

REPORT

# AI and EdTech Procurement: Key Consultation Outcomes

EDDS  
ETOILE PARTNERS

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Etoile is a geopolitical consultancy dedicated to delivering strategic positioning advice and expert communications, research and support policy development. The organisation is uniquely positioned to assist governments, companies, organisations, and individual leaders worldwide in achieving their objectives through innovative communication strategies that shape perceptions and inspire action. It works with researchers and experts globally and across diverse domains.

## Education Data and Digital Sovereignty

EDDS is a project launched at Etoile. Spearheaded by Dr. Velislava Hillman alongside a team of international scholars, practitioners, and interdisciplinary experts, champions the global governance and oversight of the EdTech sector. EDDS provides a robust, independent framework to oversee educational technologies, ensuring that children's data privacy and the integrity of educational experiences remain protected. Its mission focuses on setting standards and developing comprehensive mechanisms to navigate and secure the increasingly data-driven educational landscape.

### EDDS's Mission

EDDS stands at the forefront of digital education governance, emphasizing the critical need for contextually relevant and meaningful evaluation systems to manage the edtech ecosystem effectively. We are a coalition of scholars, educators, engineers, and privacy advocates united to safeguard education systems from potential risks posed by the rapid integration of digital technologies, big data, and algorithms.

### Key Focus Areas

Creating safer digitised learning environments: As active contributors to the European research consortium TRUSTEE, Etoile are developing methods that preserve data privacy while enabling secure data exchange and processing. This work, funded by the EU's Horizon programme and UKRI/Innovate UK, aims to ensure that data practices are safe and privacy-conscious. This work feeds into EDDS's efforts to better understand the technological challenges and advancements, and how these can translate into governing the digitisation of education.

### Evaluating and Certifying EdTech Products

In collaboration with EdTech Impact, EDDS are pioneering the Quality Evaluation Framework, which is partly outlined in this document (with focus only on lawful, ethical and safe governance of education data, data transactions and computation). This initiative rigorously assesses EdTech products to ensure they are both lawful and safe for school environments. This global- first framework is designed to serve as a blueprint for a comprehensive, international programme that streamlines EdTech evaluation and promotes ethical and effective digital learning tools.

### Our Approach

We merge research, advocacy, and practical implementation. Working with our College of Expert Reviewers, we collaborate with enlightened educators, school authorities, tech experts, legal scholars, and ethical EdTech providers to pilot systems that elevate the quality and security of educational technology.

We prioritise real-world applications and impact, integrating diverse perspectives from educators, researchers, and privacy advocates to foster a safe, effective digital future for education.

EDDS is committed to transforming the EdTech landscape to prioritise children's rights, ensure privacy, and uphold high educational standards. By providing proactive, independent oversight, we aim to empower educational institutions globally, protecting them from the pitfalls of unchecked technological dependence and advocating for sustainable, responsible digital education practices.

EDDS @ Etoile Partners Ltd.

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## PROBLEM STATEMENT

The rapid integration of AI and EdTech in education presents major challenges across financial, regulatory, and operational fronts across the whole education system of the United Kingdom. Added to that, AI is accelerating and breakneck speed while EdTech suppliers are often a moving target—some vendors shut down, others get acquired by third parties and thus pose further challenges to monitoring data practices, and yet others are quickly integrating AI functionalities that have not been tested or risk-assessed. Key issues include high costs, lack of transparency in procurement, insufficient data privacy and security measures, and ineffective governance frameworks. Current procurement practices fail to engage end-users (students and teachers) adequately and are dominated by commercial interests rather than educational value.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The AI and EdTech market is rapidly evolving, outpacing policy and regulatory frameworks. With the global EdTech industry projected to grow substantially, UK institutions are grappling with selecting and implementing technologies under constrained budgets. The consultation held on July 26, 2024, involved a diverse range of education stakeholders and emphasized the urgency of addressing gaps in procurement and governance. Concerns over data privacy, financial inefficiency, and the need for end-user participation dominated the discussions.

## KEY CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

1. **Transparency issues** with regards to decision-making processes around AI and EdTech. These were seen as opaque which impacts negatively on teaching and learning.
2. **Regulation weaknesses** especially with regards to enforcement of standards on data privacy and security.
3. **Lack of evidence**—stakeholders expressed difficulty in assessing the true educational value and long-term benefits of AI and EdTech solutions.
4. **Fragmented governance and procurement practices** has been stressed again, despite previous assessment back in 20221 lead to inefficiency and increased costs. Schools often duplicate efforts while the lack of dedicated comprehensive framework makes it hard to identify the benchmarks against which products are assessed.
5. **Limited ‘user’ involvement.** Stakeholders emphasised the limited input from students and teachers, who are the primary users of AI and EdTech.

## POLICY OPTIONS

6. Maintain current state. Continue with current practices, risking further inefficiency, high costs, and non-compliance with data standards.
  - Pros:** No need for immediate investment or restructuring.
  - Cons:** Persistent inefficiencies, growing costs for schools, data security risks, and low impact on educational outcomes.
7. Decentralized reforms. Allow institutions to individually develop their procurement frameworks, offering more autonomy. Richer institutions (HE) are finding ways, however FE and primary/secondary education are struggling.
  - Pros:** Customization to specific institutional needs.

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<sup>1</sup>See <https://www.lse.ac.uk/social-policy/Assets/Documents/PDF/working-paper-series/02-22-Hillman.pdf>

- Cons:** Continued inefficiencies and lack of unified standards.
- 8. Centralized procurement framework. Develop a national, unified procurement system for EdTech and AI with strict regulatory oversight.
  - Pros:** Cost savings, improved vendor compliance, and increased transparency.
  - Cons:** Initial setup costs and potential bureaucracy.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### Immediate actions:

1. **Centralize procurement.** Develop a single web portal with APIs listing vetted and actively licensed vendors (see examples in finance, online gambling, and utilities services). Streamline procurement to minimize duplication and enhance negotiation power, save on costs, and maintain a dynamic update of rules and regulations in pace with the accelerating changes of technologies.
2. **Enforce rules and standards.** Regulatory bodies (e.g., ICO) must impose meaningful consequences on non-compliant AI and EdTech vendors.
3. **User participation.** Directly involve students and teachers in procurement decisions to ensure AI and EdTech tools align with pedagogical needs.

### MID-TO-LONG TERM ACTIONS:

1. **Establish standards.** Create and regularly update standards covering data privacy, accessibility, security, human rights, and socio-ethical practices. Require vendors to meet these for licensing.
2. **Public reporting.** Implement systems for publishing vetting and audit results. Ensure educational institutions can easily report vendor non-compliance.
3. **Training and education.** Mandate training for AI and EdTech vendors on compliance and safety the way training is offered to school staff.
4. **Clear objectives.** Policies must define educational and pedagogical goals to ensure technologies enhance human-led education rather than replacing it.

### Expected outcomes

Implementing these recommendations will result in a more transparent, cost-effective, and secure procurement system. Educational institutions across all levels of education will benefit from streamlined processes, better negotiation leverage, dynamic oversight and tools that genuinely support learning outcomes. Students and teachers will gain a voice in selecting technologies that enhance education while ensuring data privacy and security.

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This brief is based on the report published at LSE on AIED and EdTech Procurement: Challenges for Policy and Governance. The full report can be found here: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/social-policy/Assets/Documents/PDF/working-paper-series/WPS-10-24.pdf>