1. AI.RDN+ Events December 2026

These online events mark the beginning of a new series of online and in-person activities designed to support postgraduate researchers (PGRs) across Yorkshire and Midlands universities to understand and navigate AI in their research, and to make defensible decisions about its use which reflect the principles of research integrity.

Where places are limited, priority will be given to PGRs and staff involved in PGR development and support at AI.RDN+ partner institutions.

We are also recruiting for PGRs and staff to run activities exploring AI in 2027 – you don't need to be an expert, we also want to hear from people who would like to share what is (and isn't) working for them. For further details please see AI.RDN+ speakers and contributors - expression of interest.

The Anatomy of Generative AI.

Prof. Serge Sharoff (University of Leeds)

7 December 2026 11:00 – 12:00 Online (Teams)

With the rise in quality of output from AI tools, some people claim the arrival of Singularity when machines become smarter than the smartest humans. Other people claim that Generative AI tools are merely a version of autocomplete on steroids. In my talk I will explore the trajectory of the last hundred years of research into Language Models with the aim to balance understanding of the opportunities and challenges arising from their use, specifically for the purposes of conducting research and reporting research findings.

Beyond the Prompt: Reclaiming Academic Agency in the Age of AI

Prof. Antonio Martinez-Arboleda (University of Leeds)

15 December 2026 13:00 – 15:00 Online (Teams)

This workshop explores the customisation of generative artificial intelligence (AI) as a way to reassert academic agency in a context of disempowerment and uncertainty about AI's role in education, research and other knowledge-intensive human activities.

Participants will learn about the principles, potential, practicalities and limitations of educational customisation by examining and discussing real examples across a range

of platforms. By introducing key AI concepts and presenting interfaces that require no coding to design customised AI tools, the workshop will challenge the perception that such interventions are beyond academics' reach. It will also make the case that the most important expertise required in AI customisation is the researcher's and educator's applied knowledge of their own subjects.

Alongside this practical exploration, discussions will centre on the technopolitical dimensions of AI adoption in universities and the roles of researchers, educators and institutions. Knowledge sustainability, openness, knowledge equity and digital autonomy will inform this critical examination.

Register for the session(s) here.

2. Call for expressions of interest: AI.RDN+ speakers and contributors

AI.RDN+ is developing an events programme for postgraduate researchers (PGRs) across its network of 20 universities in Yorkshire and the Midlands.

We welcome contributions from current PGRs, researchers at all career stages and professional services colleagues, bringing practical experience, specialist expertise or critical perspectives. You do not need to be an AI specialist: if you have thought carefully about AI in your own research, supervision or role, you are likely to have something worth sharing.

The aim is to help PGRs decide whether, when and how to use AI in their research, making informed, defensible judgements grounded in research integrity.

Who could contribute

Contributions might come from any of the groups below. These are starting points rather than limits, so please get in touch if your idea does not fit neatly.

If you are a doctoral researcher, and there is something related to your use (or non-use) of AI – a technique, a strategy, a framework, or a lesson learned along the way – that you think other PGRs could benefit from, please do apply. We particularly welcome peer-led workshops that guide fellow PGRs through practical examples of AI use and the decisions involved: for example, how you checked the output of an AI-assisted literature search, how you agreed boundaries on AI use with your supervisor, or why you decided not to use AI for part of your project. You do not need to be an expert or near the end of your doctorate. First-hand experience of working through these decisions is exactly what other PGRs want to hear about. Proposals from pairs or small groups of PGRs are welcome, and we are happy to talk through ideas at any stage.

If you supervise or examine doctoral research, you could share how you guide students on appropriate AI use, how you approach AI use in thesis assessment and the viva, or how expectations differ across disciplines.

If you are a researcher with relevant expertise, whether in AI itself or in using it within your field, you could offer a talk or workshop on a method, tool or critical perspective, such as AI-assisted qualitative or quantitative analysis, working with archives and large text collections, writing and testing code, or the limits of AI in your discipline.

If you work in a graduate school, doctoral college, library, research integrity or research data team, you could share institutional policy and guidance, or practical advice on topics such as declaring AI use, data protection, copyright and responsible research practice.

Formats, locations and topics

The programme will include expert talks with Q&A and hands-on workshops, delivered online or in person at partner universities across the network as well as at the University of Leeds. If your institution would be interested in hosting an in-person event, please let us know. Suggestions for other formats, such as panel discussions or collaborative activities, are also welcome.

We are also interested in recruiting subject matter experts to contribute to or review online learning resources.

Contributions can be cross-disciplinary or discipline-specific. Topics might fall under themes such as:

- **Understanding AI:** how AI tools work, what they can and cannot do, and how to evaluate them.
- **Integrity and responsibility:** ethics, transparency and declaring AI use, intellectual property, data privacy and security, and sustainability.

- **AI across the research process:** literature reviews, data collection and analysis, writing and coding.
- **AI in your discipline:** applications, conventions and debates specific to your field, from laboratory and clinical research to the social sciences, arts and humanities.

Other ideas are encouraged. We anticipate a focus on cross-disciplinary topics in late 2026 and early 2027, with greater emphasis on discipline-specific topics from spring 2027 onwards.

An honorarium will be offered to contributors, including PGRs. Reasonable travel expenses will also be covered for those contributing to in-person events.

How to express interest

To express interest, please **complete this form** by 4 December which asks for your name, role and institution, together with a few sentences about your idea, relevant experience and what PGRs would gain, and your preferred format, online or in-person delivery, and likely availability, if known. There will be another call for contributors around Easter 2027.

Early-stage ideas are welcome. For an informal conversation about a potential contribution, contact Richard de Blacquiere-Clarkson at r.clarkson1@leeds.ac.uk.

3. AI.RDN+ Newsletter

Artificial Intelligence Researcher Development Network Plus (AI.RDN+), is a research project spanning across **20 partner universities** (Midlands Innovation and Yorkshire Universities) with the aim of **learning how doctoral researchers use GenAI**, **rewarding best practices** and **translating this new knowledge into resources accessible to everyone across the doctoral ecosystem**.

Only one year into our project, we have organised four major events (**a webinar** and **a conference**, attended by Researcher Developers, Postgraduate Researchers, VC/PVCs, Deans, Directors and Managers of Doctoral Schools and other HE professionals from Midlands Innovation, Yorkshire Universities and beyond, and **two hands-on PGR workshops on GenAI in doctoral research** in collaboration with Hitachi Solutions and Microsoft), as well as a series of consultation activities (focus groups and interviews with doctoral researchers from across Midlands Innovation and Yorkshire Universities).

If you would like to receive updates on our latest news, planned activities and ways to get involved, please **subscribe here**.