

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE – TERTIARY EXAMINATIONS – STANDARD & PROTOCOL

(No. B/583) Mr J. B. Léopold (Second Member for Rodrigues) asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to Artificial Intelligence, she will state the measures/protocols her Ministry proposes to develop to control the use thereof at the tertiary education level with a view to maintaining the standard of the examinations in our educational system.

The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun): Mr Speaker, Sir, artificial intelligence is increasingly transforming various aspects of education, providing new opportunities to enhance learning, teaching and administrative processes.

However, generative AI with its ability to autonomously create content presents both exciting opportunities and significant challenges in education. Post pandemic, a wide array of open AI sources, software and applications such as Chat GPT and Microsoft Copilot have been increasingly used.

In the education sector, students have readily embraced these AI tools as part of their educational journeys to enhance their learning and so have educators and lecturers as part of their teaching experiences. Mr Speaker, Sir, as stated in the UNESCO document, Generative Artificial Intelligence in education: Think piece, despite its numerous benefits, the integration of generative AI in education presents several challenges.

Ethical concerns are significant, ranging from over reliance on AI tools, reduced engagement and active learning and a possible decline in critical thinking and problem solving skills to issues related to data privacy and intellectual property rights. There is a need to harness AI's potential while safeguarding educational standards and ethical considerations. It must be highlighted that at the international level, UNESCO recently produced the first ever global standard on AI ethics: the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, a framework adopted by all 193 Member States. It stresses that governments must ensure that use of AI always adheres to the principles of safety, inclusion, diversity, transparency and quality.

In fact, not later than in May 2024, a UNESCO global survey of over 450 schools and universities found that fewer than 10% have developed institutional policies or formal guidance concerning the use of generative AI applications. Mr Speaker, Sir, controlling the use of AI in tertiary education to maintain examination standards is indeed complex and yet crucial. Our high education institutions are aware of the challenges and risk associated with AI tools, particularly regarding, assessments, student's evaluation and academic integrity.

To address these concerns, high education institutions have so far proactively integrated technological tools and established internal guidelines such as regulations on academic dishonesty to safeguard the standards of assignments, coursework, projects and examinations.

Tools like Turnitin and SafeAssign are employed to ensure academic integrity and originality in students' projects submissions. These software, along with the traditional role of checking for plagiarism, are now also able to detect contents created with it AI. It is important to note that there are acceptable limits for similarity indices concerning generative AI matches in dissertations and other assignments. In addition to these digital safeguards, high education institutions in Mauritius have clear guidelines on viva voce examinations for all students. Universities appoint external examiners to moderate scripts and examinations ensuring that marking schemes and results are of the highest standards and free from bias.

Mr Speaker, Sir, my Ministry is currently working on the use of AI in higher education. An internal technical committee has been set up to prepare the relevant guidelines based on the guidance document from UNESCO for policy-makers. HEIs in Mauritius will need to review the valuation process to ensure that students have a good mastery of the topics they are quizzed in their assignments. More weighting will be placed on value addition by candidates on topics presented than on content. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

Mr Speaker: Yes, please.

Mr Léopold: Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister inform the House whether there will be a new role of educator in regard to AI Automating Processes?

Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun: Mr Speaker, Sir, educators will obviously have to be trained because it is a new situation and the educators, as I have just stated, as well as the lecturers – because we were talking about the tertiary sector – will be recommended to review their assessment mode, their evaluation mode and to lay more emphasis on value addition than on content. With the new Apps that are available, it is now possible to even detect whether any piece of work has been generated from AI.