DIGISHIELD LABS

Practice Framework Series · No. 1 / 2026

The DigiShield Human–AI Synergy Framework

A Practice Framework for Transparent, Structured, and Educationally Purposeful AI Use in Schools

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DATE March 2026

VERSION v1.1 — Revised Edition

WEB digishieldkids.com

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SERIES
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KEYWORDS
AI in education; human–AI collaboration; pedagogical framework; AI literacy; safeguarding; role assignment

Abstract

Schools face a practical question that few frameworks answer directly: not whether to allow AI, but how to use it well. The DigiShield Human–AI Synergy Framework offers a structured, principled answer. Built on the proposition that AI is a **force multiplier** — amplifying the skills, knowledge, and judgement a person already brings rather than replacing them — the framework provides a replicable model for transparent, accountable AI use across all key stages and further education. At its operational core is the **Role Assignment Model**: a sixty-second practice in which the human defines what AI will do, what it will not do, and how its output will be verified, before any AI tool is used. The framework addresses the full educational population from KS1 to post-16, integrates with existing safeguarding obligations under KCSIE 2025 and the Online Safety Act 2023, and is designed to complement rather than replace established AI literacy models. A significant secondary finding is that using AI responsibly under this framework teaches a set of higher-order procedural competencies — task decomposition, delegation logic, verification — that education has historically found difficult to develop by any other means. This

document establishes the framework, its principles, and its implementation model, and constitutes the citable founding record of the DigiShield Human–AI Synergy Framework.

1. What This Framework Is

The DigiShield Human–AI Synergy Framework is a practice-oriented model for the transparent, structured, and educationally purposeful use of AI tools in school and educational settings. It is designed for use by students, teachers, and school leaders across Key Stages 1–5 and further education, and it is equally relevant to the safeguarding professionals, governors, and policymakers who support those settings.

The framework addresses a gap in the current landscape. There is now substantial guidance on what AI is and how it works (AI literacy), and there is regulatory guidance on what schools must do (DfE, Ofcom, KCSIE). What is missing is a practical, principled model for how the human–AI relationship inside a school should actually operate — one that is specific enough to guide action, flexible enough to cross subjects and stages, and robust enough to be defensible when challenged.

This framework fills that gap. It is not any of the following:

– An AI literacy curriculum — it does not prescribe what students learn about AI, only how they work with it.

– A technology integration ladder — it does not measure the degree of AI adoption.

– A compliance document — though it is designed to be consistent with DfE guidance (June 2025), KCSIE 2025, and the Online Safety Act 2023.

– A ban or a permission structure — it does not require institutional approval for every AI interaction, nor does it mandate unrestricted access.

– A claim that AI is always beneficial or that its use should be maximised. The force multiplier principle cuts both ways: AI amplifies poor thinking as readily as good thinking.

What it is, precisely, is a framework for how humans and AI work together — one that makes that relationship visible, deliberate, and defensible.

2. The Central Proposition

> *AI is a force multiplier. It amplifies the skills, knowledge, and judgement that a human already brings to a task. It does not replace that human, substitute their thinking, or act independently of their direction.*

The force multiplier principle is the load-bearing idea of this framework. A force multiplier does not generate force independently — it extends force that already exists. A lever multiplies the effort a person applies; it does not move objects on its own. Applied to AI in education, this means:

– A student who understands a topic can use AI to go further, faster, and with greater depth.

– A student who does not understand a topic cannot use AI to pretend otherwise — not because the technology prevents it, but because this framework makes the attempt visible and names it as a misuse.

– A teacher who knows their subject can use AI to prepare richer, more varied material in less time.

– A teacher who delegates judgement to AI has left their professional role vacant.

The force multiplier principle reframes the central question in AI education policy. The question is not ‘should we allow AI?’ — that question has already been answered by the simple fact that students are already using it and will continue to regardless of school policy. The question is: what does the human bring, and how does AI extend it?

This reframing has practical consequences. It moves the assessment question from ‘did the student use AI?’ (unanswerable and unenforceable) to ‘can the student demonstrate what they bring to this task?’ (answerable and pedagogically meaningful). It moves the safeguarding question from ‘how do we keep AI out?’ to ‘how do we ensure students engage with AI in ways that are safe and developmentally appropriate?’ And it moves the institutional question from ‘what do we ban?’ to ‘what structures make beneficial use possible?’

3. Four Realist Premises

Before the framework’s operational principles are stated, four premises about the landscape must be acknowledged. These are observations about the world as it is, not prescriptions for how it should be. They are called ‘realist’ because the framework will only function in contact with reality — and any framework premised on a comforting fiction will fail when it meets the classroom.

PREMISE 1

Everywhere, All the Time

AI use by students cannot be meaningfully contained, monitored, or restricted. Students are already using it and will continue to, across subjects, outside school hours, and on personal devices that institutions do not control. Any framework premised on restriction is built on sand. This framework begins by accepting that reality and building a constructive response to it.

PREMISE 2

Younger Generations Do Not Experience AI as Disruptive

For a teacher or a parent, generative AI may represent a rupture — a before and an after. For a fifteen-year-old it is another capable tool on their phone. They have no prior world to compare it against and do not experience it as philosophically threatening. Fear-based messaging about AI will not land with students, even if it resonates with staff. The framework must engage students in a register that matches their actual experience of the technology.

PREMISE 3

Human–AI Collaboration Requires Defined Roles

The phrase ‘human-in-the-loop’ is widely used but rarely operationalised. Being in the loop is not enough — what matters is having a defined role in the loop. This framework provides exactly that: a practical model that makes each party’s contribution explicit before work begins. The result is collaboration that is accountable, not merely supervised.

PREMISE 4

Three Wrong Models Must Be Actively Rejected

‘Not cheating, not Google, not autonomous.’ These three negatives do more pedagogical work than many positive definitions, because they directly address the three live fears — academic integrity, cognitive laziness, and human replacement — without naming them as fears. Students and staff who understand what AI use is not are better equipped to understand what it properly is.

These four premises do not require agreement from every reader before the framework can be adopted. They require acknowledgement — a recognition that the framework has been built to function in the world as it is, not in a more comfortable version of it.

4. Five Operational Principles

The five principles below translate the realist premises into actionable commitments. They are ordered deliberately: each principle builds on the one before it. Together they define what it means to operate within the Human–AI Synergy Framework.

PRINCIPLE 01

Human Primacy

The human is always the lead. Every task, output, and decision that involves AI use must have a named human who is responsible for it. AI initiates nothing; it responds. AI concludes nothing; a human does. This is not a constraint on AI’s usefulness — it is what makes that usefulness legitimate. When something goes wrong with an AI-assisted piece of work, there is always a person who owns it.

PRINCIPLE 02

Defined Roles

Before AI is used in any task, its role is named. Not ‘I used AI’ — but ‘AI was used to generate initial search terms, which I then evaluated and refined.’ A defined role has a scope, a boundary, and an endpoint. Undefined AI use is not collaboration — it is delegation without accountability. This principle is the foundation of the Role Assignment Model described in Section 6.

PRINCIPLE 03

Transparent by Design

AI use is declared upfront, not disclosed under pressure. Transparency is not a confession; it is a methodology statement. This framework treats disclosure as a mark of intellectual rigour, equivalent to citing a source or acknowledging a collaborator. A student who declares their AI use clearly and accurately is demonstrating good academic practice, not admitting a shortcut.

PRINCIPLE 04

Developmental Appropriateness

The role assigned to AI must be appropriate to the age, stage, and learning objectives of the student. At earlier stages, AI is primarily a subject of structured exploration. At later stages it becomes a working tool — but only where the student has sufficient knowledge to evaluate its outputs critically. AI cannot multiply a force that is not yet present. This principle protects younger learners from premature reliance while ensuring older learners develop genuine AI competency.

PRINCIPLE 05

Safeguarding Integration

AI use in schools is not separate from safeguarding — it is a dimension of it. This includes data privacy, exposure to AI-generated harmful content, the manipulation potential of AI companions and conversational agents, and the risk that unstructured AI use widens existing inequalities. Schools adopting this framework embed AI governance into existing safeguarding structures rather than creating parallel systems. This principle connects the framework directly to KCSIE 2025 and the Online Safety Act 2023.

These five principles are intentionally non-prescriptive about tools, platforms, or subject content. A school may operate across multiple AI tools, change those tools as the market evolves, and apply the framework equally across English, mathematics, the sciences, and the arts. The principles govern the relationship, not the technology.

5. What the Human Brings

The force multiplier principle only functions if there is a force to multiply. This section addresses what that force is across the school population — which varies considerably across developmental stages but is present and genuine at all of them. Acknowledging this is not sentimentality; it is a prerequisite for using the framework correctly.

Adult and Post-16 Learners

The human contribution is most legible at this stage: domain expertise, disciplinary knowledge, professional or life experience, and the metacognitive awareness to evaluate AI outputs against accumulated understanding. A post-16 student studying history brings contextual knowledge,

interpretive frameworks, and a developed sense of what constitutes evidence — none of which AI provides. The framework's principles and Role Assignment Model were designed with this population partly in mind, and implementation at this stage is most directly analogous to professional practice.

Secondary Learners — KS3 and KS4

Secondary students bring subject knowledge in formation, developing critical faculties, and a growing capacity to evaluate claims and sources. Crucially, they also bring motivation, personal perspective, and the emerging ability to know what they do and do not understand — which is the metacognitive foundation the framework requires. At this stage, the human contribution may be less comprehensive than an expert adult's, but it is real and it is theirs. AI use that bypasses rather than extends this contribution produces outputs that the student cannot own or defend.

Younger Children — KS1 and KS2

The human contribution here is less legible to adults but no less real. Young children bring what might best be described as embodied, unbounded engagement with the world — a full and unguarded participation in experience that has not yet been disciplined into approved channels or socialised into the constraints of formal knowledge.

More specifically, young children bring:

– Narrative and character — the capacity to sustain complex collaborative fictions, track motivations, and negotiate plot with genuine creative investment.

– Humour and play — an instinct for the unexpected, the absurd, and the socially generative that is genuinely creative and cannot be replicated by AI.

– Embodied experience — years of sensory, relational, and emotional experience that is entirely their own and forms a perspective AI has no access to.

– Unbounded curiosity — the willingness to ask questions that have not yet been socialised into irrelevance, and to pursue answers across domains without disciplinary constraint.

– Social intelligence — a sophisticated intuitive understanding of relationship, hierarchy, fairness, and belonging that informs everything they make and say.

AI is genuinely well-suited to engaging with these modes. It will sustain a character, extend a narrative, and respond to humour in ways a busy teacher in a class of thirty often cannot. The interface between young children and AI in a structured educational context may therefore be unusually productive — not despite the child's relational engagement with the technology, but because of it. The teacher's role at this stage is to structure that engagement, not to limit it.

Neurodivergent Learners

Neurodivergency is not a special case to be accommodated — it describes a different cognitive architecture, and one that may interface with AI in ways that are genuinely advantageous rather

than merely supported. A student who thinks in non-linear, associative patterns that are difficult to communicate within neurotypical classroom conventions may find that AI's capacity to receive and work with those patterns — without social friction, without impatience, and without the implicit demands of a teacher's facial expression — is genuinely liberating. Schools implementing this framework should recognise that for some learners, the human–AI interface may be less neurotypically biased than the human–human interface in many educational settings — and build on that possibility rather than simply managing around it.

The Developmental Thread

What develops across the school years is not simply the accumulation of knowledge, though that matters. What develops is the student's capacity to know what they know — to recognise their own expertise, value it, and deploy it deliberately. The framework develops metacognitive awareness of task structure; education develops metacognitive awareness of personal knowledge. Both are forms of making the tacit explicit, operating simultaneously at different levels. A student who has grown up using the Role Assignment Model from KS1 has been practising metacognition, week by week, as an embedded routine rather than an examined skill.

6. The Role Assignment Model

The Role Assignment Model is the practical core of the framework. Before using AI in any task, the user completes a three-part assignment that takes approximately sixty seconds. It makes the human's role explicit before AI is involved — which means the human's thinking precedes the AI's contribution, not the other way around.

> *The Three-Part Role Assignment: (1) What the AI will do — the specific, bounded task. (2) What the AI will not do — the explicit boundary. (3) How the output will be verified — the human review step.*

The Role Assignment is not a form to be filed. It is a cognitive habit — one that can be spoken aloud, written in a margin, typed at the top of a document, or completed in conversation with a teacher. Its purpose is not bureaucratic compliance but deliberate thinking: forcing the student to articulate the architecture of their task before delegating any part of it to AI.

A completed Role Assignment does several things simultaneously. It establishes the human's accountability. It creates a record of intent that can be compared to the actual output. It makes the AI's contribution specific enough to be evaluated rather than vague enough to be contested. And it gives teachers, examiners, and parents a meaningful window into the student's process — not just their product.

Role Assignment in Practice — Examples by Stage

Stage	Example Role Assignment
KS2 (Age 9)	We asked AI to suggest three ways our story character could solve the problem. We did not ask it to write the solution. We chose the idea we liked best and wrote it in our own words.
KS3 (Age 12)	AI will generate a list of possible essay structures for this question. It will not write any part of the essay. I will review the structures and choose one that fits my argument, then modify it.
KS4 (Age 15)	AI will check my calculations for errors and flag any I should review. It will not explain the method — that is my job. I will return to each flagged item and correct it myself before submitting.
Post-16 (Age 17)	AI will summarise three academic sources I have already read. It will not select sources or generate any argument. I will compare its summaries to my notes, correct any errors, and use them as a memory aid only.
FE / Adult	I will use AI to draft an initial structure for this report section based on my bullet-point notes. It will not add content I have not provided. I will rewrite every paragraph in my own voice and verify all factual claims.

These examples are illustrative, not prescriptive. The Role Assignment works in any subject, at any stage, with any AI tool — because it governs the relationship between human and AI, not the specific content of that relationship.

7. Developmental Implementation

The five principles of the framework remain constant across all key stages. Their operational form scales with the child's developing metacognitive capacity, mirroring well-established models of scaffolded instruction: the teacher first models the process explicitly, then gradually releases responsibility to the student until the student can operate the full model independently.

Stage	How the Framework Operates
KS1 (Ages 5–7)	The teacher holds the Role Assignment on behalf of the class. Children experience structured creative collaboration: 'Today we will tell the AI the beginning of a story and it will suggest what might happen next. Then we decide whether to use its idea.' The protocol is invisible; the principle of human decision-making is actively reinforced.
KS2 (Ages 7–11)	Children begin to participate in defining task boundaries with scaffolding. Simple versions of the three-part assignment are introduced explicitly: What shall we ask it to do? What should it not do? How will we check? The teacher models and guides. By the end of KS2, most students can complete a basic Role Assignment with prompting.

KS3 (Ages 11–14)	Students author their own Role Assignments with teacher guidance. Cross-subject application begins. The metacognitive dimension becomes explicit — students are encouraged to notice when a Role Assignment reveals gaps in their own understanding, and to treat that as useful information rather than a problem.
KS4–5 (Ages 14–18)	Students refine and critically evaluate their Role Assignments. AI use is assessed not just for outputs but for process quality — the coherence and rigour of the Role Assignment is part of the evaluation. Students begin to extend the framework to extracurricular and early career contexts.
Post-16 / FE (Ages 16+)	Full operational independence. The framework connects explicitly to professional practice — workplace delegation, project management, and research methodology all share the same underlying logic. At this stage, the Role Assignment Model functions as an introduction to professional accountability for AI-assisted work.

Schools introducing the framework mid-way through a student's education should plan a brief explicit introduction at whatever stage the student enters. The framework is not an assessment of AI literacy — a student who has completed many Role Assignments may know very little about how AI works technically, and that is entirely consistent with operating the framework correctly.

8. Framework in Practice

The principles and Role Assignment Model described above are designed to be operationalised through structured classroom activities. The following three tools, developed by DigiShield Labs as part of a broader education programme, illustrate how the framework's core ideas translate into direct practice. Each embeds the framework's principles without requiring students to engage with the framework explicitly — the structure does the pedagogical work.

These tools are illustrative rather than exhaustive. The framework is deliberately tool-agnostic; any activity that builds the habit of explicit role assignment, supports transparency, and requires human judgement at each stage is consistent with it.

The Slider Game — *KS2–KS4+ — Premises 1 and 2*

Instead of a binary ‘real or AI?’ judgement, students are presented with content tiles — images, video clips, text excerpts, audio samples — and use sliders to estimate the degree of AI involvement on a scale from 1 to 10. There is no single correct answer. After responding, students see where other players placed their sliders. The spread of responses is the lesson: it reveals that reasonable people disagree about where AI begins and ends, and that this ambiguity is a feature of the modern media landscape, not a problem to be solved.

Adaptive complexity by stage: Younger learners (KS2) use a single slider per tile. Older learners (KS3+) use multiple sliders covering distinct dimensions — visuals, audio, script, concept, distribution — revealing that a single piece of content can be simultaneously human and AI depending on which layer is examined.

Framework connection: The Slider Game operationalises Premise 1 (AI is everywhere, all the time) by teaching students to assume AI presence as a baseline and ask where it is, rather than whether it is present. It also embeds Premise 2 by meeting students on the technology continuum they already inhabit, building on existing digital fluency rather than treating AI as a threatening novelty.

The Mutation Lab — *KS3+ — Principle 05 and the DigiShield Research Base*

Drawn directly from DigiShield Labs’ OSINT research into content evolution across platforms, the Mutation Lab asks students to take a piece of ‘starter content’ and map how it could mutate through four mechanisms: algorithmic amplification (what gets more views and why), AI remixing (how generative tools create variations at scale), trend-chasing (how creators imitate successful content), and platform migration (how content changes as it moves from YouTube to TikTok to Roblox).

The exercise teaches students to recognise patterns of content mutation rather than attempting to identify individual pieces of AI content — a skill with substantially greater durability as generation technology improves.

Framework connection: The Mutation Lab is the classroom application of Principle 05 (Safeguarding Integration). It makes the mechanics of AI-generated harmful content visible — not as a catalogue of threats, but as a comprehensible set of processes that students can learn to recognise and interrogate. It is the most direct expression of DigiShield Labs’ research programme in educational form: no other organisation has the systematic evidence base to ground this exercise in documented, real-world examples.

Digital Weather Report — *All stages — Habits of Practice*

A routine classroom exercise designed for regular repetition rather than one-off delivery. Students assess the 'AI weather' of their recent media consumption: what they watched, read, or interacted with that week; where AI may have been involved at any stage; and what the 'forecast' looked like — heavy algorithmic recommendation, light AI-assisted production, or somewhere between. The exercise is designed to be lightweight enough for a ten-minute starter activity.

Framework connection: The Digital Weather Report builds the framework's core habits into classroom routine. Transparency (Principle 03) and critical evaluation of AI's role (Principle 02) are most durable when practised regularly rather than introduced as occasional lessons. The exercise also reinforces the developmental trajectory: younger students describe what they noticed; older students analyse why, for whose benefit, and with what consequences.

Full implementation guidance, teacher notes, and resource materials for these and other DigiShield Labs tools are available through the DigiShield Labs Education Programme. Contact: digishieldkids.com

9. Procedural Emergence

A significant — and underexamined — benefit of this framework is what it teaches by compulsion rather than by instruction. Because the Role Assignment Model requires students to make their cognitive process explicit before delegating any part of it to AI, the act of using AI responsibly under this framework teaches a set of higher-order procedural skills that education has historically found difficult to develop. Not because those skills are rare or exotic, but because they are invisible inside competent adult performance and therefore hard to point to.

> *Learning a second language forces you to learn what grammar is — by requiring you to name something in your own language that you had been doing automatically since childhood. The metalanguage emerges from the collision between the known and the explicit. This framework does the same thing to task structure. The student who has to define AI's role must first articulate the architecture of their own thinking.*

The following competencies emerge as functional prerequisites of the framework rather than as separately taught skills. A student cannot complete a Role Assignment without already exercising them.

Competency	How It Emerges
Task decomposition	You cannot assign AI a role without first breaking the task into parts. This is not presented as a skill to be taught — it is a prerequisite for using the tool at all.

Sub-task naming	Students must develop a working vocabulary for the parts of complex processes. What is a generative step? What is a verification step? What is a judgement call?
Process architecture	Loops, gates, and bottlenecks emerge naturally when students ask: where could this go wrong? What has to be true before the next step can happen?
Delegation logic	What can legitimately be handed to another agent, and what cannot, and why? One of the most practically important and least explicitly taught professional competencies.
Input–output thinking	Students learn to consider what information goes in, what form it takes, what transformation occurs, and what comes out — foundational to understanding any systemic process.
Verification and trust	When and why do you check an output? What makes a source trustworthy? Taught not as an epistemological lecture but as a workflow habit repeated until automatic.
Ownership and IP	Who made this? Who is responsible for it? At what point does a human contribution become authorship? Encountered as practical decisions, not abstract legal questions.
Abstraction and scope	Knowing what level of detail is appropriate for a given task. AI's tendency towards either excessive granularity or unhelpful vagueness forces students to develop a feel for appropriate abstraction.

The student who has completed many Role Assignments has, by compulsion, become a more deliberate planner, a more careful delegator, and a more reflective thinker — not because those skills were taught directly, but because they were required as prerequisites. This observation inverts the standard concern about AI in education. The worry is usually that AI allows students to bypass thinking. This framework argues that AI, used within a proper structure, compels more of exactly the kind of thinking that is hardest to develop any other way.

10. Scope, Boundaries, and Relationship to Other Frameworks

What This Framework Covers

This framework covers the governance of the human–AI relationship in educational settings — the structure, accountability, and transparency of AI use, across all key stages and subjects. It applies wherever a student or teacher uses an AI tool to assist with any task that has educational, professional, or safeguarding implications.

What Sits Outside This Framework

– Specific tool selection, platform approval, or technical filtering systems — these are matters for school IT policy, not pedagogical frameworks.

– AI literacy education — what AI is, how it works, and what it can and cannot do. The SEAME framework (Raspberry Pi Foundation) provides excellent coverage of this domain and is the recommended companion.

– Assessment policy — how AI-assisted work is graded or weighted. This is a matter for awarding bodies and institutional policy, though the Role Assignment Model provides the transparency infrastructure that any fair assessment approach requires.

– Professional practice beyond education — though the framework's logic applies equally to workplace AI use, and schools may choose to make this connection explicit for post-16 learners.

Relationship to Existing Frameworks and Guidance

Framework / Source	Relationship to This Framework
SEAME (Raspberry Pi Foundation)	Provides the AI literacy foundation that makes this framework meaningful. SEAME teaches what AI is and how it works; this framework governs how to work with it responsibly. The two are designed to be used together: SEAME as the knowledge layer, Human–AI Synergy as the operational layer on top.
SAMR (Puentedura)	Describes the degree of technology integration across four levels (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition). This framework addresses a different dimension: the quality, ethics, and human accountability of that integration. SAMR answers 'how much?'; this framework answers 'how well?'
DfE Guidance (June 2025)	Sets the policy obligation for transparency and responsible governance in AI use in schools. This framework provides a practical method for meeting that obligation — the Role Assignment Model is directly responsive to the DfE's transparency requirements.
KCSIE 2025	Now references generative AI directly under online safety obligations. This framework operationalises that connection, treating AI governance as a safeguarding practice rather than a separate technical domain. Principle 05 (Safeguarding Integration) maps directly onto KCSIE's AI provisions.
Online Safety Act 2023	Creates obligations for platforms and schools around harmful online content, including AI-generated content. This framework's safeguarding and developmental appropriateness principles address these obligations from the educational practice side.

About DigiShield Labs

DigiShield Labs is an independent AI safety research consultancy specialising in children's digital safety, based in Thirsk, North Yorkshire. The organisation conducts OSINT-led intelligence and systematic research on emerging digital risks to children across platforms including YouTube, TikTok, and Roblox, producing evidence-based research for safeguarding professionals, educators, and policymakers. DigiShield Labs produces research outputs targeting Multi-Academy Trusts, local authorities, university education departments, Ofcom, and DSIT. This Practice Framework is part of the DigiShield Labs Practice Framework Series. Enquiries: digishieldkids.com

Intellectual Property and Methodology Note

Suggested Citation

Langley, A. & DigiShield Labs (2026). The DigiShield Human–AI Synergy Framework: A Practice Framework for Transparent, Structured, and Educationally Purposeful AI Use in Schools (v1.1). DigiShield Labs Practice Framework Series, No. 1. Thirsk: DigiShield Labs. doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18891685

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18891685

Version History

v0.1 — Internal working draft, DigiShield Labs (2025).
v0.2 — Extended working draft with developmental implementation (February 2026).
v1.0 — First published edition (March 2026).
v1.1 — Revised edition incorporating illustrative applications (Section 8); proofread and finalised for distribution (March 2026). Th