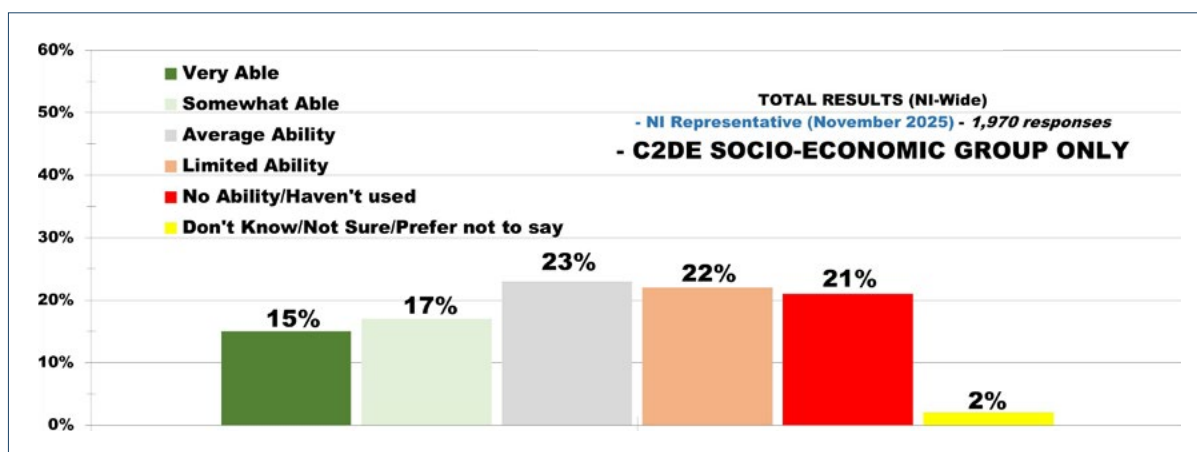
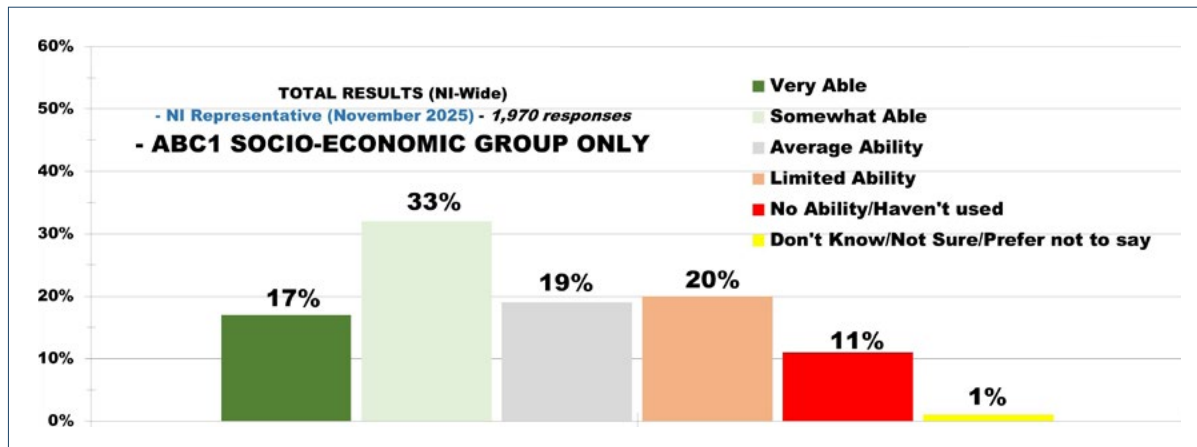
We have included additional graphics to illustrate significant differences in attitudes to AI, based on socio-economic status. There is a pattern of those with ABC1 status being more likely to use AI and more positive about potential uses.

This result should be compared with Question 6 on the opportunities versus risk spectrum and differential responses may be explained by the different framing of the question. Asking both formats of this broad question was a conscious decision.

#### Q4. How able do you feel to use AI effectively and safely?







This question reflects self-perception of AI competencies. Responses are much more evenly spread than with most other questions, indicating a wide range of perceived competency.

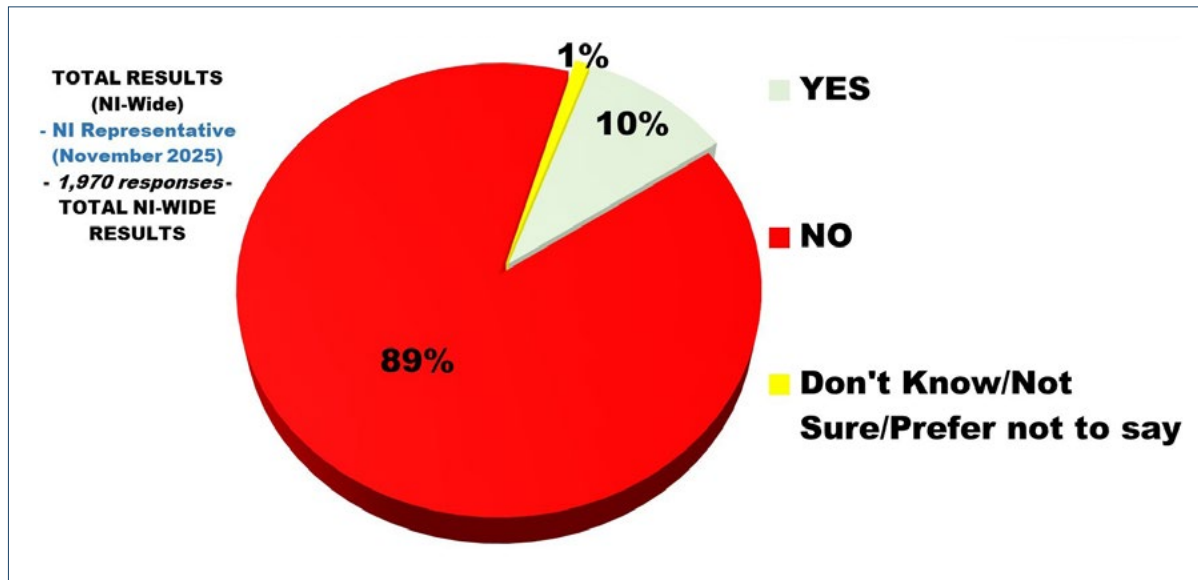
The answers to this question should be considered in conjunction with the following question in relation to engagement with AI-related training. Competence may be developed independently, without access to formal training.

However, the wide range of perceived competence illustrates the need for further training options to be developed and rolled out widely across society.

Whilst the NI-wide figures are evenly spread, there are some key demographic differences.

On this question, gender differences were less pronounced compared to others. However, there are clear differences based on age and socio-economic status, with younger people and ABC1s reporting higher skill levels.

## Q5. Have you had any training in the use of AI?



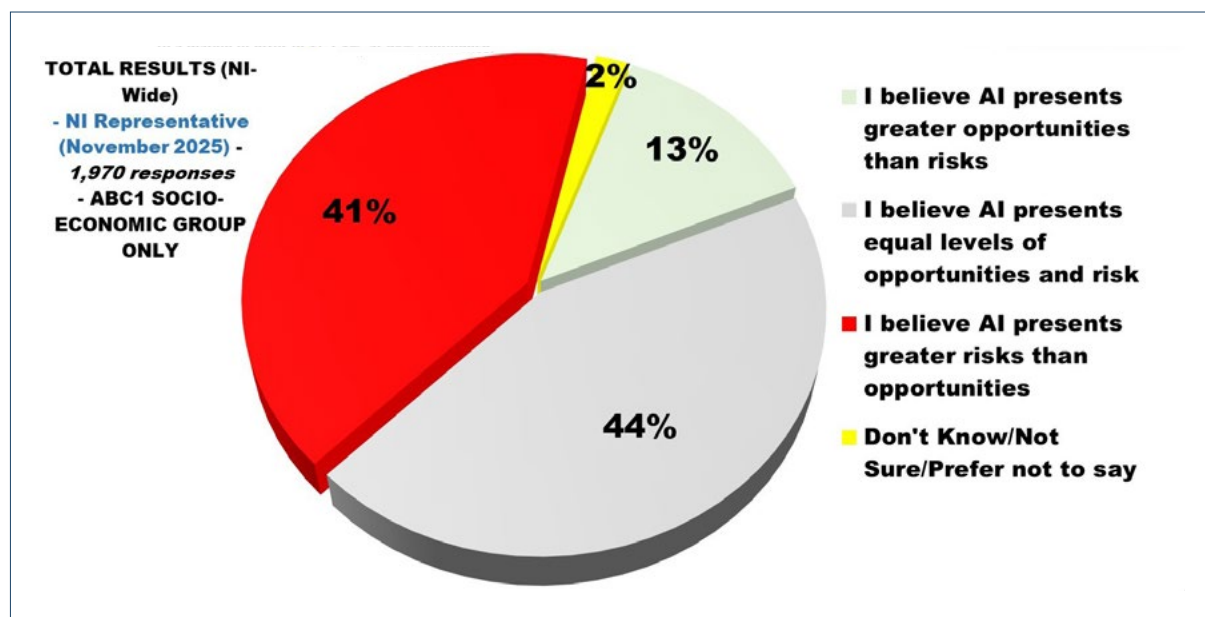
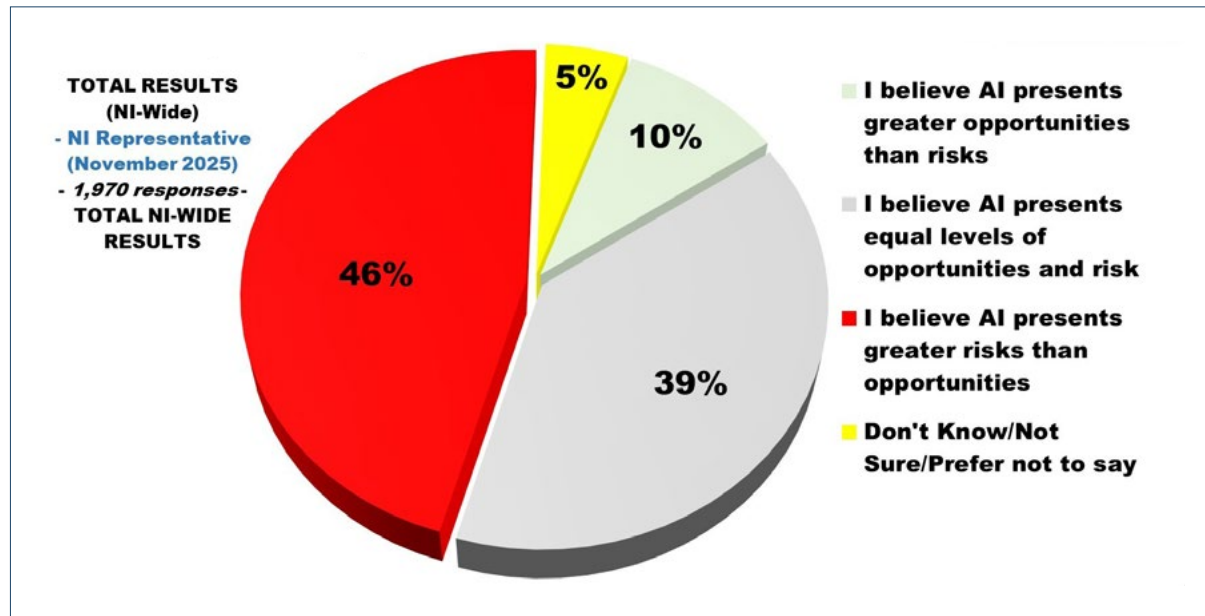
With a 10pc (yes) to 89pc (no) split, there is a very clear differential between those who have and have not had access to any AI-related training. This points to a significant training deficit which raises immediate challenges for the education system and wider upskilling landscape, including through life-long learning.

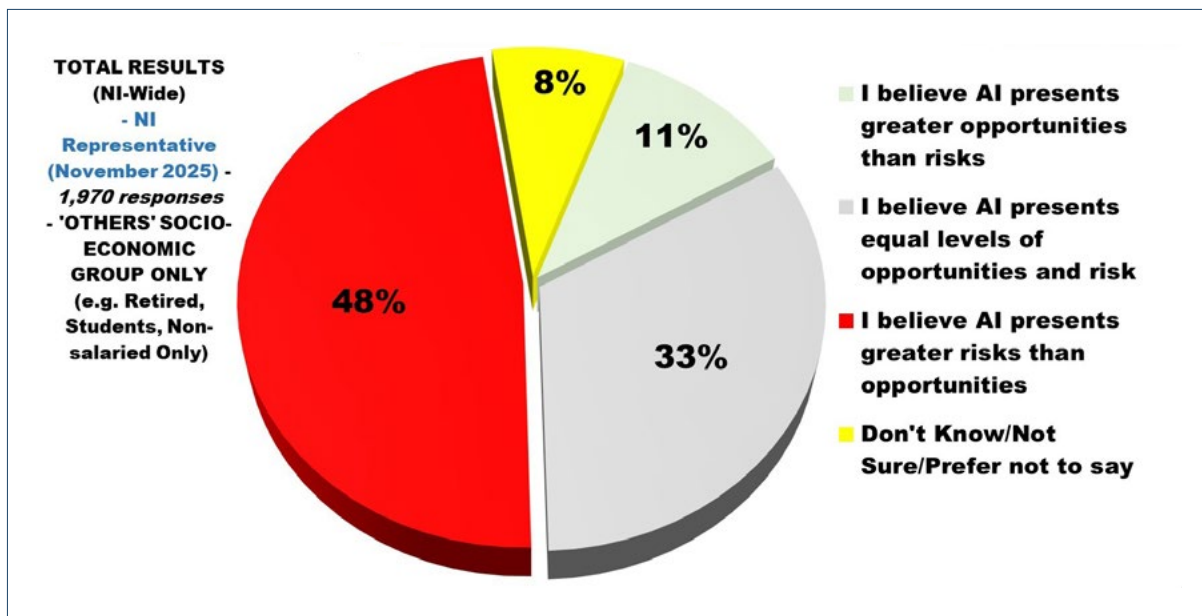
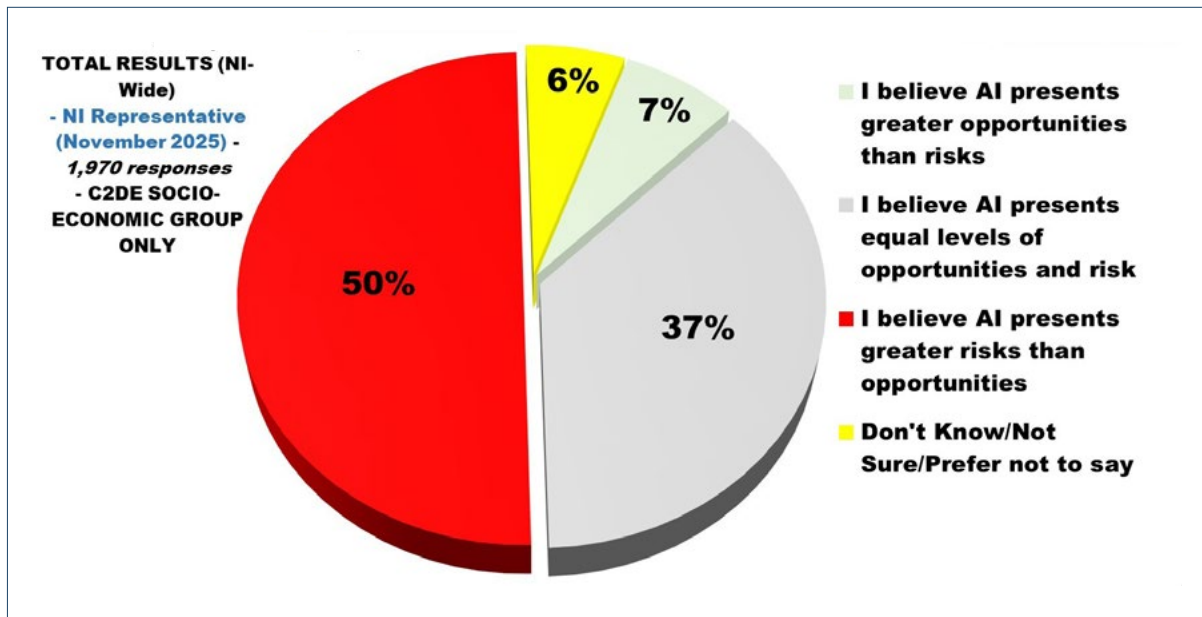
On this particular question, there is little discernible difference in terms of gender. However, there are significant demographic differences in terms of age and socio-economic status.

Regarding age, the split between those who report training compared to no training is 17pc to 83pc for those aged between 18 and 44 years old and, by contrast, 6pc to 93pc for those 45 and over. Younger people therefore appear to have greater access to opportunities to upskilling in this area. It is the nonetheless still a minority who have availed of such opportunity.

In terms of socio-economic status, the respective splits are 18pc to 80pc for ABC1, 5pc to 95pc for C2DE, and 4pc to 95pc for others. This aligns with a relative awareness of AI amongst the ABC1 socio-economic group, as indicated in Question 1, and higher assessment of ability to use AI safely and effectively in Question 4.

## Q6. Opportunity versus risk spectrum





This Question is framed intentionally to be considered in conjunction with the responses to Question 3 on positive versus negative attitudes to AI.

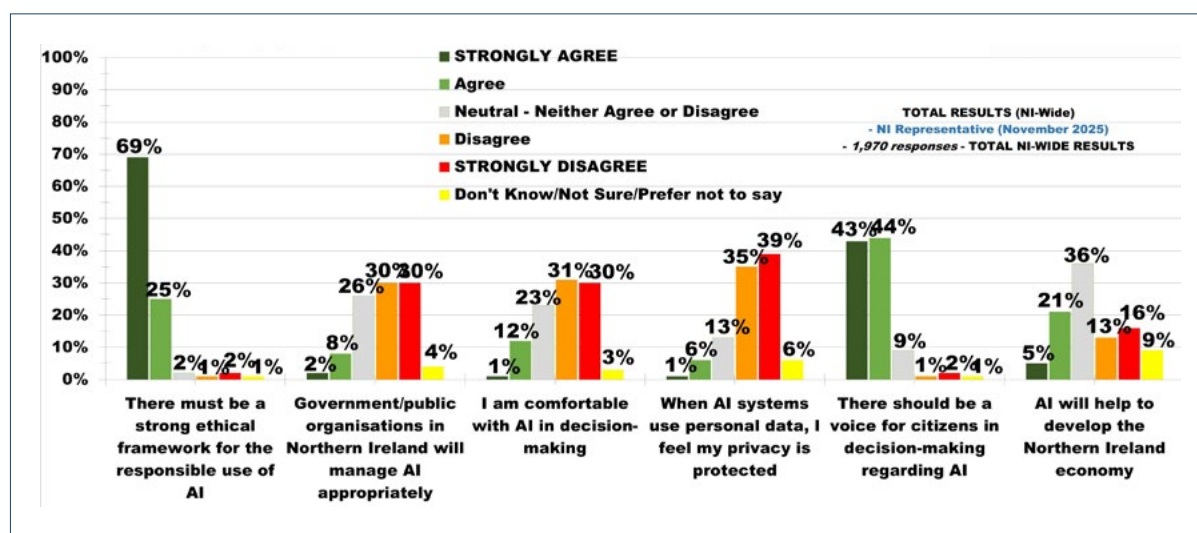
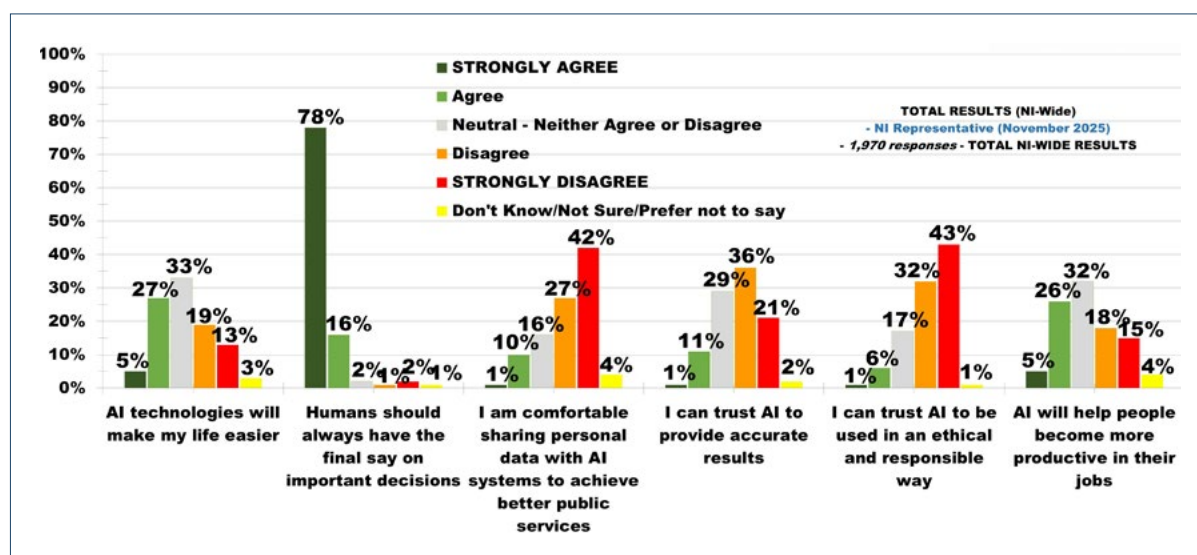
At just 10pc, respondents indicating the view that 'opportunities outweigh risks' is relatively small. By contrast, those perceiving 'risks outweighing opportunities' are at 46pc, with 39pc regarding opportunities and risks are relatively equal. There is therefore a relative risk-aversion towards AI, which is perhaps linked to concerns around trust, privacy and ethics, as well as a deficit of training opportunities and/or perception of competence, both in terms of self and more widely.

There are also some notable differences based upon socio-economic grounds, with ABC 1s as leaning more towards regarding opportunities and risks as equal, whilst close to majority of the other socio-economic categories consider AI as more of a risk than opportunity.

Overall, these results illustrate an emerging pattern of growing AI awareness and use, and mixed perception of opportunities and risks, with a dominance of risk-aversion. This poses challenges for policymakers in relation to developing means for highlighting benefits and other positive impacts, whilst addressing both actual and perceived risks.

## Q7. Assessments against the following Statements

Twelve different propositions were tested within this question, and the Northern Ireland wide results are spread across two graphics.



In this question, respondents were asked to cite their levels of agreement or disagreement with a broad range of statements, as outlined below. The spread of responses varies considerably across the questions answered, but nevertheless some patterns are apparent.

There is overwhelming agreement with the statements "*Humans should always have the final say on important decisions*" and "*There must be a strong ethical framework for the responsible use of AI*" with the majority of respondents indicating that they strongly agree with each statement. There was also clear support for a citizens' voice in decision-making regarding AI.

There was much more mixed or soft support for the following statements:

- AI technologies will make my life easier.
- AI will help to develop the Northern Ireland economy.
- AI will help people become more productive in their jobs.
- These results may reflect an overall uncertainty regarding the scope for ethical and trusted deployment of AI.

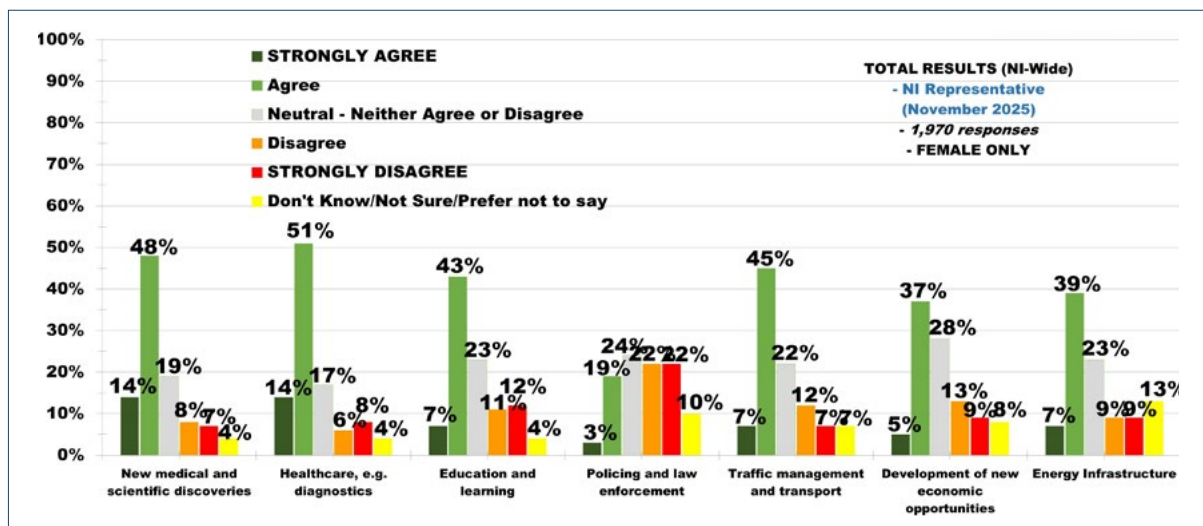
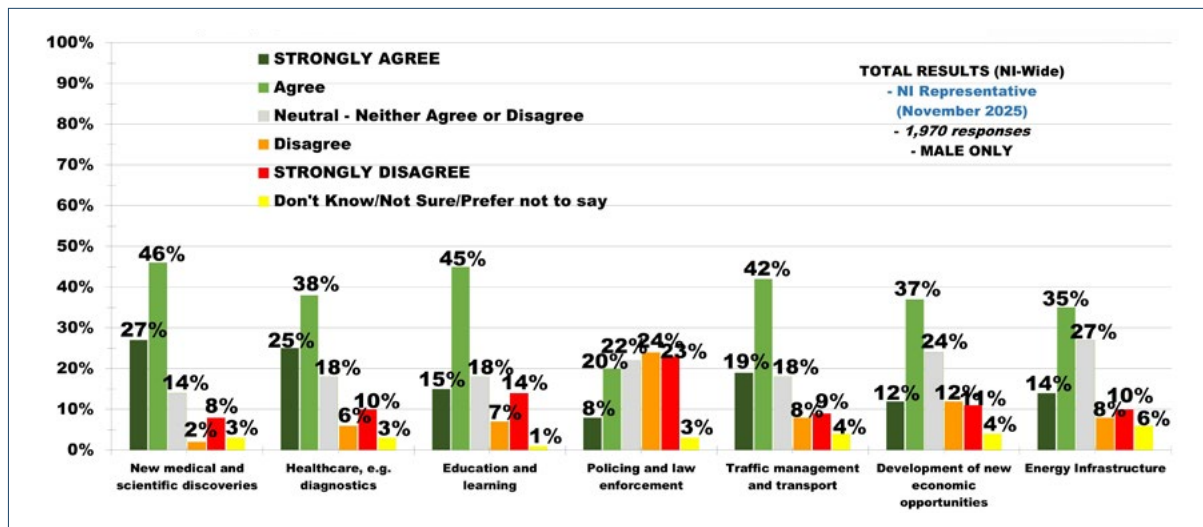
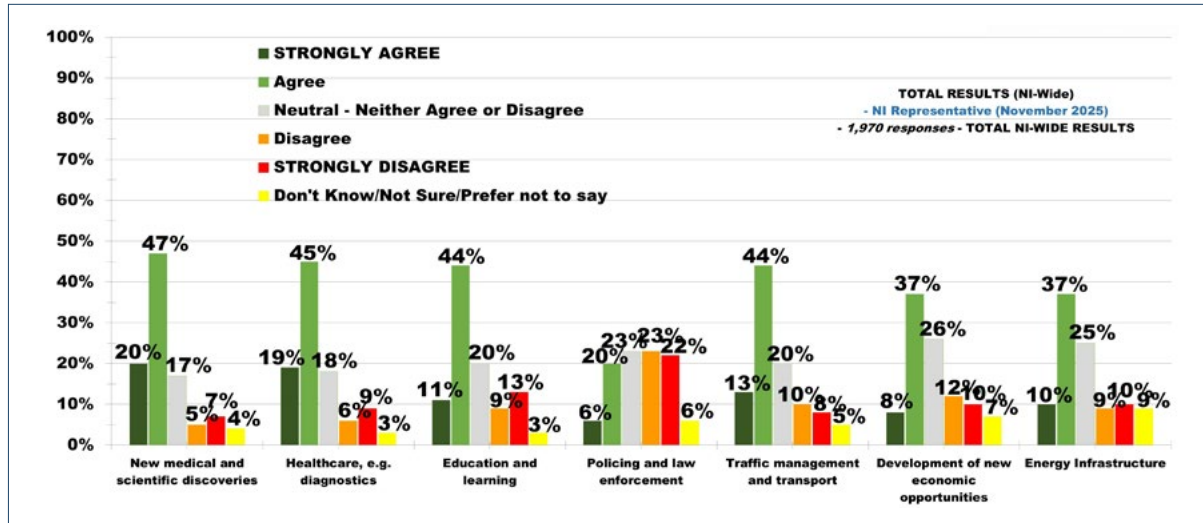
By contrast, there were different degrees of net disagreement with the following statements:

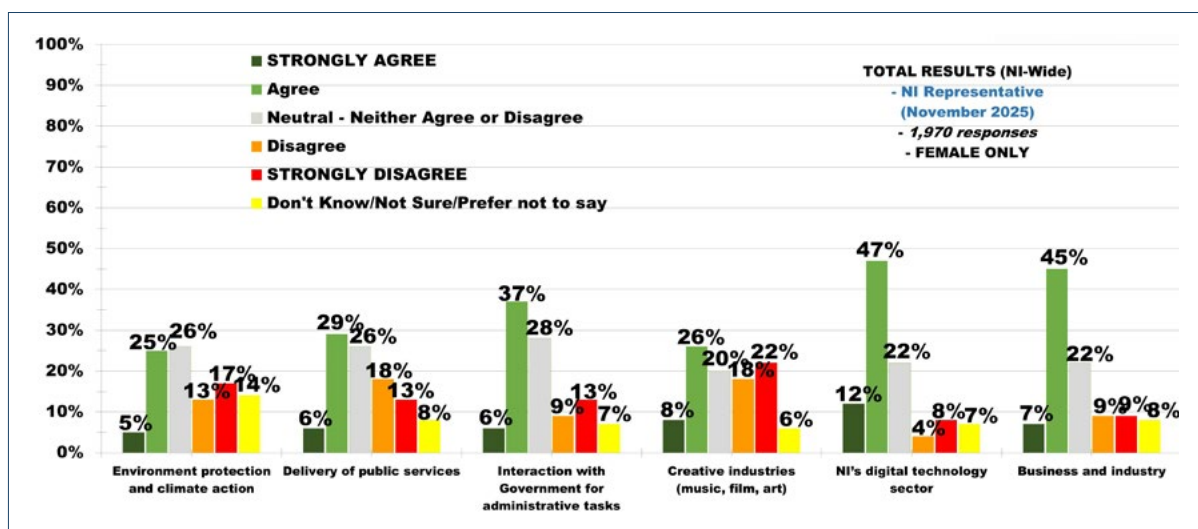
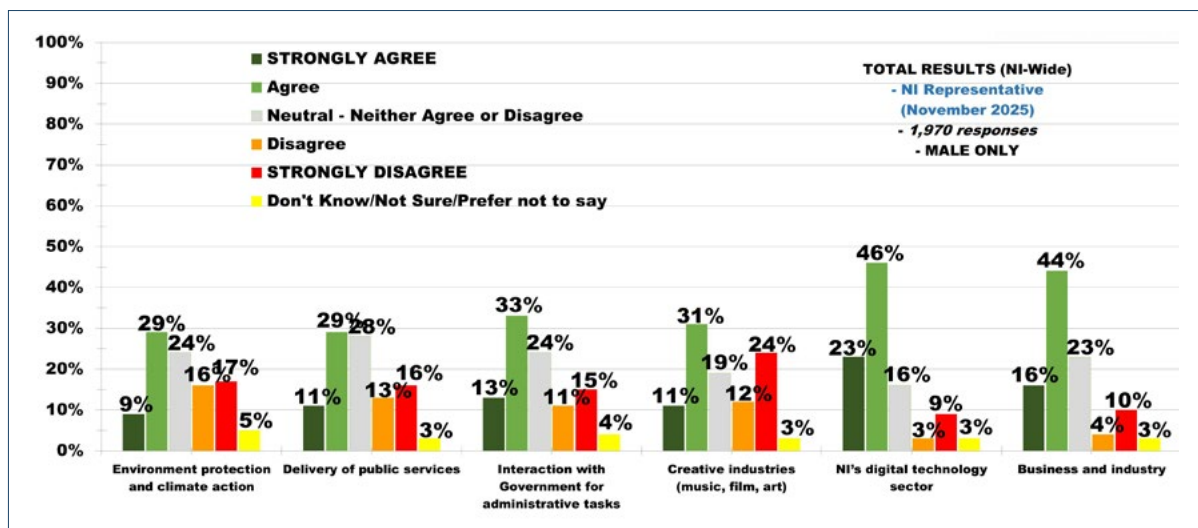
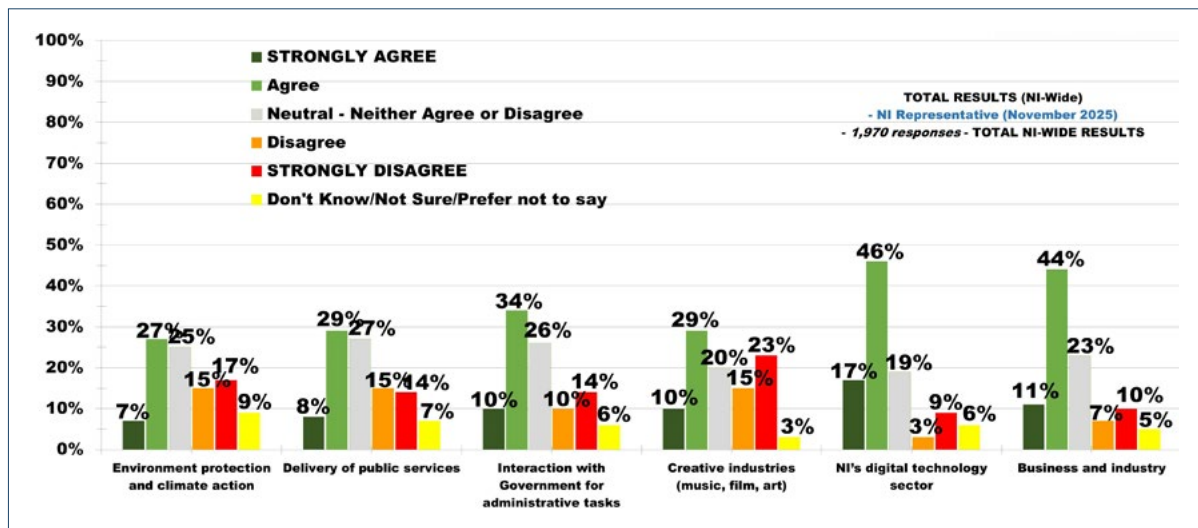
- I am comfortable sharing personal data with AI systems to achieve better public services.
- I can trust AI to provide accurate results.
- I can trust AI to be used in an ethical and responsible way.
- Government/public organisations in Northern Ireland will manage AI appropriately.
- I am comfortable with AI in decision-making
- When AI systems use personal data, I feel my privacy is protected

These results indicate significant deficits in terms of trust in the reliability of AI, the provision of effective guardrails around AI, and how data will be stored or used. This mirrors wider and growing issues of trust between the citizen, government and other institutions. There are clear challenges for government around trust in the specific AI context, alongside other requisite policy responses.



## Q8. In what areas can Artificial Intelligence be beneficial?





Please note that the results of this question are spread out over two sets of graphics, the main NI wide result and accompanying male and female versions.

This question covers a range of potential benefits, which were confined by poll limitations and are not intended to be comprehensive in covering the spectrum of potential uses of AI. We have prioritised applications that could be considered specific to the Northern Ireland devolved space.

There is majority support for half of these options, and at least a plurality of support for all options, with the exception of policing and law enforcement.

The rank order of the combined strongly support and support figures for each option is as follows:

New medical and scientific discoveries	67%
Healthcare, e.g. diagnostics	64%
Digital Technologies	63%
Traffic management and transport	57%
Business and industry	55%
Education and learning	55%
Energy infrastructure	47%
Development of new economic opportunities	45%
Interaction with Government for administrative tasks	44%
Creative industries (music, film, art)	39%
Delivery of public services	35%
Environment protection and climate action	34%
Policing and law enforcement	26%

The most overwhelming support for the beneficial use of AI relates to medical and scientific discoveries and in healthcare, followed by digital technologies. Medicine and healthcare tend to be the most pressing concerns for the electorate, and the potential benefits of AI appear to be relatively well identified.

AI may also be seen as integral to the digital sector, explaining the comparatively high figures for support for the use of AI in digital technology relative to other areas of the economy.

Support for using AI in education and learning is also significant, but potential concerns or uncertainty regarding the implications on how and what children learn may explain the lower figure than, for example, within the health sector.

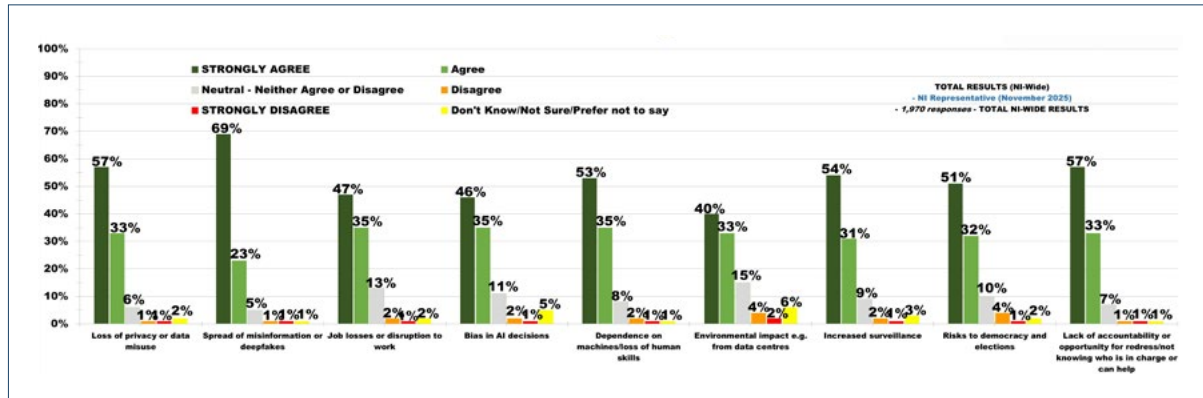
The lower support for the more generic administrative tasks and public services may reflect a need for specificity regarding use and associated benefits.

The relatively suppressed sentiment towards usage of AI within creative industries may reflect concerns regarding the impact upon human creativity and associated copyright debates. Similarly, the relatively low position for environmental protection and climate change may reflect concerns regarding environmental impact of AI, particularly in relation to data centres.

In subsequent work, we plan to compare the Northern Ireland figures to those of other UK and international polls. Amidst this, consideration will be given to how the NI figures compare in terms of support for AI usage in the context of policing/law enforcement. Policing is a particularly sensitive issue in Northern Ireland, and this unique characteristics of our society may mean that we are an outlier in terms of scepticism over the use of AI in these areas.

In common with patterns seen in responses to other questions, there is a gender differential with women being more cautious in recognising the range of potential benefits.

## Q9. Do you agree or disagree that the following are risks with AI?



This question covers a range of potential risks and is not intended to be comprehensive in covering the full spectrum of potential risks. Space limited the number of questions that could be tested, and we opted to highlight issues that could be considered as most pertinent to the human experience.

Notably, respondents overwhelmingly declared that they either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with all of the risks or perceived risks listed.

The rank order of 'strongly agree' is as follows:

Spread of misinformation or deepfakes	69%
Loss of privacy or data misuse	57%
Increased surveillance	54%
Dependence on machines/loss of human skills	53%
Risks to democracy and elections	51%
Job losses or disruption to work	47%
Bias in AI decisions	46%
Environmental impact e.g. from data centres	40%

The rank order of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' combined is as follows:

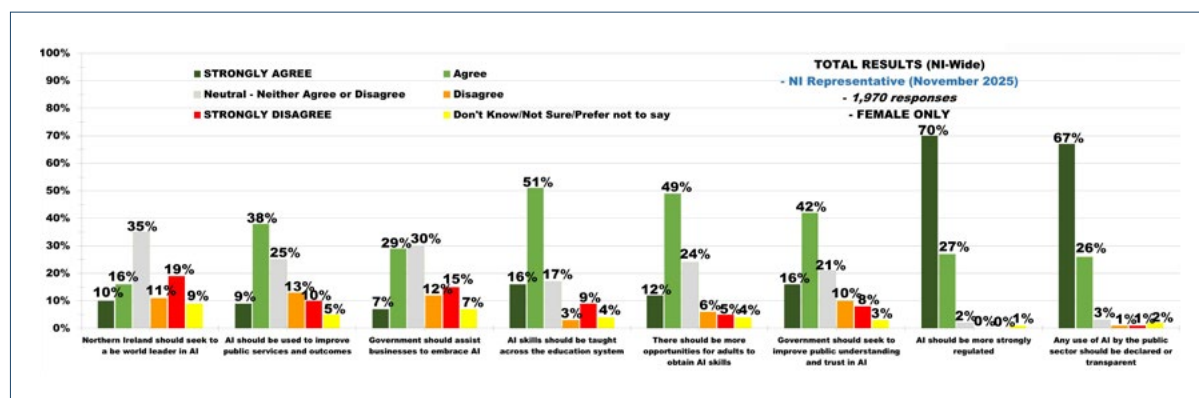
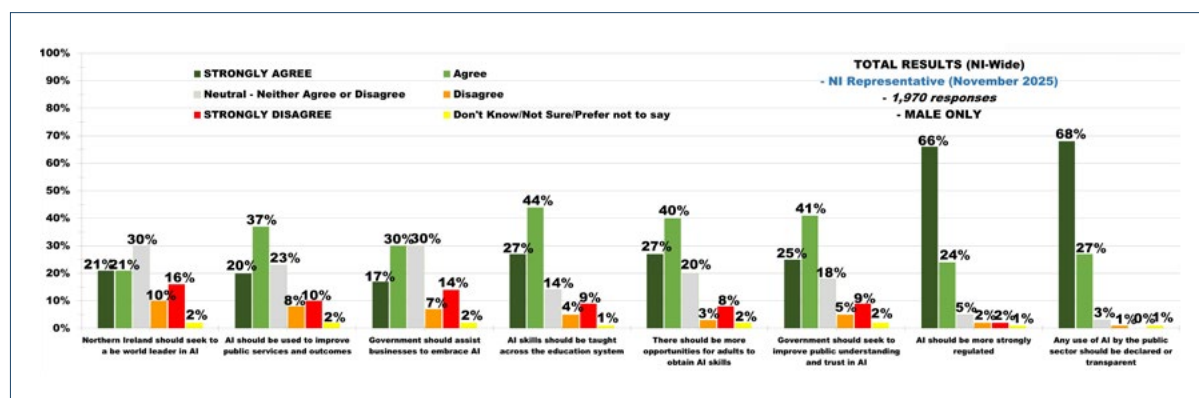
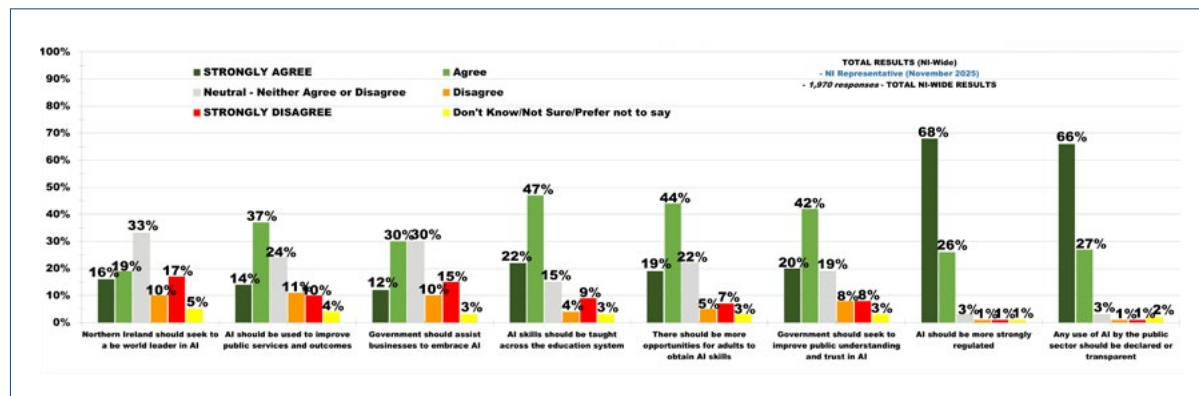
Spread of misinformation or deepfakes	90%
Loss of privacy or data misuse	90%
Dependence on machines/loss of human skills	85%
Job losses or disruption to work	85%
Increased surveillance	85%
Risks to democracy and elections	81%
Bias in AI decisions	81%
Environmental impact e.g. from data centres	73%

Risks or perceived risks that most impact directly on the human integrity or wellbeing emerge as higher concerns in the opinion of respondents.

Relative to the answers to other questions, the numbers of those who strongly agree with the risks associated with AI in relation to misinformation or deepfakes is particularly striking.

Changes to the skills landscape and the job market, around environmental sustainability are very substantive issues arising from the increased adoption of AI. We have considered these aspects in separate sections of our paper *AI for NI: A Strategic Overview for the Adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Northern Ireland*.

## Q10. What is Your View on the following policy measures?



This question offers eight different policy options related to AI, and respondents were asked to indicate their levels of agreement or disagreement. In the graphics, Northern Ireland wide results are provided alongside male and female results to illustrate some different gender perspectives.



The combined 'strongly agree' and 'agree' totals for each policy option in ranked orders is as follows:

AI should be more strongly regulated	94%
Any use of AI by the public sector should be declared or transparent	93%
AI skills should be taught across the education system	69%
There should be more opportunities for adults to obtain AI skills	63%
Government should seek to improve public understanding and trust in AI	62%
AI should be used to improve public services and outcomes	51%
Government should assist businesses to embrace AI	42%
Northern Ireland should seek to a be world leader in AI	35%

Each of the statements received support from either a majority or a plurality of respondents.

There was overwhelming support for the propositions that address actual and perceived challenges with the use of AI, including very strong support for stronger regulation of AI and transparency around its use. The overwhelming majority of respondents to these two options indicated that they 'strongly agree'.

Support is also very clear for propositions that there should be provision of AI skills both across the education system and in terms of other upskilling or lifelong learning opportunities. By contrast, support is softer for the use of AI to improve public services and outcomes and government assisting businesses to embrace AI.

Finally, there was the greatest level of uncertainty on the prospect of NI becoming a world leader in AI. This may reflect the need for evidence of policy interventions, both in terms of taking opportunities and addressing concerns, for this to be perceived as a genuine proposition.



## Qualitative Responses

Respondents had the option to provide comments on the opinion poll and the subject of AI more widely. Those comments received are not necessarily representative of the overall respondents to the opinion poll. One aspect of this is that written comments may come from those who are most engaged with or exercised by Artificial Intelligence. The majority of those making a response tended towards negative comments.

## Word Cloud

This word cloud reflects the key recurring words from all of the comments received.

It is noticeable that there is spread of key words, but 'people' and associated words such as 'human/humans' being central.



## Written Comments

The comments below are a broadly representative sample of the comments received by respondents.

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"I like using AI for various things but I find if you word something even slightly differently you will get a different answer even though the question is essentially the same."

---

"I worry that AI information will not remain impartial and will be used to influence consumers and to nudge us in various controlled directions."

---

"AI will inevitably result in a great many white collar job losses. Yet no effort is being put into replacing those jobs with meaningful alternatives. While the many £millions in lost salaries will negatively impact the whole economy."

---

"With advances in technology we are constantly on the back foot with regulatory processes. AI fakes and misinformation leading to mistrust of what is real."

---

"Interesting, thought-provoking survey."

---

"AI is a massive opportunity but not without risks."

---

"AI has many exciting opportunities to advance technology but it's frightening for people who don't understand the all the risks and potential for it's nefarious misuse. We will all have to embrace it but it needs to be strictly regulated to ensure the public and especially the young and vulnerable aren't exploited, misinformed or misled."

---

"AI has great potential yes, and it has come on in leaps and bounds, especially recently. But it is not perfect (yet?), it is still learning and unfortunately the data it is learning on is, in a way, already corrupted. We need to be educated more in that AI is a tool; we need to check its work! It can give us a good starting point, but we need to use more than one resource! We should not take AI at its word."

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"My answers may seem contradictory. I am deeply ambivalent about AI technology and especially concerned for how it will widen inequalities. Like many technologies it has great potential for good and evil- and humans being what they are, we have to gauge so carefully the downsides before pursuing this."

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"AI knows no borders and is very open to manipulation and bad actors. It presents huge opportunities but it must be regulated much better, although how this will be done is a conundrum for open democracy."

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"Technology has already shown that, without clear, strict regulation, it can be a negative force in people's lives. Worldwide regulation should be enforced to reduce any negative impact on the human race."

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"There are very real benefits in using AI but it should always be disclosed if AI has been used and there needs to be stringent regulation in place governing it's useless. People need to be educated in what's possible with AI as it opens the door to more believable fakes in terms of both information and scams."

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"People should be well aware of how AI regularly gets things wrong, particularly in areas of core importance."

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"There have been no questions on the cost of AI. A huge amount of energy is used to power the databanks involved. Ecological constraints should be considered."

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"AI is a new revolution. It needs to be strongly monitored, and strict rules as to its use, should be transparent, when it comes to civil liberties, and interaction between Government and all citizens."

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"I have a lot of reservations about possible misuse of AI, but this survey points out to me that I am actually more positive about it than I thought I was!"

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"The question isn't as much trust in AI but in the humans using it!"

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"As well as ethical and economic concerns, I am hugely concerned about the huge negative environmental impact of AI, when energy infrastructure is already creaky and the climate is in a precarious state."

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"AI scares me but it seems to be happening."

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"AI should be a tool to enhance skills and knowledge."

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"I think there are many potential benefits in using AI. My biggest concern is the use of AI to spread disinformation and to undermine democracy."

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"I work in tech and have completed a lot of training in AI so am comfortable using it, getting the best out of it and building appropriate queries. It is not something that I would trust, always needs a human to eyeball the results. But for digesting a lot of information really quickly with strict parameters, it's fabulous."

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"AI can provide great benefits but the risks also require attention. New job opportunities will be needed to replace job losses to automation. Machines cannot be allowed to become autonomous and a threat to humanity."

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"Use of AI needs high standards and close oversight with major decisions taken by humans after appropriate consultation with those impacted."

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"There can be no doubt that AI is now very much a part of our everyday lives. We must however take every precaution to protect its use from abusive practise."

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"AI should strongly be supported by the Northern Ireland government because it is the nature future of the world."

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"I believe there are distinct benefits from using AI although perhaps it should be regulated as it depends on who is developing AI & for what purposes. It has the potential to be both beneficial & detrimental."

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"It is with us and like any huge advance in the past such as computers or mobile phones AI should be embraced particularly as there is potential to solve man's greatest difficulties like world poverty, disease, incurable illnesses, etc. I believe the benefits far outweigh the negatives."

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"Artificial Intelligence is an extension of information literacy. Not to have an awareness of it, and how it can be used, will be a form of illiteracy in the future."

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"I have to declare that my knowledge of AI is extremely limited. I'm very aware that I need to develop my understanding of how it can enhance /support all our lives."

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"AI and its development is inevitable, and it would therefore be best to fully understand and embrace asap"

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"All technology can be used for good or bad. In this case, the bad stands out a lot further than the potential benefits. It has the potential to make a huge amount of money for those who already have too much, and cause a lot more harm to those who have currently far too little. I base my thoughts on how I believe it will be used."

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"I am deeply concerned that AI will undermine human intelligence with dangerous consequences for society and, ultimately, the future of the human race. Its malign influence in education is already apparent."

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"Public information on what AI is and how it works and how to use it."

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"AI should be funded to assist in cancer diagnosis /reoccurrence."

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"AI has positives. However, the negatives will eventually far outweigh the benefits in terms of human capital. This will destroy much of the work environment for humans."

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"AI needs to be a tool, a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Human oversight remains essential."

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# Key Findings

There are a number of core themes that emerge from our poll.

- Poll results indicate that there is a reasonably high level of self-declared awareness of AI in NI, with 83% being at least 'somewhat aware'.
- However, respondents' self-assessed competency or literacy in the 'safe and effective use of AI', represents a more split profile, indicating hesitancies around standards or safety of usage, with only 15% stating that they are 'very able'.
- Responses demonstrate a stark deficit of training in AI (89% have had none), indicating a need for an urgent policy imperative regarding up/re-skilling. There is a clear AI readiness gap.
- With regards to attitudes, perceptions, and policy preferences, there is a mixed and sometimes conflicted response profile, perhaps reflecting uncertainty and apprehension around the potential impacts of AI.
- The responses reflect public recognition and optimism for the potential for AI to positively impact the economy and public services. There is a significant recognition that AI will be beneficial for healthcare, science and education.
- Consistently, views on actual or perceived risks are generally more strongly held. Trust levels are currently very low. In particular, there is greater sensitivity to actual or perceived risks that impact on individual well-being, and a corresponding desire for humans to retain control and for a strong ethical framework.
- People are not rejecting AI – they are demanding responsible, transparent, human-led governance. This has clear implications for policymakers, public services and industry.
- Respondents' awareness, usage/willingness to use, self-identified skills competency, and attitudes and perception indicate significant differentials based on gender, age, and socio-economic status. There is evidence of an emerging digital divide.
- Responses indicate public support for a range of policy interventions, particularly those that mitigate risks, increase regulation, improve transparency, and provide skilling opportunities.

# Policy Implications

An AI revolution is underway which is set to accelerate changes in how we lead our lives and in relation to our economy, society and wider understanding and knowledge.

Whilst there is a variable recognition of those opportunities, there is considerable unease around matters such as trust, transparency, and the protection of data, and concern around a number of risks or perceived risks.

There is a dual challenge for policymakers in terms of capturing the opportunities that AI presents for the economy and more productive and effective public services, whilst identifying and mitigating risks. Fundamentally, the poll results and wider context indicate an imminent policy imperative regarding investment in local digital and AI skills to exploit opportunities and mitigate labour market risks.

Some of the immediate implications for policymakers arising from the results of this opinion poll are outlined below. These reflections should be considered in conjunction with the recommendations of our report, *AI for NI: A Strategic Overview for the Adoption of Artificial Intelligence in Northern Ireland* (May 2025).<sup>3</sup>

- Recognition of the existing levels of support for the adoption or use of AI in areas of the economy and public services should provide confidence for intensification of activity in those areas.
- Further work is required to explain the rationale for AI adoption in areas where there is less support but nevertheless there are net benefits in terms of enhanced productivity, and more efficient and effective outcomes. A process to capture and communicate beneficial outcomes from the deployment of AI could be helpful in this regard.
- Skill levels regarding competency or literacy in AI are relatively low. There is a clear need for interventions across the education system, with appropriate offerings at primary, post-primary and tertiary levels, and via other upskilling measures and life-long learning opportunities.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.ulster.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/1735992/AIforNI-AStrategicOverviewFullDocument.pdf](https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1735992/AIforNI-AStrategicOverviewFullDocument.pdf)

- Policymakers should recognise the digital divide in terms of knowledge, usage and skill levels across gender, age and socio-economic status, and therefore design and implement policies to mitigate this risk, such as through ensuring equality of access and opportunity to AI training opportunities within the education system.
- The poll results reinforce the NI Executive's commitment to ensure that the deployment of AI being placed with a strong ethical framework focused around safe and responsible use. In particular, attention should be paid to demonstrating how concerns expressed by the public will be addressed, and how perceived or actual risks will be mitigated.
- Given the level of unease over many aspects of the adoption and use of AI, there is a strong basis for the development of communication plans from government, public agencies and other organisations operating in the public square.
- Information should be provided on where and how AI is used in the delivery of public services and other respects in order to address desires for enhanced transparency, building upon some of the systems used in other jurisdictions.
- Steps are required to provide greater reassurance on the management and use of data. This can be addressed through current NI Executive and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) work on the organisation and deployment of data.
- AI needs to be democratised, with a commitment to citizen engagement in terms of shaping the overall framework in which AI is developed and used.
- AI knowledge, usage, skill levels and training participation levels, alongside wider attitudes and perceptions should be tracked and assessed on a rolling basis to assess the impact of communications and engagement activities.
- There is a clear desire within public opinion for enhanced regulation of AI. There is scope to explore in further work what options are for regulation, and what aspects people would wish to prioritise. It should be noted that many of the levers in this regard lie beyond the scope of the NI institutions.
- Ultimately, progress in the adoption of AI within the economy and public services needs to be reinforced by broad-based popular consent in order to be trusted and sustainable.

# Methodology

This poll was commissioned by the Ulster University Strategic Policy Unit from the Belfast based polling and market research company LucidTalk.

Polling was carried out online for a period of 4 days from 8th to 11th November 2025. The project targeted the established Northern Ireland (NI) LucidTalk online Opinion Panel (16,800+ members) which is balanced by gender, age-group, area of residence, and community background, in order to be demographically representative of Northern Ireland. 1,970 full responses were received. A data auditing process was then carried out to ensure all completed poll-surveys were genuine 'one-person, one-vote' responses, along with a preliminary weighting to obtain a NI balanced sample, and this resulted in 1,050/1,051 responses being considered and verified as the base data-set (unweighted). Then in order to produce a robust and accurate balanced NI representative sample, this base data-set of 1,050/1,051 responses was then weighted by gender, community background and additional demographic measurements to reflect the demographic composition of Northern Ireland resulting in the weighted data tables and weighted results set i.e. the final results - 1,050 responses (weighted - model dataset) and these are the results presented in this report. All data results produced are accurate to a margin of error of  $\pm 2.3\%$ , at 95% confidence. NB all surveys and polls July be subject to sources of error, including, but not limited to sampling error, coverage error, and measurement error. All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting.

Data was weighted to the profile of all NI adults aged 18+. Data was weighted by age, sex, socio-economic group (using data from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency - NISRA), previous voting patterns (i.e. turnout probability), constituency, constitutional position, party support and religious affiliation. This resulted in a robust and accurate balanced NI representative sample, reflecting the demographic composition of Northern Ireland, resulting in 1,050 responses being considered in terms of the final weighted results - these are the results presented in this report. Data was weighted using a raking algorithm, in R, otherwise known as iterative proportional fitting or sample-balancing. Raking ratio estimation is a method for adjusting the sampling weights of the sample data based on known population characteristics.

Two weights were calculated. These are the normal weight and the trimmed weight – with the trimmed weight being the one that we use in the results tables shown in this report. The trimmed weight is preferable as it reduces the influence of outlying observations. The total amount trimmed is divided among the observations that were not trimmed, so that the total weight remains the same.



The weights are trimmed at 64 and 0.1 meaning that no observation is allowed to exceed these limits of relative importance.

For this poll-project weights were used as follows: These were/are calculated from data such as the 2016 EU Referendum, the 2017 Northern Ireland (NI) Assembly Election, the 2017 NI Westminster election, the 2019 NI European Election, the 2019 NI Westminster election, the 2022 NI Assembly Election, and the 2024 NI Westminster election, plus NI census 2021 estimates, and electorate election figures for gender, age, religion, constituency etc. plus previous polling information and results from LucidTalk NI polls in the last 5 years for party and constitutional position.

LucidTalk (and/or its officers) are members of the British Polling Council (BPC), the UK Market Research Society (UK MRS), and ESOMAR (European Society of Market Research organisations). The BPC are the primary UK professional body ensuring professional Polling and Market Research standards. All polling, research, sampling, methodologies used, market research projects and results and reports production are, and have been, carried out to the professional standards laid down by the BPC and also (as published) of AIMRO (Association of Irish Market Research Organisations).



# About the Authors

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Professor Farry has served as an elected representative in various levels between 1993 and 2024, including holding office as local government councillor, Mayor, member of the Northern Ireland Assembly and a Member of Parliament. Between 2011 and 2016, he was the Minister for Employment and Learning on the Northern Ireland power-sharing Executive.

He participated in the negotiations that resulted in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (1998) and has been involved in many subsequent negotiations in relation to the Northern Ireland peace and political process. He has also been a consultant for the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs.

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Dr Carson has served as a Senior Parliamentary Adviser in the House of Commons and as a Special Adviser to the Minister of Agriculture, the Environment and Rural Development in the Northern Ireland Executive.

Previously, she was a Senior Economist within the Economic Policy Centre at UU, and subsequently a Course Director at the Business School. She has also been a Senior Economist with Oxford Economics, an Economist in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, a committee subject specialist in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and worked in corporate banking.

She has been involved in negotiations between the UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive on a financial package for the devolved government, and participated in political meetings with UK Ministers, including the current and previous Prime Ministers.

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## About SPU

The Ulster University Strategic Policy Unit undertakes strategic policy analysis and engages with academia and policymakers, to inform policy and drive outcomes for the betterment of Northern Ireland and beyond.

## Disclaimer

This report reflects the views of its authors and does not necessarily reflect the institutional position of Ulster University.

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