Case Studies: The children's thematic exploration of children's rights and AI

The four case studies that follow present the views and ideas that the AI Teams shared with us through the 'Big Missions' which they completed with AI partners. These workshops provided the children with a focused opportunity to look at each theme in depth. The discussions that the children had during the sessions formed a large part of the evidence that the Calls to Action were based on.

1.

Fairness and bias

Stirling

What we did

In Stirling, Members of Children's Parliament worked with doctors and researchers from the West of Scotland Innovation Hub, a partnership between NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and the University of Glasgow, to explore themes around fairness and bias in AI systems. Having earlier identified feelings (and whether AI systems can consider them) as a key concern for Members of Children's Parliament when it came to fairness and bias, the children were keen to share their thoughts on how the use of AI in healthcare made them feel.

Our partners from the Innovation Hub have been developing plans for an AI system which could help with seizure diagnosis in infants. They were interested in understanding how the children felt about AI being used in healthcare more generally, and in this specific instance how they felt about videos of children being used as training data. Children's Parliament facilitated a day of workshops in school to support these conversations. A subsequent sound design workshop co-facilitated with artist Eye Suriyanon allowed the children further opportunities to reflect and express their ideas creatively.

Image (opposite): Members of Children's Parliament engage in a workshop activity.

What the children told us

Trust in AI and AI's relation to human feelings were discussed frequently during the sessions. Overall, Members of Children's Parliament have more trust in human decision making than AI-based decisions. They highlighted the need for humans to be involved in the development and monitoring processes. The children have a strong preference for interacting with humans rather than AI systems when they access services.

"I like speaking to someone who can stop me worrying about things."

Member of Children's Parliament, Stirling

"Doctors are trusted but AI systems can't reassure you."

Member of Children's Parliament, Stirling

While acknowledging that the use of AI in healthcare can be beneficial and can help with diagnosis and treatment, the children remained skeptical about how well AI systems can be trained and raised the question of how useful AI systems would be when new illnesses or diseases emerge.

"You'd expect that if it was being used in a hospital it was properly trained. You'd have to trust it."

Member of Children's Parliament, Stirling

"AI doesn't get everything right – you need a human."

Member of Children's Parliament, Stirling

"What if AI diagnoses you wrong?"

Member of Children's Parliament, Stirling

"If you program the machine to know all the illnesses, what if you get a new illness - because obviously you put the data into the machine - If you get a new illness, it might not have the data in the machine. So then wouldn't you need a doctor to be able to understand that one?"

Member of Children's Parliament, Stirling

Another central issue that the children discussed was how they felt about AI systems in healthcare collecting and using their personal data. The children were aware that medical records contain sensitive data and felt they should be protected. Although some children were not too concerned about sharing their data, especially if it would help other people by allowing AI systems to be better trained, other children highlighted the importance of privacy, particularly relating to their bodies. The children were conscious of body-image issues as well as the importance of having control over information relating to ill health.

"I don't really mind [sharing data if it helps other people] because it's an algorithm, it's not even a person."

Member of Children's Parliament, Stirling

"What if there are some parts of your body you don't want anybody to see or know about? Sometimes you don't want people to know what is wrong with you. You might be ashamed."

Member of Children's Parliament, Stirling

The children in Stirling (and other locations) highlighted the responsibility of adults to keep them safe and to provide child-friendly information on how their data will be used and shared. Most Members of Children's Parliament in the workshop agreed that children should be asked for their consent. When discussing the use of images for training AI systems, there was a clear preference among the group for any data to be anonymised as much as possible, for example by using avatars or the motion-tracked 'skeletons' that the software produces, rather than real images or video footage. Similarly, in a conversation related to AI-generated voices, there was some discomfort from Members of Children's Parliament regarding the use of their voices and the unsettling impact of these voices being indistinguishable from real human speech.

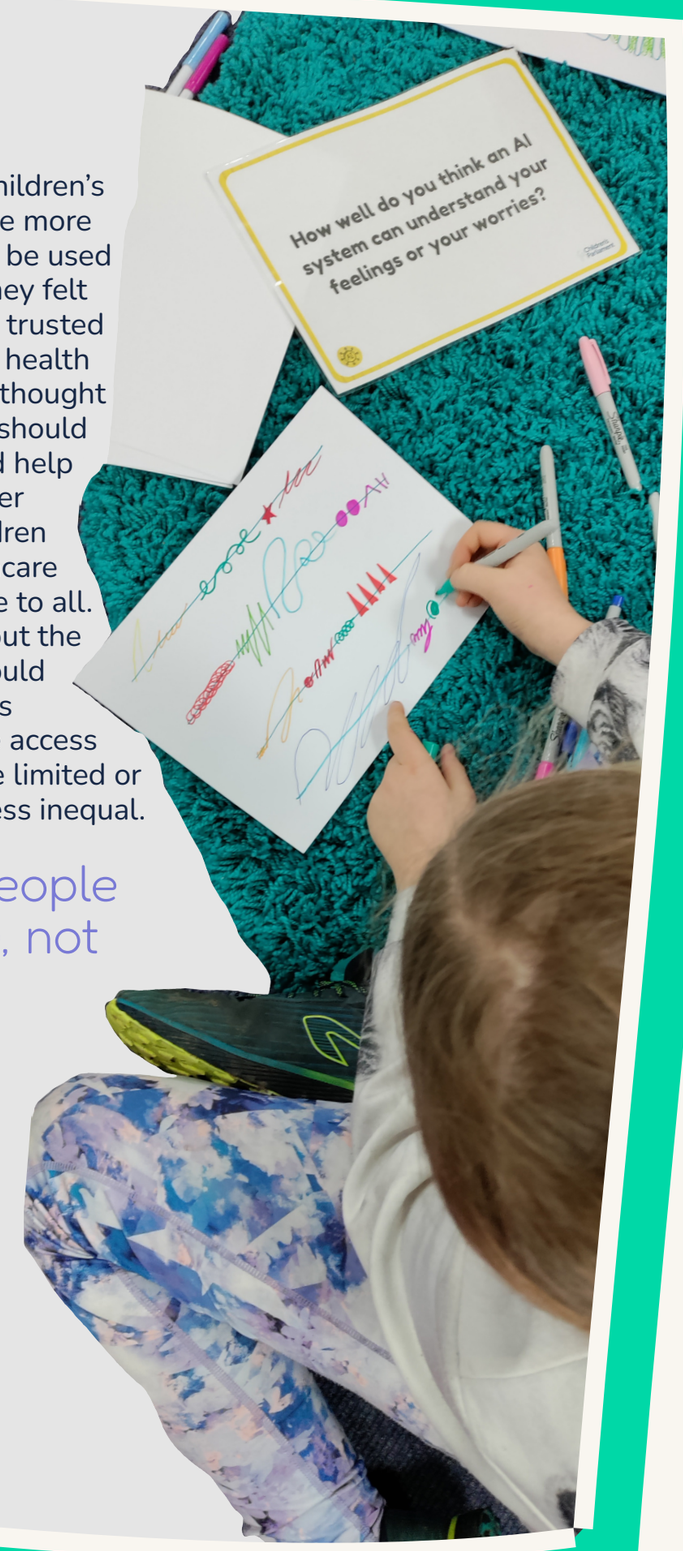
"Children should decide if they want their voices in datasets."

Member of Children's Parliament, Stirling

"You need to have children help create the voices and sounds for AI, but it would also be weird if they sounded exactly like children, so you need to change the sound so it is a little more higher or lower than a human voice."

Member of Children's Parliament, Stirling

Overall, Members of Children's Parliament tended to be more willing for their data to be used to train AI systems if they felt the AI system could be trusted and would support the health of others. The children thought that new technologies should be shared, and AI could help with making things fairer for everyone. The children were aware that healthcare is not always accessible to all. They felt positively about the idea that AI systems could be used to aid diagnosis globally in areas where access to healthcare was more limited or where costs made access inequal.



"AI lets more people get healthcare, not every country gets free healthcare so AI could make it easier."

Member of Children's Parliament, Stirling

Image (opposite): Member of Children's Parliament engages in a workshop activity.

What our partners told us

The workshop provided our partners with a better understanding of how children feel about their video images and data being used for training AI systems in relation to their human rights and enabled them to take children's views into consideration for the further development and employment of these AI systems. Highlighting the importance of involving children in decision making, staff from the West of Scotland Innovation Hub discussed how the Children's Parliament sessions lay the framework for similar approaches in the future.

"The workshop has enabled us to actively start including children further in our research projects, not just within AI but throughout our departmental studies. We are using the views of the children in the workshop to design our current and upcoming AI research and hope to continue this. We would love to host more workshops with children as our research progresses."

Isla Birnie

"The workshop impacted my work by highlighting the importance of stakeholder engagements and having more insights from the research participants' point of view."

Edmond S. L. Ho

"It has made me appreciate the importance of engaging with [children and] young people and developing innovative ways to do this."

Prof. Sameer Zuberi

Our partners expressed their surprise at the children's understanding of AI – especially in relation to their human rights. They noted that children could discuss safeguarding issues, framed by their right to privacy, and how this makes them feel. This will impact how consent for data collected is presented to the children in the future. Indeed, soon after the workshop our Investigators were asked to evaluate and provide feedback on an information text on the proposed AI system aimed at explaining the process to children.

Our partners from the Innovation Hub also highlighted the insight that the children are very supportive of AI that can be used to help others within healthcare settings.

"They are very supportive of research projects that can help other people - they are happy to share their data if that can help the improvement of AI systems designed to help other people."

Edmond S. L. Ho

"A standout moment for me was when the children stated that the use of AI in healthcare could be used to benefit less -advantaged children across the world and this is a key aim for our research."

Isla Birnie

Overall, this collaboration was perceived as a meaningful, fruitful and insightful piece of work and a very valuable experience of how children's views can impact research and AI development directly.