Correspondence

Students need AI-free spaces to learn core skills

In his World view, Marc Schmitt argues that if universities teach students to argue with artificial-intelligence systems and assess their debating skills, and if developers offer learning modes, then students will use such tools as a sparring partner rather than as an oracle (see *Nature* **657**, 575; 2026). Concerns about loss of critical-thinking skills are, he says, "aimed at the wrong object": as with the calculator, students' abilities will "come out sharper".

But children learn arithmetic before they are handed a calculator, so that they do not rely on the machine while developing their calculation skills. AI poses two unique problems. Students can rely on it for many cognitive tasks and nobody can verify how much they delegate. Its proper use thus depends on students' good will and, as long as results are graded, using it as an oracle is rewarded.

Schmitt's proposal therefore falls short. Evaluating how students argue with one AI model shows little when reading, questioning and arguing can be outsourced to another. I agree that we need to improve AI literacy.

But, more urgently, universities need to provide supervised AI-free spaces and tasks in which students acquire the core skills that academic education develops. The danger is that these abilities will be outsourced to technology before they are acquired.

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Chile's postdoc rules risk driving talent away

The Chilean National Research and Development Agency (ANID) has released the rules for its 2027 Postdoctoral Fellowship Programme, the country's main funding scheme for early-career researchers. For the first time, eligibility is restricted to Chilean citizens and foreign researchers who already hold permanent residency. Applicants intending to obtain residency after receiving the fellowship are excluded.

This requirement is fundamentally incompatible with the purpose of a postdoctoral programme: to foster scientific excellence through international mobility and the attraction of talented researchers. Major international postdoctoral schemes — including the European Union's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions programme and fellowships from Germany's Alexander von Humboldt Foundation — select candidates on scientific merit, not immigration status.

Scientific excellence depends on attracting the best researchers, regardless of nationality or immigration status. Chile should not isolate itself from the principles that strengthened the global research community.

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PhD programmes should protect the right to disagree with supervisors

Your report compares what PhD students earn across Europe. An equally important question is what they can afford to refuse (see *Nature* **658**, 850–851; 2026).

A salary or scholarship can support a researcher without ensuring their independence from a supervisor. Funding comparisons should therefore distinguish the amount paid from the protections available when a supervisory relationship breaks down.

Can researchers change supervisors without losing their funding? Can they challenge decisions through an independent process? Who controls the continuation of their financial support? These questions should be raised alongside income, living costs and employment benefits. A well-paid doctoral position offers limited security if challenging a supervisor puts that income at risk. Universities and funders should make financial continuity during supervisory disputes an explicit safeguard, not a matter of discretion.

The test of doctoral funding is not only whether researchers can afford to stay. It is also whether they can afford to disagree.

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