NON-BINARY GENDERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

LIVED EXPERIENCES • IMAGINED FUTURES

Survey Findings, Report and Recommendations

NB
IN HE

CITY
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
— EST 1894 —

UNIVERSITY OF
WESTMINSTER

Contents

Background

Over the course of the past decade non-binary people have become increasingly visible in the public sphere. Non-binary people are those with gender identities which fall outside the binary categories of man and woman (see **Glossary** for a fuller definition). Equalities Office and Census data have shown that non-binary people comprise between a third and half the **trans** population in the UK, and that younger people are more likely to identify as non-binary than those over 35 (Government Equalities Office, 2018; ONS, 2023). Despite this increasing, but limited recognition, non-binary identities and experiences continue to be widely misunderstood.

Knowledge about non-binary gender, especially in relation to identity and access to healthcare, has been steadily growing through community groups and networks, on social media and increasingly in academic research (see Richards *et al*, 2017; Twist *et al*, 2020; Vincent, 2020). However, research on non-binary people's experiences in **higher education (HE)** have generally subsumed them in broader studies of all trans people meaning that, to date, there has been very little attention paid to the specificities of non-binary experiences in HE (see Barker *et al*, 2016; Lawrence and McKendry, 2017, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2017).

Against the backdrop of an increased focus on the participation and success of marginalised social groups in HE, we wanted to understand how non-binary students and staff currently move through and inhabit universities, and what could allow them to thrive there. Increasingly universities have developed and introduced trans inclusion policies in order to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and as part of their equality, diversity and inclusion commitments. However, these policies are often modelled on the needs of trans people undergoing more 'binary' and/or medicalised transitions, which do not necessarily reflect the priorities or needs of all non-binary people. Consequently, very little is known about the experiences and needs of non-binary people in HE.

About the Non-Binary in HE Project

In this context of a lack of research and literature, in 2019 we established the Non-Binary Genders in Higher Education: Lived Experiences, Imagined Futures project. The overall aim of the project is to gather information on the experiences of non-binary staff and students in UK HE institutions and to create spaces for non-binary people involved in HE to come together and dream different futures. The project is not only interested in exploring institutional inclusion, but also broader questions around how binary gender structures both curricula and the structural foundations of the university.
The overall aims of the project are:

- To understand non-binary student and teaching staff experiences of HE, including navigating institutions, engaging with specialist resources, and reflecting on the curriculum.

- To use our data to provide universities with policy recommendations and examples of best practice.

- To gather resources and share experiences with other members of the non-binary academic community to create a different HE experience for students and each other.

- To add to the literature on inclusive curriculum and explore the disruptive potential of non-binary genders for transforming the academy.

Project Information and Contacts

► More information about the project, including publications, resources and past/future events can be found on our website: **http://nbinhe.com**

► Follow the project on Twitter/X: **@NBinHE**

► Email: **nonbinaryinHE@westminster.ac.uk**

The 2019 Survey

This report sets out the key findings from a large-scale online survey conducted in April-May 2019. The survey was conceived as a scoping exercise to find out more about the experiences of non-binary students and staff in HE. Our aims were to use the survey to understand more about current levels of institutional inclusion or recognition of non-binary staff and students, and how they navigated institutional structures. We also wanted to identify both areas of good practice and where institutions could do further work.

The survey was open to anyone who identified as non-binary and who fell into one of the following groups:

- Current students (undergraduate, postgraduate or PhD) at UK HE institutions.

- Recent graduates (2013-2018) from UK HE institutions.

- Staff working in UK HE in any teaching and learning capacity (including librarians, learning developers and others).

- PhD students who also teach in UK HE institutions.

Figure 1: Participants' roles in HE [n=367] *

PhD Students who teach
8.2% [n=30]

Staff
16.3% [n=60]
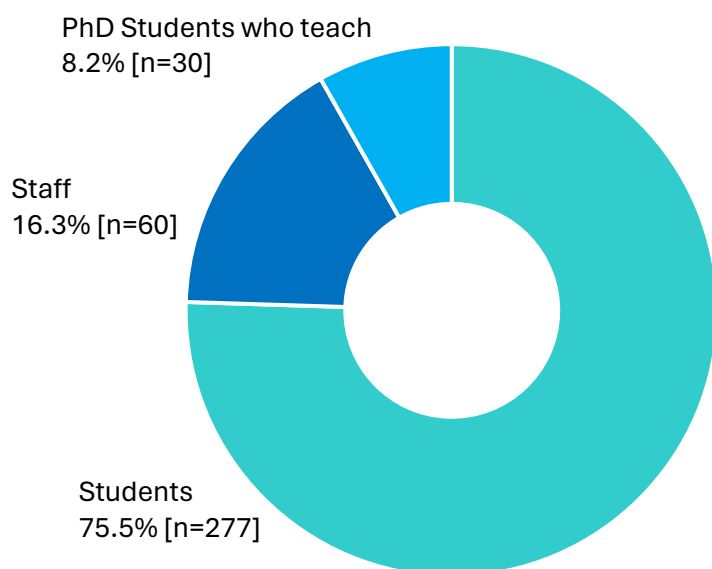
Students
75.5% [n=277]

Over the six-week period that the survey was open we received 367 responses from 277 students (226 current students and 51 recent graduates), 60 staff who teach and 30 PhD students who teach.

* In this report we refer to these roles as:
1. Students
2. Staff
3. PhD Students

The survey was designed in keeping with the **queer** politics that shape the project. All questions, apart from the participant consent question and the one asking whether they were answering the survey as a student, staff member or PhD student who teaches, were optional. While this carried the risk that some questions would have very few answers, we wanted to ensure that our participants had control over what information they shared.

We also chose to have open answer boxes for questions around gender, **sexual orientation** and race and ethnicity to allow participants to express these aspects of their identity in their own terms. The remaining questions used a combination of open, scaled and multiple-choice style formats and covered participants' studies and/or teaching; the inclusiveness of their institutions; and aspects of how they navigated being non-binary in their studies and/or work.

This report is based primarily on the quantitative findings from the survey. However, we draw on and quote from the qualitative findings where they provide additional context about people's experiences and needs in HE. To further protect the anonymity of participants, especially those in the smaller 'PhD students who teach' cohort, we have attributed quotations to either 'staff' or 'student' depending on which context participants were referring to.

Further Information

▶ This project and the survey were approved by the University of Westminster Research Ethics Committee (Ref ETH1819-0425).

▶ More detailed analysis of the qualitative findings will be published separately – please see the **project website** for our latest publications.

▶ The full questionnaire can be found at: **https://doi.org/10.34737/w62xz**

▶ To cite this report: Benato, R., Fraser, J. and White, F.R. (2023) *Non-Binary in Higher Education: Survey Findings, Report and Recommendations*. Available at: **https://doi.org/10.34737/w6vz0**

Findings

The findings from the survey are organised into three sections. **Being Non-Binary** presents the data on participants' ability, or not, to 'be' non-binary in their institutions in terms of being open about their gender and experiences of validation and erasure. **Policies, Administrative Systems and Facilities** shares the data on participants' understandings and experiences of their institutions' trans inclusion policies, interactions with administrative systems relating to gender, and access to facilities such as toilets. Finally, information about who the participants are and their roles in HE is provided in **Demographics**.

Key Findings

1

Non-binary students and staff want their gender to be known and recognised within the university, but this desire is not being met. The data show they are significantly less open about being non-binary inside the university compared to outside it.

78% of participants said it was very or somewhat important that people at university know their gender and treat them accordingly.

93% of participants are open about their gender with friends and **60%** with family, but just **20%** of students are fully open with their university teachers.

Only **32%** of students are fully open with other students on their course and only **31%** of staff are fully open with their immediate colleagues.

2

Non-binary people understand and name their gender in a wide variety of ways. There is no one 'third gender' category, and non-binary people often do not identify as trans.

There were **93** unique terms and phrases used by participants to describe their gender identity. **28%** of participants described themselves exclusively as 'non-binary', while **34%** did not use the term 'non-binary' at all. 'Trans' was mentioned by **21%** of participants when describing their gender identity.

Non-Binary in Higher Education: Survey Findings, Report and Recommendations

3

Non-binary staff and students were more likely to feel their gender had been erased at university than they were to feel validated, seen or accepted.

51% of participants said their gender felt frequently erased and only **8%** felt frequently validated. **26%** felt their gender was never validated.

Lack of inclusive university administrative systems and the unavailability of gender-neutral toilets played a prominent role in participants' feelings of erasure. Positive interactions with teachers, colleagues and other students played more central roles in feelings of validation.

Half of students did not know whether their university had a trans inclusion policy or if it included non-binary genders indicating that policies play a less central role in everyday experiences of validation or erasure.

4

Non-binary experiences in HE are shaped by intersections with other identities including race, ethnicity, sexuality, class and particularly disability and neurodivergence.

11% of participants were from minoritised racial or ethnic backgrounds. **44%** of participants declared a disability or disabilities. More than **95%** of participants identify as LGBQ in some way.

Non-binary people are impacted by the racism, heteronormativity and ableism of institutions which produce additional barriers to being open about their gender and to accessing support.
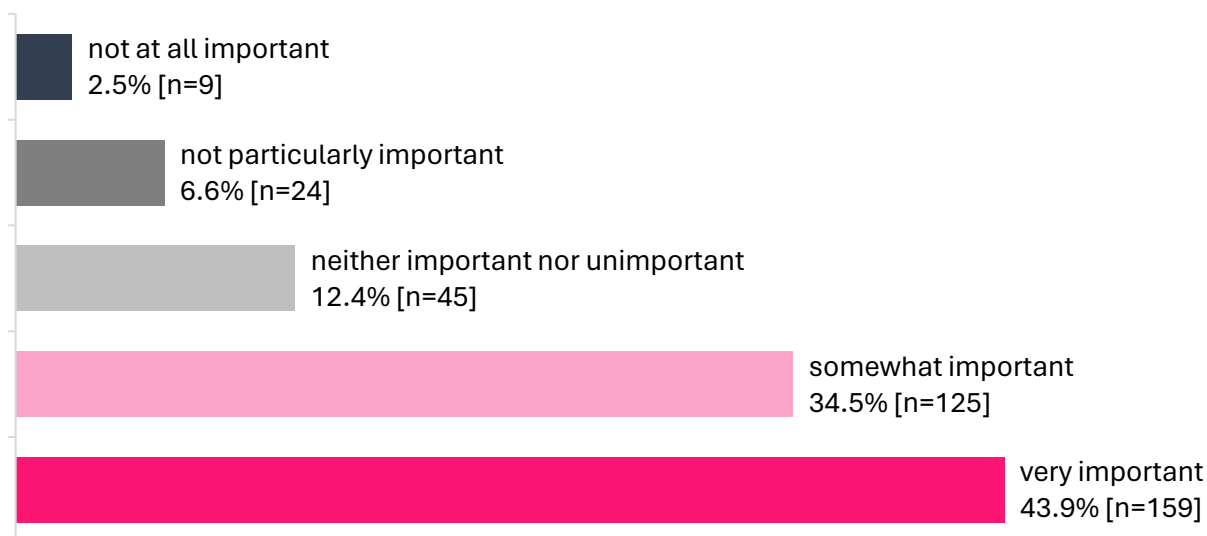
5

Non-binary people are everywhere in HE. Non-binary students and staff study and teach across all disciplines, levels and throughout England, Scotland, and Wales.

Students and staff were present in STEM subjects (**24%**), Social Sciences and Law (**29%**) and Arts and Humanities (**45%**) from Foundation level to PhD. Staff had been teaching between **1** and **20+** years.

Being Non-Binary in HE

We wanted to establish whether it was important to our participants for their gender to be known at university and for them to be treated accordingly. We found that this was overwhelmingly important. 78.4% (n=284) of participants indicated that this was very or somewhat important to them, and only 2.5% (n=9) indicated that it was not at all important.

Figure 2: Is it important that people at the university know your gender and treat you accordingly? [n=362]

not at all important
2.5% [n=9]

not particularly important
6.6% [n=24]

neither important nor unimportant
12.4% [n=45]

somewhat important
34.5% [n=125]

very important
43.9% [n=159]

> *"My gender is important because it's such a large part of who I am, and if I am to fully be myself at work and actually build relationships with colleagues and students it would be nice for me to be able to be more open with my gender identity in the workplace, but I don't feel that it is a supportive environment for it. The energy I spend hiding at work takes a toll mentally and physically and I definitely have low morale at work as a result."* (Staff)

> *"I have just never seen NB gender identities acknowledged within the department, and have heard 'jokes' about different gender identities which make me feel as though being open about this would be risky."* (Student)

In contrast with people's *desire* to be known, we asked whether they had been *able* to be open at university, and with whom. To do this we asked detailed questions about interactions with tutors, colleagues, fellow students and other university staff in order to capture how openness relates to power differences. The findings indicate a significant gap between participants' desires to be open and their ability to do so.

Figure 3: Students – Who have you been able to be open with about your gender?
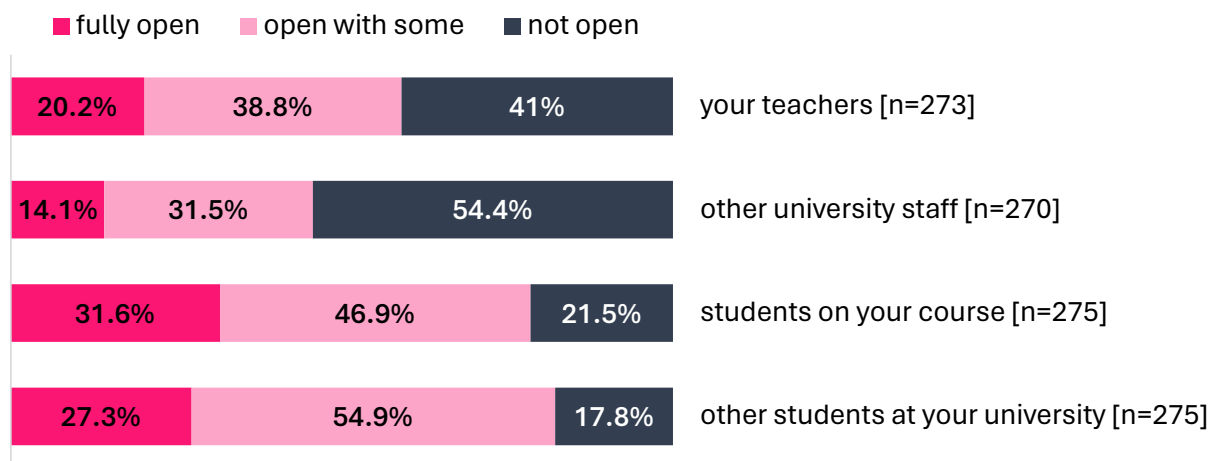
legend: ■ fully open ■ open with some ■ not open

Category	fully open	open with some	not open
your teachers [n=273]	20.2%	38.8%	41%
other university staff [n=270]	14.1%	31.5%	54.4%
students on your course [n=275]	31.6%	46.9%	21.5%
other students at your university [n=275]	27.3%	54.9%	17.8%

Figure 4: PhD Students – Who have you been able to be open with about your gender?

legend: ■ fully open ■ open with some ■ not open

Category	fully open	open with some	not open
your research supervisor(s) [n=30]	53.4%	23.3%	23.3%
other university staff [n=29]	13.8%	51.7%	34.5%
students on your course [n=29]	31.0%	41.4%	27.6%
other students at your university [n=29]	24.1%	51.8%	24.1%
your students [n=29]	24.1%	31%	44.9%
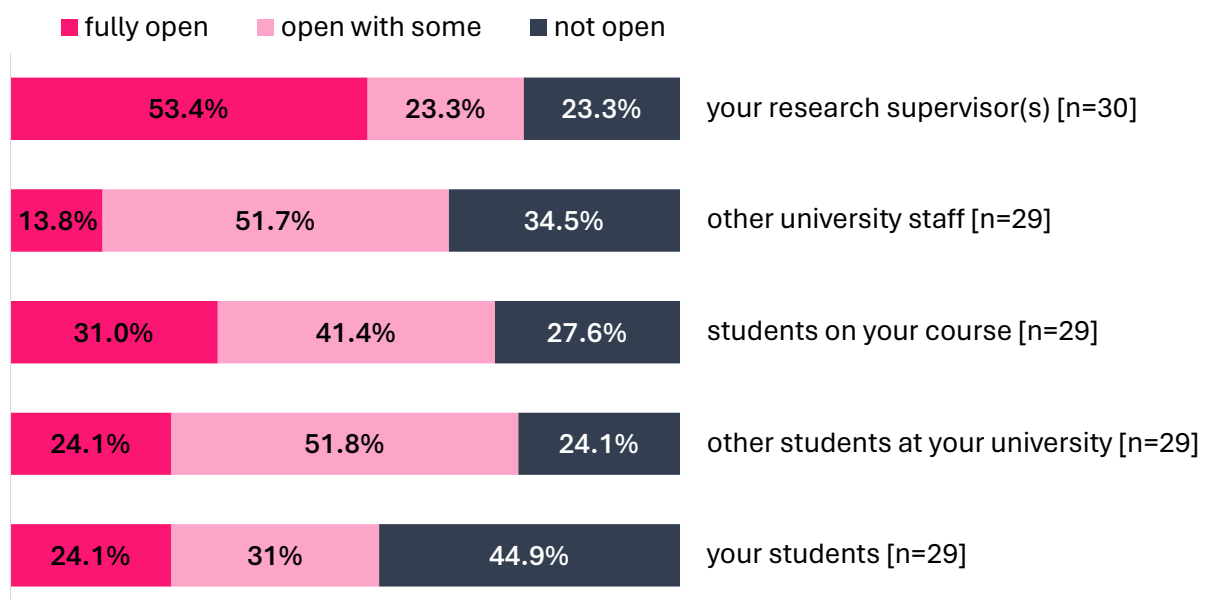
Figure 5: Staff – Who have you been able to be open with about your gender?

■ fully open   ■ open with some   ■ not open

30.5%	40.7%	23.3%	immediate colleagues [n=59]
20.3%	40.7%	39%	other university staff [n=59]
29.8%	31%	50.9%	your students [n=57]
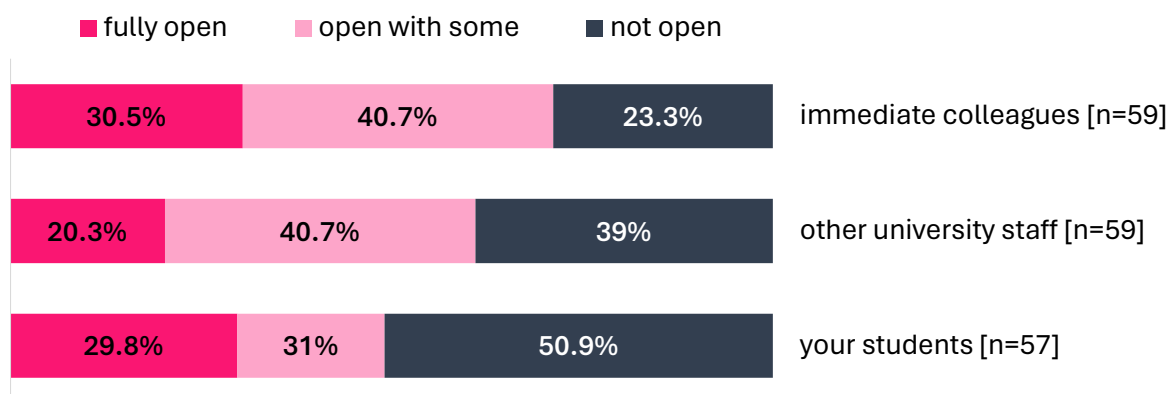
The most significant finding here is that 41% (n=112) of non-binary students are not able to be open with their teachers about their gender and 21.5% (n=59) are not able to be open with other students on their course [fig 3]. For staff, 50.9% (n=29) of staff and 44.8% (n=13) of PhD students who teach have not been able to be open with their students about their gender [figs 4 and 5]. Classrooms and learning and teaching encounters are central to university life, but the survey data indicate they are some of the spaces in which students and staff are least able to be open about their gender.

The qualitative data reveal the impacts, especially on students, of inhabiting classrooms in which they cannot be open about their gender. This ranged from daily microaggressions in the classroom to more blatant transphobic encounters and to longer term detriment to academic success and mental health. Combined, the quantitative and qualitative data reveal that the impact of not being open or having one's gender recognised is costly in terms of learning experiences and well-being.
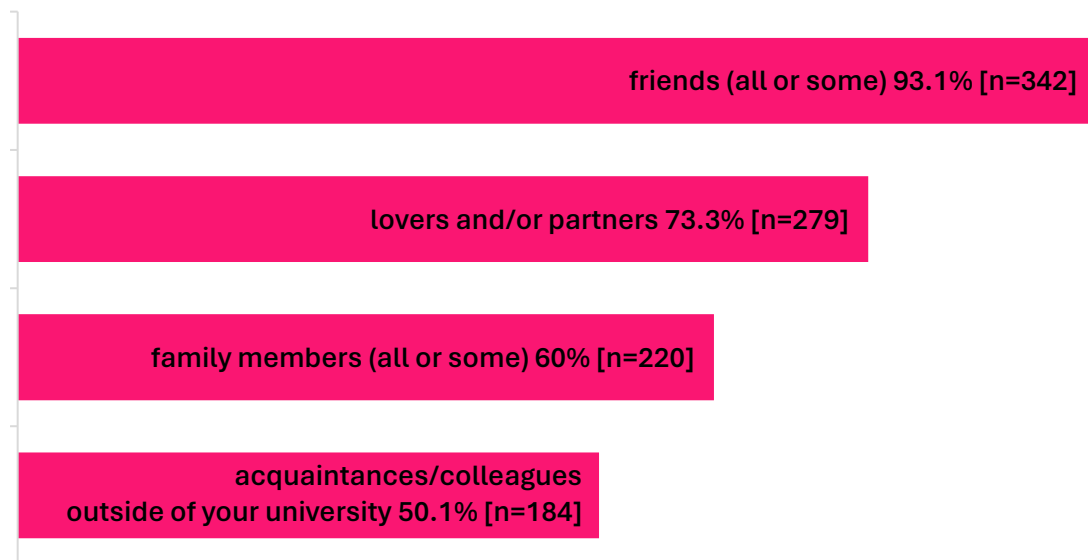
"
"I've told my personal tutor and some of the lecturers I feel more comfortable with. However, there are some I choose not to share my identity with, simply because I'm not entirely sure if they would actually use my chosen pronouns." (Student)

"I feel intensely uncomfortable if I'm not seen as my gender and my self-esteem suffers greatly which has a big impact on my mental health. I'm having to re-sit two essays due to anxiety caused by this." (Student)
"

To better understand the importance to our participants of being open about their gender we asked about who they are open with outside of the university [fig 6]. While there was not space in the survey to ask fully nuanced questions about these categories – for example, "all or some" family members is a broad spectrum – the results indicate that across the majority of their relationship groups participants had higher levels of openness outside university than inside. This suggests that for our participants universities are not spaces in which they feel able to risk the levels of openness they have outside university, and this is particularly the case for students' openness with their teachers and other university staff.

**Figure 6:** Who are you open with about your gender identity outside of the university? [n=367]

friends (all or some) 93.1% [n=342]

lovers and/or partners 73.3% [n=279]

family members (all or some) 60% [n=220]

acquaintances/colleagues outside of your university 50.1% [n=184]

"I knew my course mates wouldn't want to understand non-binary, so I didn't come out." (Student)

"I'm still in the closet about my gender to most people because I'm worried that I will not be given the same respect as I am now if I 'make a big deal' out of coming out, so a lot of my interactions with the staff are a bit anxiety-inducing because I'm hyper aware of being called female terms and my old name yet do not want to change their perceptions of me yet." (Student)

In addition to asking specific questions about who participants were able to be open with, we wanted to ascertain whether there were moments where people felt their gender was particularly validated or erased within the university.

Figure 7: Have there been moments when your gender felt particularly validated, seen or accepted at university? Have there been moments when your gender felt erased at university?
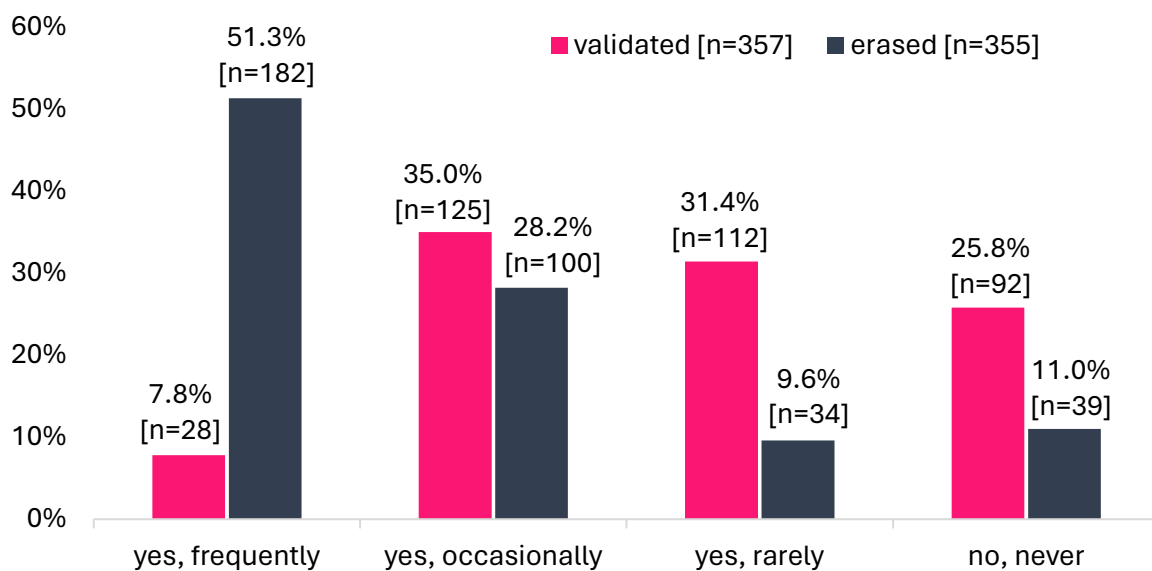
We found that 25.8% (n=92) of participants never experienced moments where their gender felt particularly validated, seen or accepted. 51.3% (n=182) reported that there were moments their gender was frequently erased, with a further 37.8% (n=134) saying this happened occasionally or rarely. While most participants had experienced some moments of validation, the overall picture is one in which erasure is a more common experience than validation.

"My gender is a part of who I am, and how I see and communicate with the world. Every time that's cut off, so am I. I want to feel safe and respected. I want to feel heard." (Student)

"There is no acknowledge-ment of people who reject having any fixed gender. The policies all assume that you have to have one of some sort." (Student)

"Every time I use the 'male' toilet I feel erased because anyone seeing me go in can say to themselves 'oh, he's really a man because he has accepted the label on the door'." (Staff)

Non-Binary in Higher Education: Survey Findings, Report and Recommendations

These moments make up people's experiences of being non-binary in an institution. The qualitative data demonstrate both validation and erasure occurring in individual experiences and interactions with staff, students and peers, but also that erasure was more often reported in administrative, physical and symbolic contexts.

A further open question in the survey revealed that these experiences of both validation and erasure are also shaped by other intersecting aspects of participants' identities, particularly race, disability, immigration status and class. These findings suggest that the reality of institutional life does not often reflect a person's desire to have their gender known and to be treated accordingly.

"I am happy that in many university forms and surveys I can choose the non-binary option." (Student)

"Having a lecturer who introduced themselves with their name and they/them pronouns during their first class, and proceeded to end each email with their pronouns." (Student)

"Tutor always uses they/them pronouns." (Student)

"My tutor consistently talks about me and gives me written feedback with the wrong pronouns." (Student)

"Being misgendered by tutors in seminars and not feeling able to correct them." (Student)

"I am a visibly queer disabled immigrant researching a highly stigmatised topic. I feel unable to come out as non-binary, because this would add another layer of other-ness to the way my institution and possible future employers see me." (Student)

"As a disabled person whose disability is 'invisible' as it is a mental health issue, I have been told by students and lecturers and other staff that it would be better for my mental health if I was not trans or if I chose a binary gender." (Student)

"I feel like my autism prevents me from telling people about the nonbinary aspects of my gender because it detracts from the respectable allistic 'mask' I expect myself to wear every day." (Student)

Policies, Administrative Systems and Facilities

In addition to gathering data on participants' experiences of being non-binary in HE, we also wanted to know what institutions are doing practically in terms of policies, administrative systems and the provision of facilities.

Policies

In recent years universities have put a great deal of energy into establishing equality, diversity and inclusion policies. Some have specific trans inclusion policies and we wanted to know if our participants were aware of their institutions' policies.

Figure 8: Does your institution have a policy that addresses trans issues? This could be a specific trans inclusion policy or an EDI type policy.
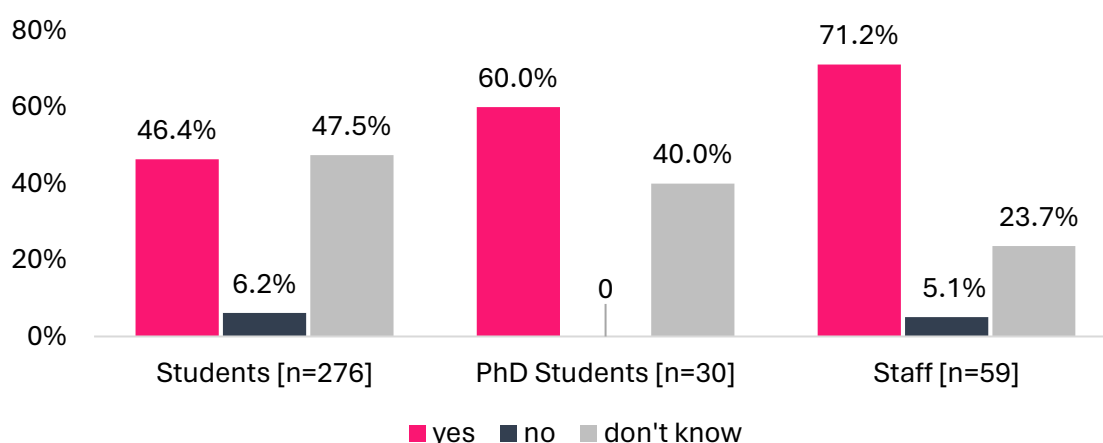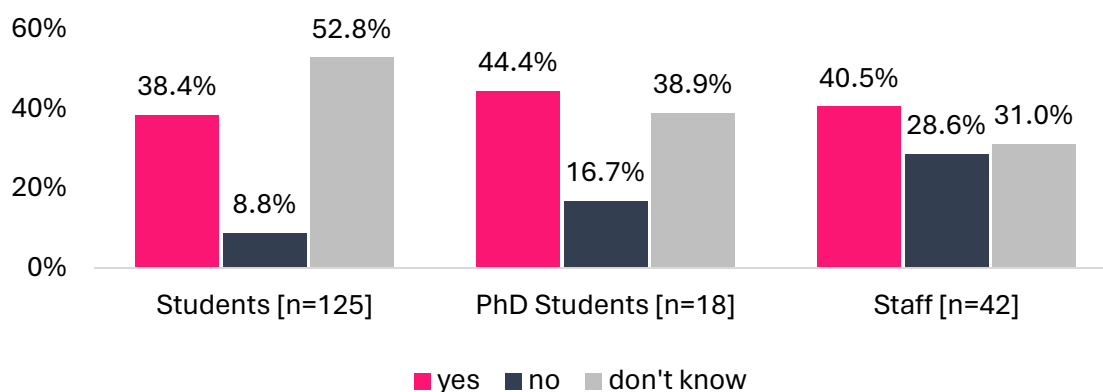

Figure 9: If yes, does the policy include non-binary genders?

The data show that a greater proportion of staff are aware of the existence, or not, of policies than students. However, it is significant that the largest proportion of students (47.5%, n=131) are unaware of whether their institution has a trans inclusion policy [fig 8]. What this suggests is that whether or not those policies exist, students will not know what the university's commitments to trans and non-binary students are, or what support is available to them. Where there was knowledge of policies, the data also show that under half of these policies specify non-binary inclusion. More significantly 31% (n=13) of staff; 38.9% (n=7) of PhD students and 52.8% (n=66) of students did not know if the policy specifically included non-binary people [fig 9].

Administrative Systems (or 'Life Administration')

Information such as names, preferred names, gender markers, titles and **pronouns** is recorded in student record and HR systems. It then appears in a range of situations including communications with the institution, class lists, interactions with personal tutors, lecturers and colleagues as well as official correspondence. The ability to update data held by the institution is very important to some non-binary people who want to change their name, title or pronouns to better reflect gender identity.

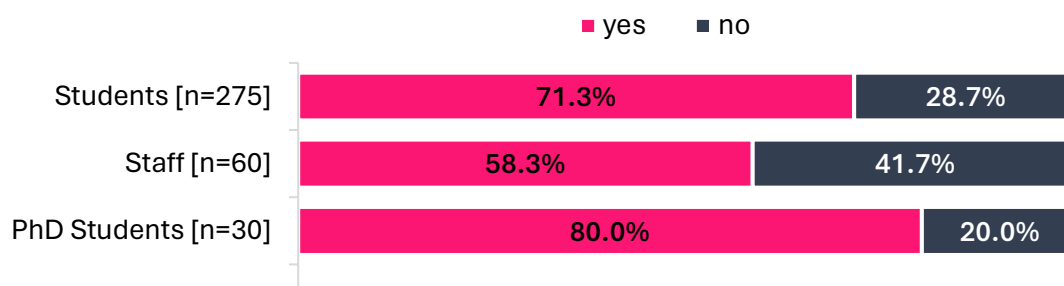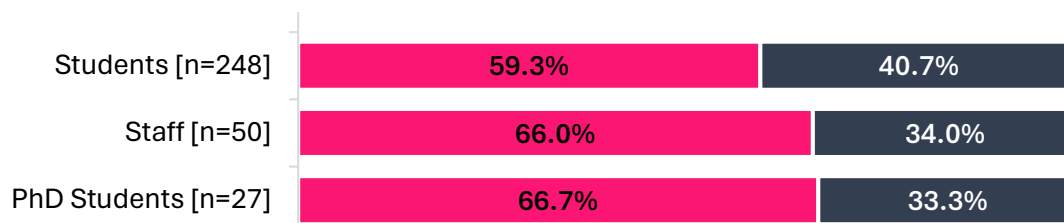**Figure 10:** Have you wanted to do any non-binary 'life administration' at your institution?

■ yes   ■ no

	yes	no
Students [n=275]	71.3%	28.7%
Staff [n=60]	58.3%	41.7%
PhD Students [n=30]	80.0%	20.0%

Figure 11: Have you been able to (or would it be possible to do) any non-binary 'life administration' at your institution?

	yes	no
Students [n=248]	59.3%	40.7%
Staff [n=50]	66.0%	34.0%
PhD Students [n=27]	66.7%	33.3%

We asked participants whether they had wanted to do this type of non-binary 'life administration' at their institution and found the vast majority of students (71.3%, n=196) and PhD students (80%, n=24) and a smaller majority of staff (58.3%, n=35) did want to [fig 10]. We then asked whether they had been able to, or whether it was possible to, do any life administration; approximately two-thirds of participants reported it was, or would be, possible. There is a significant discrepancy between the number of people, especially students, wanting to do life administration and those reporting they were able to.

The data show a very mixed picture of what is available to participants in terms of administrative support to have their gender accurately reflected in their administrative profile. The ability to indicate a preferred name appeared widespread, whereas the availability of appropriate gender markers was not. The data suggest very uneven practices across the sector with some excellent and some extremely poor practice occurring. These issues may seem peripheral to larger questions around inclusion, however the qualitative data reveal that when these details are incorrect, cannot be changed or are onerous to get changed, this often results in non-binary people being misgendered. In the lived experiences of our non-binary participants this contributes to feelings of erasure within the university (Benato, Fraser and White, forthcoming), and is central to shaping daily interactions with the institution.

> *"I can indicate a preferred name that's then nearly universally ignored by every aspect of uni admin, which uses my legal first name and thereby misgenders me constantly."* (Student)

> *"I'm unable in certain places to change my name, as some university databases require my legal name to match my visa… My teachers wanted to use an online learning environment which would have displayed my deadname to all classmates and staff, and initially the IT systems were reluctant to change it. It was only because of persistence on the part of one teacher that they finally changed it."* (Student)

> *"I have been unable to make any administration changes due to uncertainty about how this would affect my communications with the university and whether I would inadvertently be outed to my family by my communications with them."* (Student)

> *"I am non-binary and would like to change any formal salutations on documents to 'Mx'. The University … changed my salutation to 'NEUTRAL' – for example, any documents sent to me will say 'Dear NEUTRAL'."* (Staff)

Non-Binary in Higher Education: Survey Findings, Report and Recommendations

Facilities

Facilities, like toilets and changing rooms, are some of the most prominent everyday gender-segregated public spaces. When gender-neutral facilities are not provided it is a very stark example of non-binary exclusion via the physical environment, and a further symbol of the erasure of non-binary people within the institution. The provision of gender-neutral toilets has become emblematic of institutional commitments to EDI and trans inclusion and this is reflected in the data in that a majority of participants reported that their institution did have gender-neutral toilets. However nearly-one third of participants reported not having access to gender-neutral toilets at their university.

Figure 12: Does your institution have specific gender-neutral toilets?
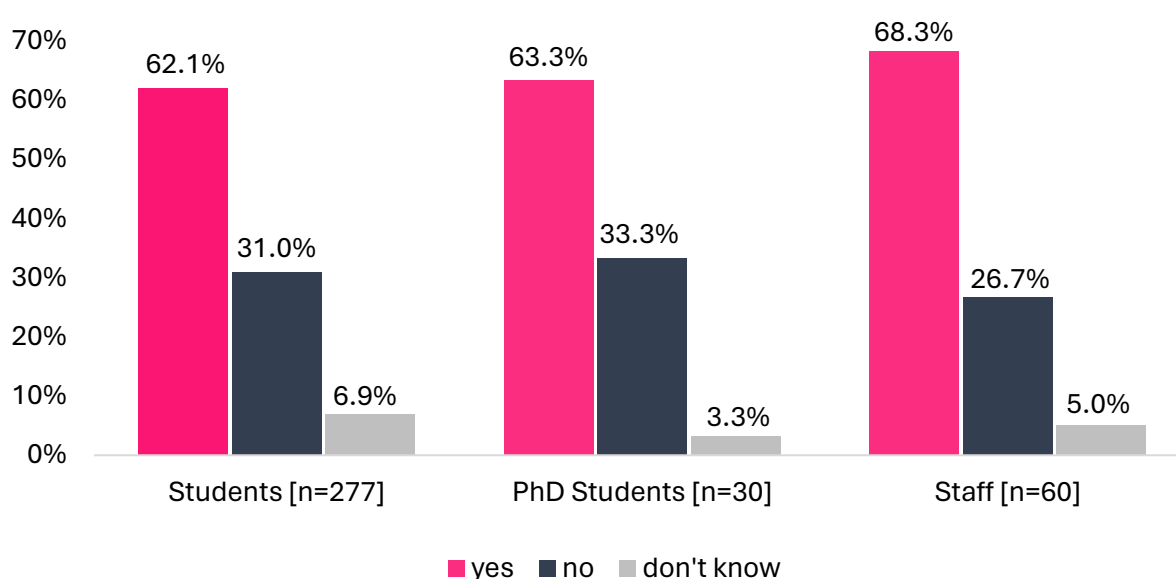
It is notable that the number of participants who 'don't know' whether their institution has gender-neutral toilets is very low (6%, n=23). This contrasts starkly with the numbers who 'don't know' whether their institution has a trans inclusion policy (43%, n=157) [see fig 8], suggesting that provisions such as toilets play a prominent and practical role in the everyday experiences of non-binary people in HE.

> *"Gender-neutral toilets are mostly limited to the college where I live. The faculty buildings are far worse on this front, which is actually quite inconvenient and puts me off spending time there."* (Student)

Non-Binary in Higher Education: Survey Findings, Report and Recommendations

We asked further questions to gather more information about the quality of toilet provision and found that while gender-neutral toilets are technically available they are often hard to find and poorly signposted, issues that were also reflected in the qualitative data.

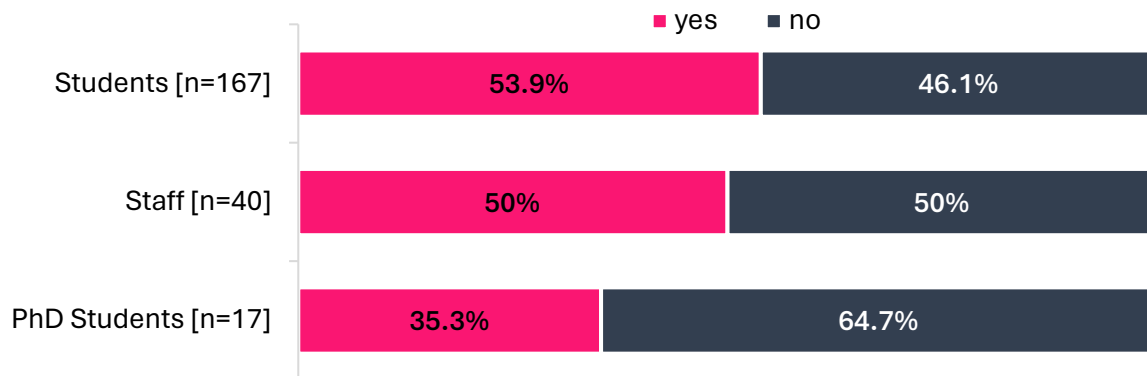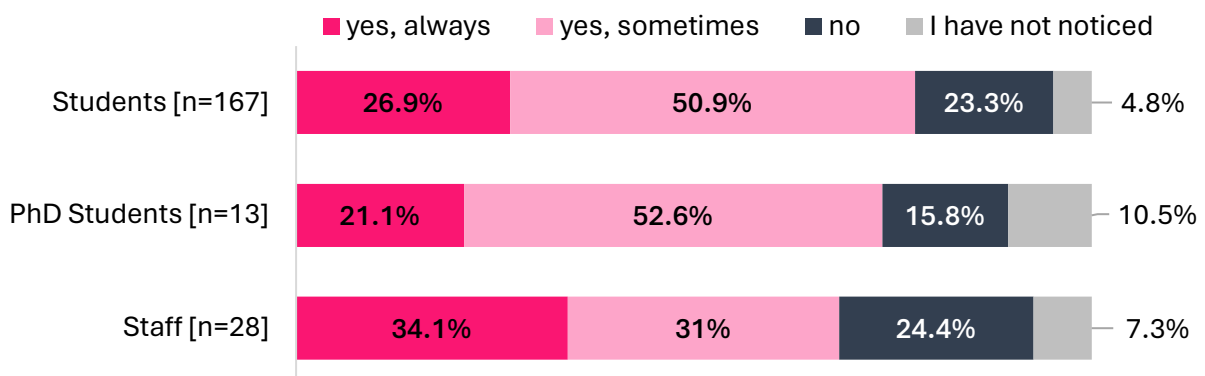**Figure 13:** Are the gender-neutral toilets in your institution easy to find?

Legend: ■ yes ■ no

	yes	no
Students [n=167]	53.9%	46.1%
Staff [n=40]	50%	50%
PhD Students [n=17]	35.3%	64.7%

Figure 14: Are the gender-neutral toilets in your institution adequately signed?

Legend: ■ yes, always ■ yes, sometimes ■ no ■ I have not noticed

	yes, always	yes, sometimes	no	I have not noticed
Students [n=167]	26.9%	50.9%	23.3%	4.8%
PhD Students [n=13]	21.1%	52.6%	15.8%	10.5%
Staff [n=28]	34.1%	31%	24.4%	7.3%

"There are buildings on campus which have no gender-neutral toilets and so I consistently have to go out of my way to use a gender-neutral toilet." (Student)

"There are only two bathrooms in my whole university that I can use without discomfort. They are down six flights of stairs on the ground floor, and unless I'm close to the area there's no other toilets on campus that I can use." (Student)

"There's also a real lack of gender-neutral toilet provision across the campus. Toilets in a couple of buildings isn't enough." (Student)

Demographics

To better understand the diversity of our participants and the intersectional nature of their experiences of being non-binary in HE we asked a range of demographic questions. These included those about aspects of identity as well as questions relating to geographical location and participants' studies and/or work.

Identity: Gender

Identifying in some way as non-binary was a requirement for participation in the survey. However, we wanted to find out the range of ways people described their non-binary gender. We deliberately designed an open question to capture the diversity that might fall under the commonly used umbrella term 'non-binary'.

There were 356 responses to this question in which participants described their gender in 93 different ways. To code this data we distinguished between participants who described their gender with a single term, e.g., 'non-binary', 'genderqueer' or 'agender' and those who used two or more terms or whole sentences to describe their gender [fig 15a]. There was a roughly even split between the single term (50.8%, n=181) and multiple term (49.2%, n=175) responses. In total 66% (n=235) of participants used the term 'non-binary' somewhere in their answer. The most frequently occurring combinations were 'non-binary transmasculine' (n=31), 'non-binary genderqueer' (n=22), 'non-binary agender' (n=21) and 'non-binary trans' (n=17). It is notable that only five participants (1.4%) described themselves as trans in some way without further qualifiers, and only 20.5% (n=73) of participants used the term 'trans' in some way in their answer [figs 15b and 15c]. The data demonstrate that non-binary is a very heterogeneous category and participants had complex and multiple understandings of their genders. This finding clearly shows that non-binary gender is not a single fixed entity, and further, is not synonymous with 'trans'.

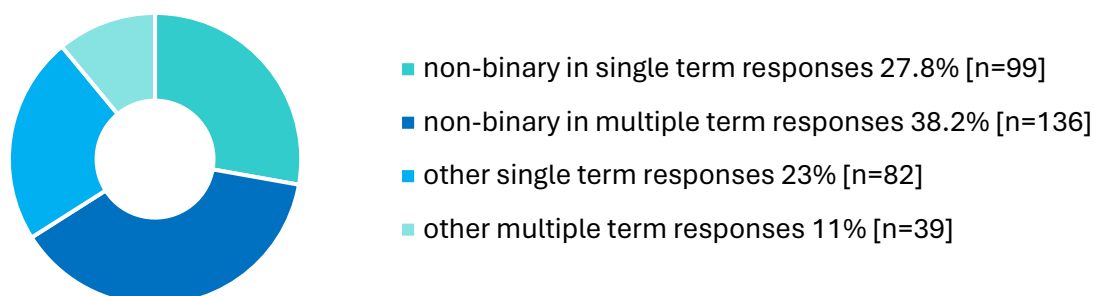**Figure 15a: How would you describe your gender identity? [n=356]**

- non-binary in single term responses 27.8% [n=99]
- non-binary in multiple term responses 38.2% [n=136]
- other single term responses 23% [n=82]
- other multiple term responses 11% [n=39]

Non-Binary in Higher Education: Survey Findings, Report and Recommendations

Figure 15b: How would you describe your gender identity?
Single term responses [n=181]

- Genderqueer 9% [n=17]
- Genderfluid 7% [n=13]
- No Gender / Genderless 3% [n=5]
- Demi Girl 2% [n=3]
- Female 2% [n=3]
- Gender Non-Conforming 1% [n=2]
- Transmasculine 1% [n=2]
- Androgynous 0.5% [n=1]
- Bigender 0.5% [n=1]
- Demi Male 0.5% [n=1]
- Gender Neutral 0.5% [n=1]
- Graygender 0.5% [n=1]
- Intersex 0.5% [n=1]
- Neutrois 0.5% [n=1]
- Questioning 0.5% [n=1]
- Queer 0.5% [n=1]
- Trans Female 0.5% [n=1]
- Transgender 0.5% [n=1]
- Transman 0.5% [n=1]
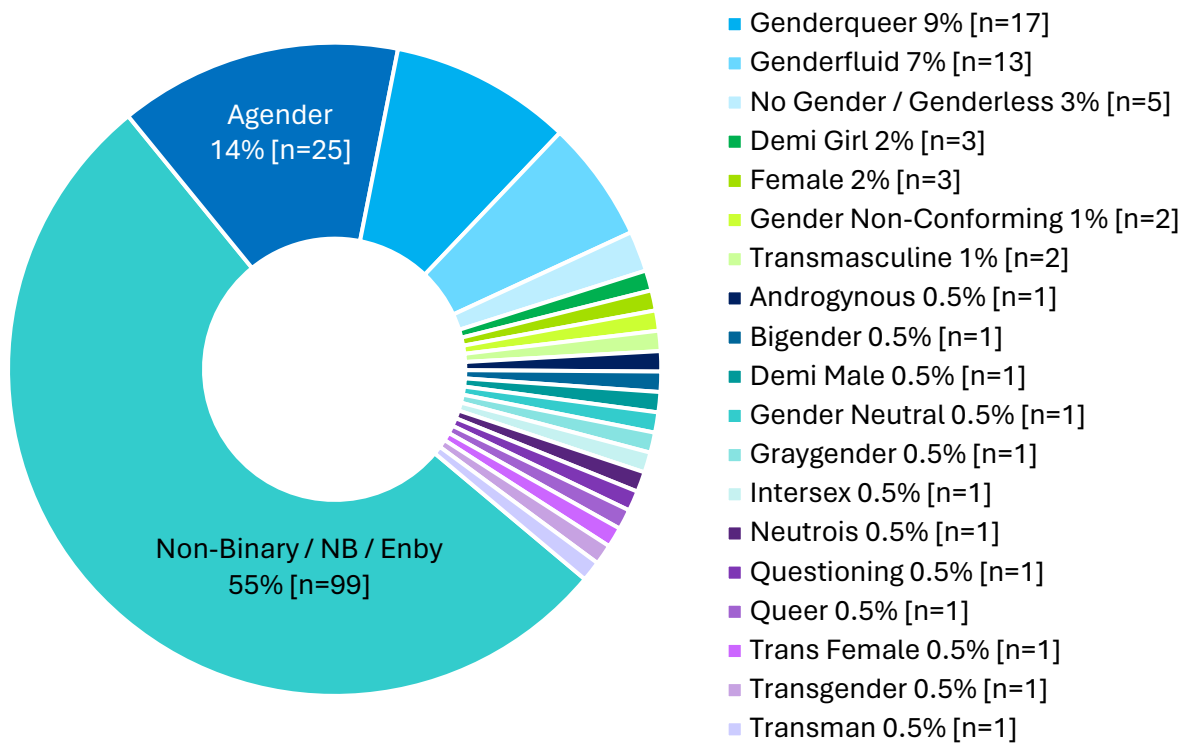
Figure 15c: How would you describe your gender identity?
Frequency of terms used in multiple term responses

- Non-Binary [n=136]
- 'Trans' in some way (total) [n=73]
- Transmasc/Transmasculine [n=37]
- Genderqueer [n=36]
- Agender [n=31]
- Trans/Transgender [n=19]
- Genderfluid [n=15]
- Trans Man/Trans Male [n=12]
- Masc/Masculine [n=12]
- Femme/Feminine [n=10]
- Woman/Female [n=8]
- Bigender [n=7]
- Queer [n=7]
- Gender Non-Conforming [n=5]
- Man/Male [n=5]
- Trans Woman/Female [n=3]
- Transfemme/Transfeminine [n=3]
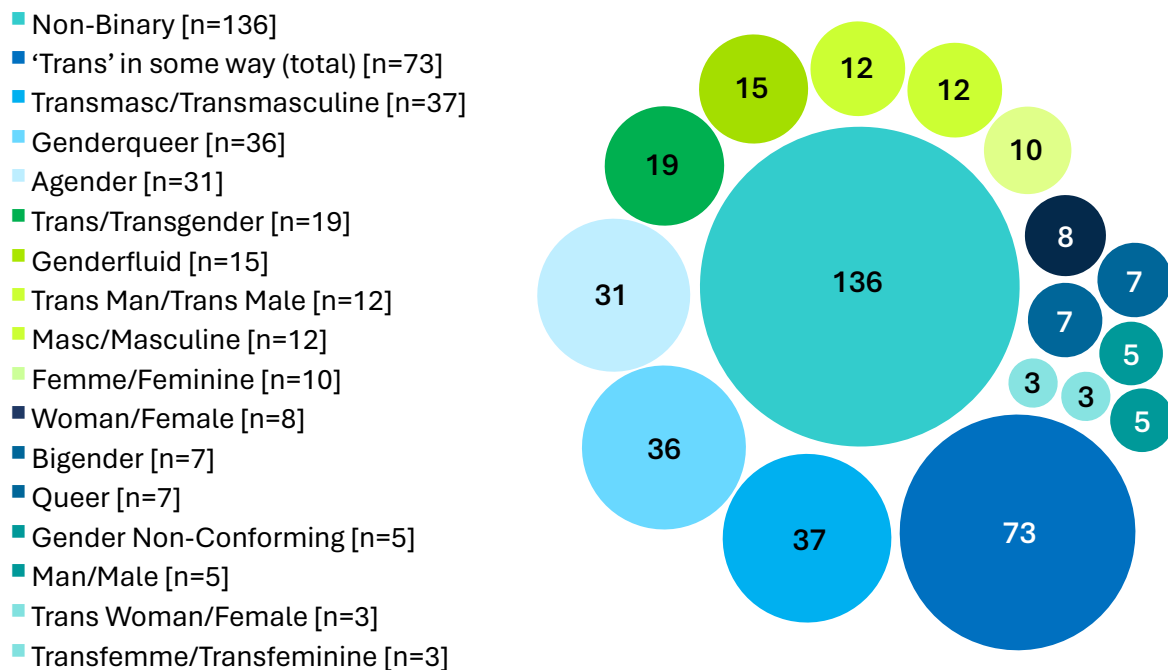
Age

The data show that 36.7% (n=129) of respondents understood their gender as non-binary before they were of university age. A further 44.8% (n=157) of respondents started to think about their gender as non-binary between the ages of 18 and 29. Therefore, universities can anticipate students having a diverse range of genders upon entering the institution as well as students' changing identities during their studies and up to early careers.
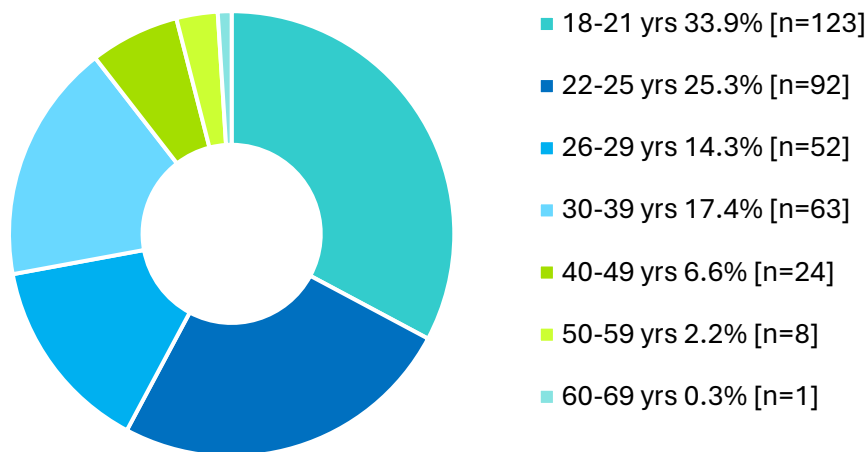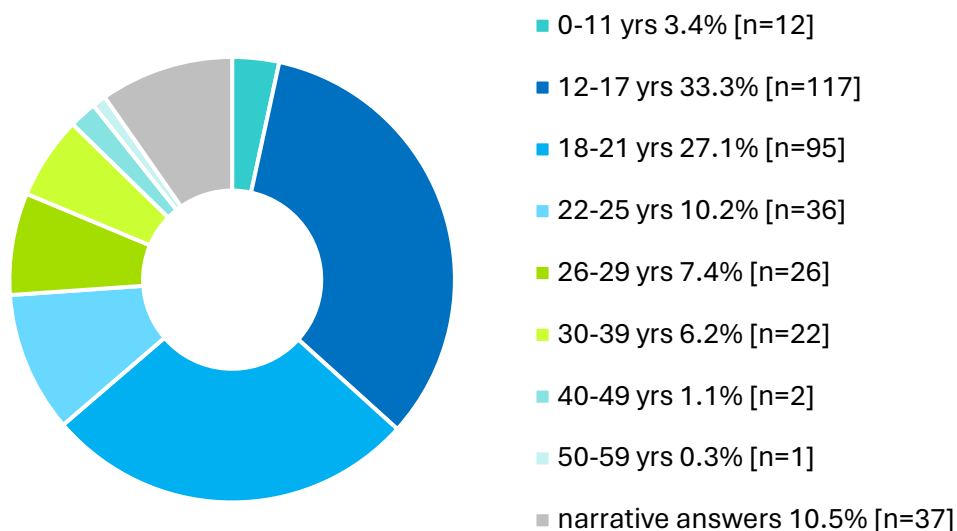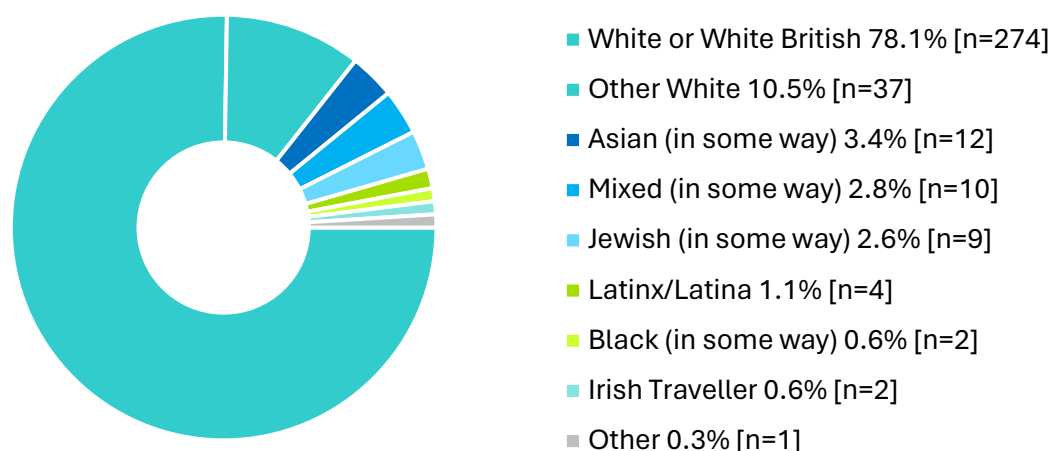
Figure 16a: What is your age? [n=363]

- 18-21 yrs 33.9% [n=123]
- 22-25 yrs 25.3% [n=92]
- 26-29 yrs 14.3% [n=52]
- 30-39 yrs 17.4% [n=63]
- 40-49 yrs 6.6% [n=24]
- 50-59 yrs 2.2% [n=8]
- 60-69 yrs 0.3% [n=1]

Figure 16b: At what age did you start to think about your gender as non-binary? [n=351]

- 0-11 yrs 3.4% [n=12]
- 12-17 yrs 33.3% [n=117]
- 18-21 yrs 27.1% [n=95]
- 22-25 yrs 10.2% [n=36]
- 26-29 yrs 7.4% [n=26]
- 30-39 yrs 6.2% [n=22]
- 40-49 yrs 1.1% [n=2]
- 50-59 yrs 0.3% [n=1]
- narrative answers 10.5% [n=37]
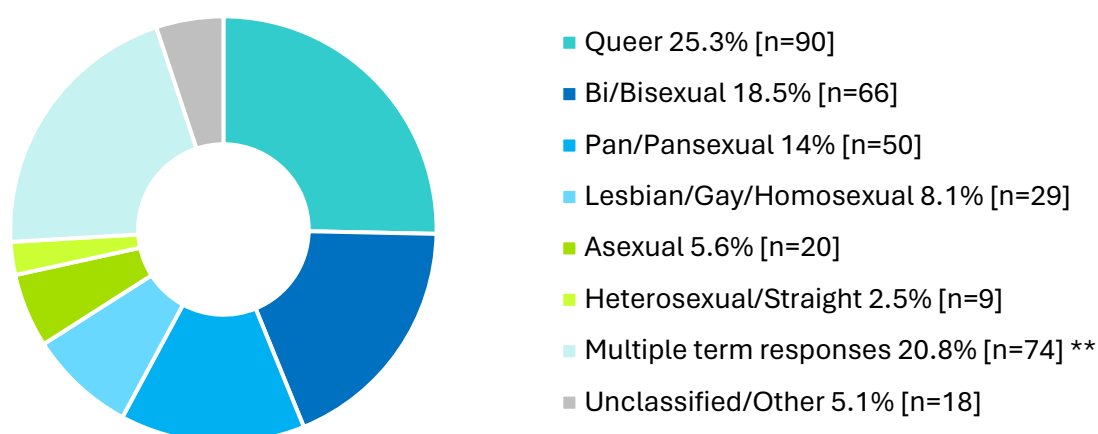
Race and Ethnicity / Sexuality / Disability

The data on participants' race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability indicates again the heterogeneity of non-binary people in HE and their intersectional experiences and needs. The impact of this intersectionality was very evident in the survey's qualitative data, especially in relation to disability. 44.3% (n=160) of participants reported being disabled in some way [fig 19], and their qualitative data further reveal how they are often forced to choose between having their disability-related needs or gender-related needs met within their institutions.

Figure 17: How would you describe your race and/or ethnicity? [n=351] *

- White or White British 78.1% [n=274]
- Other White 10.5% [n=37]
- Asian (in some way) 3.4% [n=12]
- Mixed (in some way) 2.8% [n=10]
- Jewish (in some way) 2.6% [n=9]
- Latinx/Latina 1.1% [n=4]
- Black (in some way) 0.6% [n=2]
- Irish Traveller 0.6% [n=2]
- Other 0.3% [n=1]

* Due to the range of ways participants recorded their racial or ethnic identity, and some of the small numbers involved, we have grouped some descriptions together in presenting the data to protect participants' anonymity.

Figure 18: How do you describe your sexual orientation? [n=356]

- Queer 25.3% [n=90]
- Bi/Bisexual 18.5% [n=66]
- Pan/Pansexual 14% [n=50]
- Lesbian/Gay/Homosexual 8.1% [n=29]
- Asexual 5.6% [n=20]
- Heterosexual/Straight 2.5% [n=9]
- Multiple term responses 20.8% [n=74] **
- Unclassified/Other 5.1% [n=18]

** The most frequently used terms in the multiple word responses were bi/bisexual (n=34), queer (n=33), asexual (n=21) and pan/pansexual (n=18).

Figure 19: Do you consider yourself to have a disability or disabilities? [n=361]

no
47.9%
[n=173]

yes
44.3%
[n=160]

prefer not to say
7.8% [n=28]
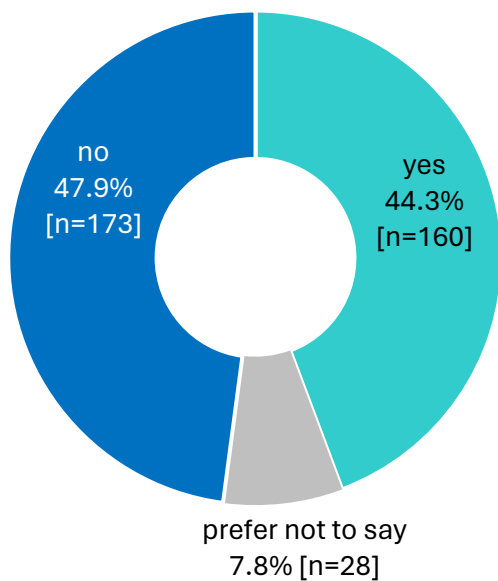
"I feel like I cannot speak up [about being non-binary] *because I need to stay on the good side of* [my] *tutor for when I need approval for disability accommodations."* (Student)

"Because I already find it hard to be at the research spaces used by other students/staff members due to my auditory processing disorder and executive functioning problems, I have with many people given up on trying to correct their language when I am misgendered and so coming 'out' as trans/ nonbinary, however I do it, is often temporary." (Student)

"Being black means having to resist a history that has actively degendered you i.e. with women during slavery or through colonial sex abuse or even through the huge misogyny present throughout civil rights efforts to be honest. It's fighting a deeply objectifying culture that says you can't be feminine or fragile or on a level with white women. If you then actively 'degender' yourself people are like 'whose side are you on?'" (Student)

*"LGBTQIA+ Society events don't always recognise **BIPOC** experiences and intersections of race with gender, where NB and trans identities may be recognised but are associated with whiteness."* (Student)
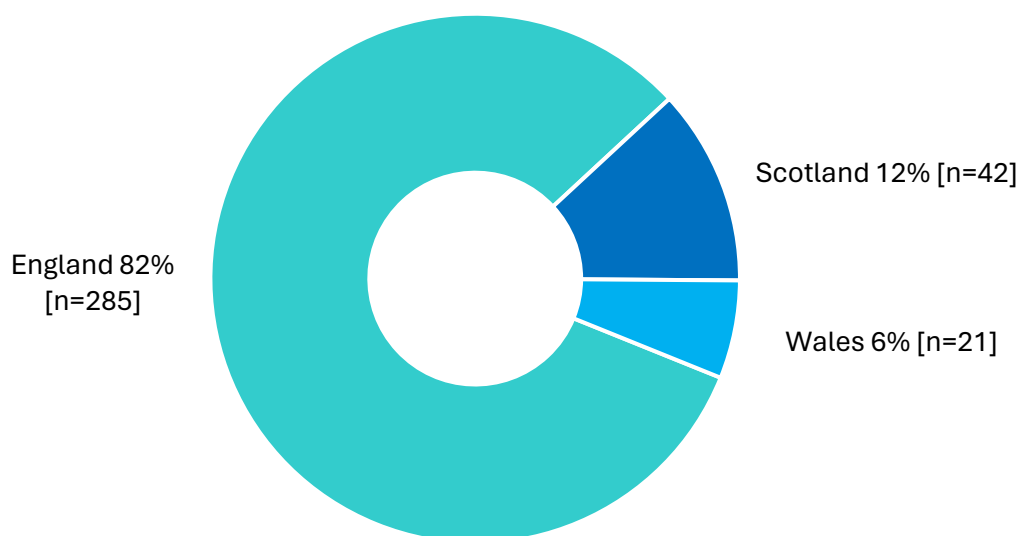
"Being accepted for all of who I am would let me put all of my efforts into my studies instead of feeling drained by constant policing of my identity around other people." (Student)

"I feel like academia does not recognise me and my experiences, and that it will be an uphill struggle (on top of studying, working, and marginalisation of other aspects of my identity, like race, class, and disability) to demand recognition and a safer working environment." (Student)
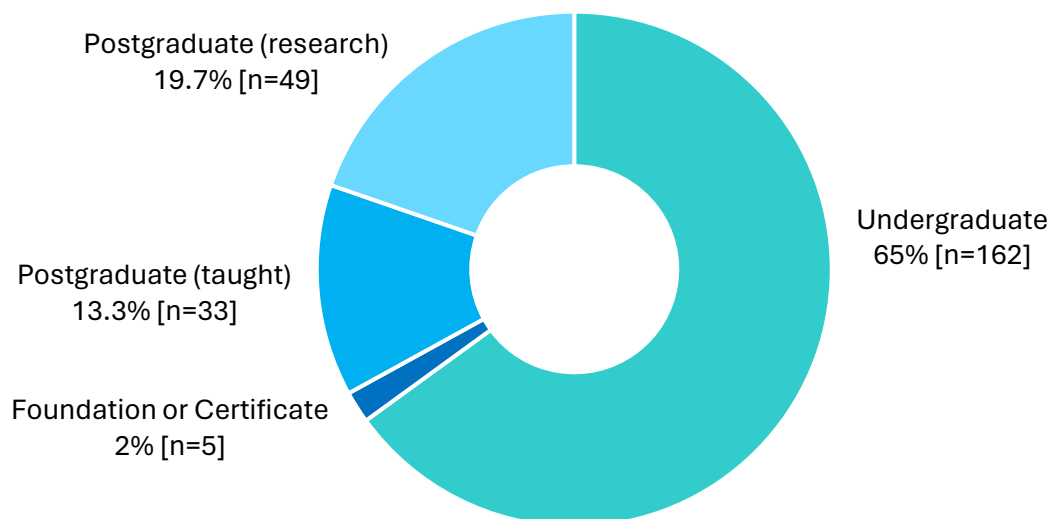
Location

Figure 20: What region is your university in? [n=348]

England 82% [n=285]

Scotland 12% [n=42]

Wales 6% [n=21]

Level of Study

Figure 21: What level are you studying at? [n=249] *

Postgraduate (research) 19.7% [n=49]

Postgraduate (taught) 13.3% [n=33]

Foundation or Certificate 2% [n=5]

Undergraduate 65% [n=162]

* This chart includes participants who answered the survey as students [n=219], and as PhD students who teach [n=30].

Study/Teaching Discipline

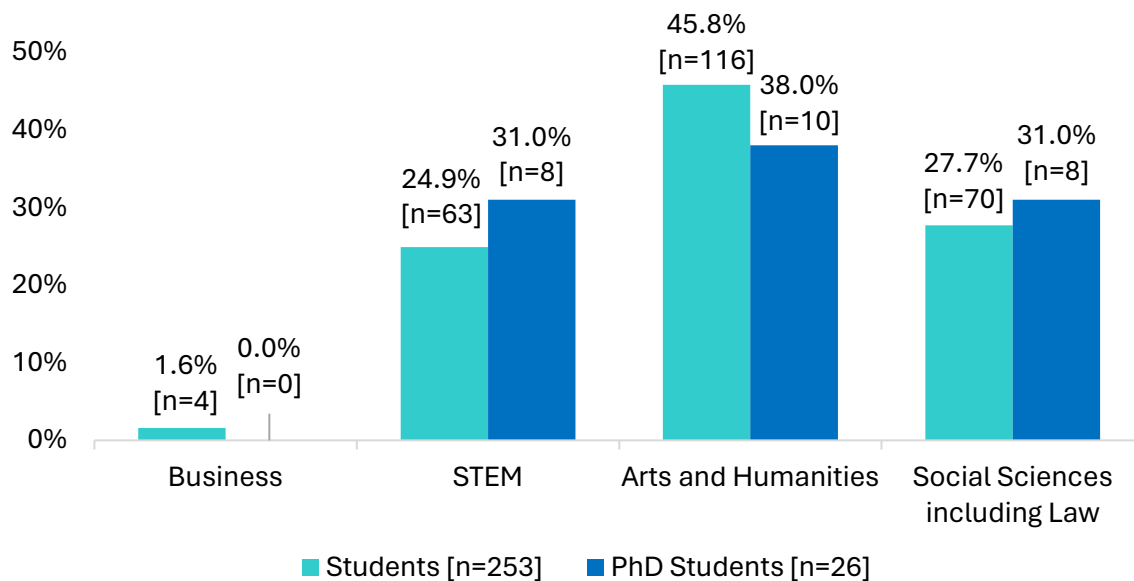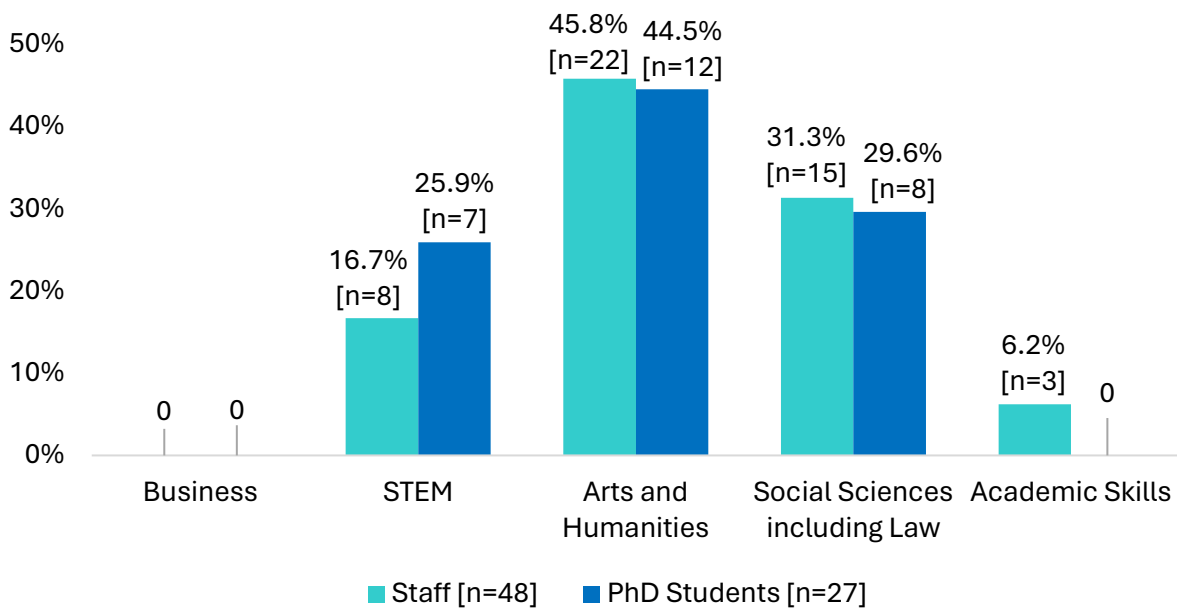**Figure 22:** What discipline are you studying/did you study?

Figure 22 bar chart data:
- Business: Students 1.6% [n=4], PhD Students 0.0% [n=0]
- STEM: Students 24.9% [n=63], PhD Students 31.0% [n=8]
- Arts and Humanities: Students 45.8% [n=116], PhD Students 38.0% [n=10]
- Social Sciences including Law: Students 27.7% [n=70], PhD Students 31.0% [n=8]

Legend: ■ Students [n=253] ■ PhD Students [n=26]

Figure 23: What discipline do you teach?

Figure 23 bar chart data:
- Business: Staff 0, PhD Students 0
- STEM: Staff 16.7% [n=8], PhD Students 25.9% [n=7]
- Arts and Humanities: Staff 45.8% [n=22], PhD Students 44.5% [n=12]
- Social Sciences including Law: Staff 31.3% [n=15], PhD Students 29.6% [n=8]
- Academic Skills: Staff 6.2% [n=3], PhD Students 0

Legend: ■ Staff [n=48] ■ PhD Students [n=27]

The data show that with the exception of business, students and staff are spread across academic disciplines. The qualitative data also indicate that students experienced discriminatory classroom situations related to their gender across the disciplines and this was not concentrated in one or two areas.

Employment

Non-binary staff are represented across different categories of employment, and are at different stages of their careers. 43.8% (n=25) of staff and all of the PhD students (n=30) surveyed are relatively new to teaching (five years or less) [figs 26 and 27]. Significantly almost half (48.3%, n=29) are in fixed-term employment [fig 25]. The impact of this kind of academic employment came through in the qualitative data where participants shared that the precarity of their employment often prevents them from being open about their gender at work.

Figure 24: Staff [n=60]
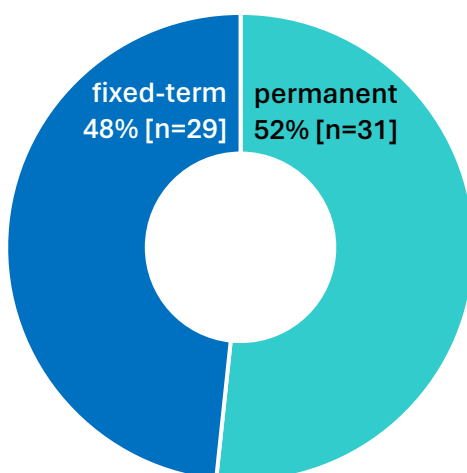**Are you employed part-time or full-time?**

part-time
25%
[n=15]

full-time
75%
[n=45]
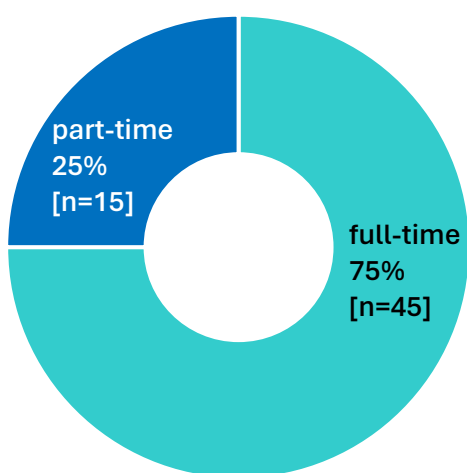
Figure 25: Staff [n=60]
Are you on a fixed-term or permanent contract?

fixed-term
48% [n=29]

permanent
52% [n=31]

"I know how difficult the academic job market is, and how conservative my field is, and I know that by coming out I would shoot my already precarious opportunities in the foot." (Staff)

"Being working class means that I must be extremely careful in displaying or discussing my gender, because I can't risk losing my teaching hours because of complaints or similar." (Staff)

Non-Binary in Higher Education: Survey Findings, Report and Recommendations

Figure 26: Staff – How many years have you been teaching? [n=57]

20+ years
12% [n=7]

11-20 years
18% [n=10]

6-10 years
26% [n=15]

0-5 years
44% [n=25]
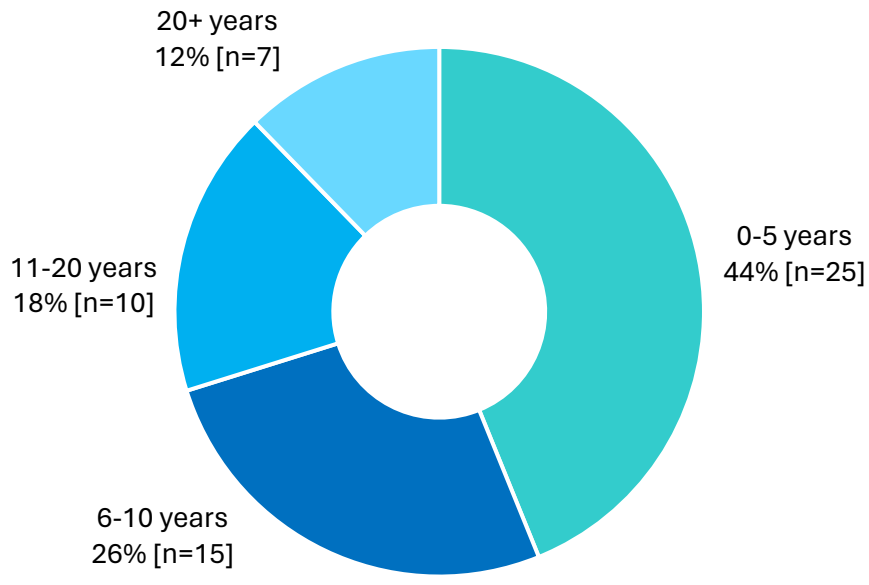
Figure 27: PhD Students – How many years have you been teaching? [n=30]

5 years 3.3% [n=1]

4 years 3.3% [n=1]

3 years
26.7% [n=8]

0-1 year
33.3% [n=10]

2 years
33.3% [n=10]
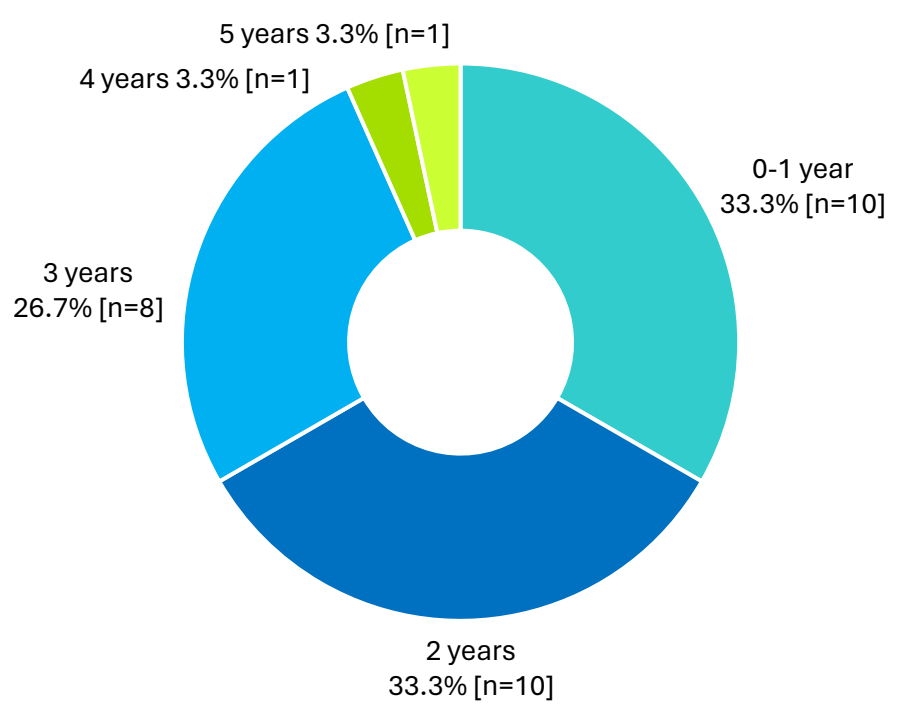
Recommendations

The survey findings have implications for non-binary people's learning and working lives and demonstrate that universities have considerable work to do to create welcoming spaces for non-binary people. Participants overwhelmingly want to be open about their gender and treated accordingly at university. However, the data show they are significantly less able to do this within the university compared to their lives outside it.

Universities must go beyond the minimum legal requirements to ensure that, from the very first interaction a potential student or staff member has with the university, through to their successful graduation or end of contract, there is a welcoming environment that positively enables them to study, teach, research or work. This must extend to all spaces of the university: the academic, the social, the administrative, the architectural and the pedagogical.

Each HE institution will have specific contexts for addressing these issues, and decisions about actions should include non-binary staff and students. Below we offer some possible areas for action that our findings tell us are likely to have the greatest impact. We have divided these into recommendations aimed at two groups: **university management and administrators** and **academic and teaching staff**. Links to **further resources and reading** are provided at the end of the section.

University management and administrators

Policies
▶ If you have trans inclusion or EDI policies they should specifically include non-binary people. Do not assume their needs will always be addressed by a broader trans inclusion policy.
▶ Any policy needs to address intersections of gender, race, class, disability, neurodiversity and other characteristics.
▶ A diverse range of non-binary staff and students need to be involved in the policy creation process.
▶ Clearly signpost any policy and/or guidance to students and staff so they are aware of the resources and support available.
▶ Engage in regular policy review processes so non-binary people can address gaps that exist between policy and their lived experiences. Make clear the routes for raising, reporting and resolving breaches of the policy or guidance.

29

Culture

▶ Deliver training for academic and support staff about non-binary genders, including best practice around use of language, pronouns and names.

▶ Review current language use in the institution and develop guidance on inclusive language and practices that enable staff and students to learn about and navigate differences.

▶ Have a named member of staff that staff who are not non-binary can contact to ask questions, and that non-binary staff can contact to have informal conversations about navigating the environment and discuss options if they are facing microaggressions or overt hostility.

Administrative Systems

▶ Do ensure that there are clear, transparent and easily accessible mechanisms for non-binary people to make changes as and when they need to.

▶ Do not assume all non-binary people want or need to change their name or make other types of administrative changes.

▶ Create maximum flexibility within systems so that non-binary people's data (e.g. names, pronouns, titles, photos and gender markers) can be recorded in ways that ensure they feel recognised and engaged with as themselves. For example:

  ▶ have a range of titles available and allow people to choose no title at all;

  ▶ enable students to change their name, or indicate a preferred name, without onerous documentation requirements (e.g. without a deed poll or passport);

  ▶ allow students to indicate which name they would like to have used for internal University communications (e.g. emails, class registers) and which name they would like to have used for official communications (e.g. post sent to their family home, degree certificates).

▶ Ensure that information is consistent across IT systems (e.g. student/staff records, virtual learning environments, timetabling systems and automated correspondence). This will mean students/staff are always correctly identified.

Facilities

▶ Provide well-signed and physically accessible gender-neutral toilets, shower and changing facilities throughout your campus(es).

▶ Ensure that all toilet stalls have sanitary supplies and bins.

Academic and teaching staff

Names and Pronouns

▶ Respect the name and/or pronouns that a student or colleague has asked you to use for them.

▶ Do not assume someone's gender or pronouns. Look up students' pronouns and chosen names on the student information system in advance of class or meetings.

▶ Ensure that your class register reflects the names and pronouns that students are using.

▶ Model good practice around pronouns use by adding your pronouns to, for example, your email signature, your office door sign and your virtual learning environment profile.

▶ Introduce your pronouns when you introduce yourself to the class (e.g. "Good morning. I'm Dr. Brown, my pronouns are she/her"; "Hello class, my name is Fatima, I use they/them pronouns").

In the Classroom

▶ Students may or may not be open with the rest of their class about their gender. Create a space in which they can say what name and/or pronoun they want to use in class. (e.g. do not read out a register – allow students to introduce themselves).

▶ Avoid unnecessarily gendered language in classroom settings, for example addressing students as 'ladies and gentlemen' or dividing students into groups by their perceived genders.

▶ Create an atmosphere where learning can happen for all students.

Engaging in public confrontation or airing unsolicited personal beliefs on the existence of non-binary genders or use of pronouns will not create an inclusive learning environment and may negatively impact non-binary students' ability to be in and learn in that space.

Line Managers and Colleagues

▶ Line managers, mentors and colleagues should actively support non-binary staff, especially junior staff (PhD students and ECRs) to navigate their gender in the classroom, if appropriate or necessary.

▶ Make a point of specifically asking if someone needs support around navigating their gender in the classroom and institution. Check in at appropriate intervals.

▶ If someone is changing names and/or pronouns, offer to email colleagues with this information and, if they take up your offer, take steps to ensure that these are used and respected.

▶ If a non-binary person is new to the institution, ask them if they would like you to send an email to colleagues introducing them and their pronouns.

▶ If you have a named person in your institution who can answer your questions and make your line management, mentoring or collegial relationship stronger, make sure you make use of this support.

Further Resources and Reading

▶ Barker, MJ. *et al*. (2016) *Non-Binary Staff and Student Guidance For Higher Education Institutions*. Available at: https://rewriting-the-rules.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Non-BinaryGenderHigherEducationGuidance-1.pdf

▶ Choudhrey, S. (2022) *Supporting Trans People of Colour: How to Make Your Practice Inclusive*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

▶ Fraser, J. and White, F.R. (2022) 'Practices for gender-inclusive module introductions'. In M. Kitchener (ed) *Handbook for Creating a Gender-Sensitive Curriculum*. Available at: https://gearingroles.eu/gearing-roles-new-handbook/

▶ Gendered Intelligence offer a range of services for educational institutions including: gender diversity and trans inclusion workshops for students; student mentoring; staff training; consultancy on projects and policy development. See: https://genderedintelligence.co.uk/support/education-schools

▶ Lawrence, M. and Mckendry, S. (2019) *Supporting Transgender and Non-Binary Students and Staff in Further and Higher Education*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

▶ National Union of Students (2023) *Supporting Trans Rights* [Policy]. Available at: https://www.nus.org.uk/liberation-policy

Glossary

BIPOC

This acronym stands for 'Black, Indigenous and People of Colour'.

Higher Education

For the purposes of this project, higher education means tertiary, post-secondary school education that is optional and leads to the award of a degree. Higher education institutions include universities and degree-awarding schools, colleges and conservatoires.

Misgender

To misgender, or misgendering, refers to situations where someone is referred to using incorrect gendered terms, or is treated as a gender they are not. Misgendering can be intentional (and hostile) or unintentional, and may involve the use of incorrect names, pronouns or titles. Misgendering can happen in face to face interactions as well as in other types of communication and via the physical and institutional environment.

Non-Binary

We recognise that the term 'non-binary' has multiple and sometimes contested meanings. In this project we are using it as an umbrella term to denote a range of gender identities which fall outside binary gender and may or may not involve identifying as trans.

We invited people to complete the survey who understood themselves as not identifying wholly as a man or a woman. This could include people whose gender fell somewhere on the spectrum between man and woman, or outside that spectrum, or those who did not consider themselves to have a gender at all. This includes (but is not limited to) labels such as genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, non-gendered, demi-gender, bi-gender, pangender, androgynous, androgyne or neutrois.

Pronouns

Pronouns are terms used to refer to somebody in lieu of their name, for example she/her/hers/herself or he/him/his/himself. In English pronouns used in everyday language are usually binary gendered, although when the gender of the person being referred to is not known it is normal to use a singular they to refer to them, for example 'someone has left their phone on the train'.

Many, but not all, non-binary people do not want to be referred to using gendered pronouns because it identifies them as a gender they are not and thus misgenders them. Other non-binary people are happy to use gendered pronouns, or use a combination of gendered and gender-neutral pronouns. Pronouns may or may not be an indicator of someone's gender.

Gender-neutral pronouns include the singular 'they', use of 'it' as a pronoun and a range of neo-pronouns designed as alternatives to traditional options. Examples include:
- ey/em/eirs/emself
- it/its/itself
- they/them/their/themselves
- per(person)/pers/perself
- xe/xem/xyrs/xemself
- ze/zir/zirs/zirself

Queer

The term queer has multiple definitions and uses both inside and outside academia. It is sometimes used as an umbrella term for sexual orientations where either one's gender, or the gender of one's partner(s) are not fixed, or as a rejection of rigid or binary categories of gender and/or sexuality. It is also sometimes used to signify anything outside of heterosexual, or heteronormative forms of desire or relationships.

Queer is also used in a more academic context, as we have done in this project, to signify a politics that questions the legitimacy of, and deconstructs all fixed categories, recognising instead that they are often instruments of power and do not always reflect the ways minoritised people understand themselves. This extends beyond gender and sexuality to thinking about things such as race, class, disability, embodiment and knowledge production.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is distinct from gender identity and refers to the ways someone might experience sexual desire or express their sexuality. Non-binary people, like any other group of people, have a wide range of sexual orientations which they may label using terms such as heterosexual, gay, lesbian or bisexual.

Some non-binary people may reject some or all of those terms on the grounds that they assume one has a binary gender and are therefore inapplicable to someone who identifies as outside binary gender. This may explain a preference for terms such as queer or pansexual which depend less on the gender binary to describe attraction.

Sexual orientation is also sometimes described by people in terms of the presence, absence or strength of attraction using terms such as demi-sexual, graysexual, aromantic or asexual.

Transgender/Trans

Transgender, or sometimes just trans, is an umbrella term for the range of people whose gender differs from how they were assigned at birth (sex as registered on a birth certificate). The term covers trans men and trans women, as well as non-binary people.

Some people who might be included by the term may not use it to describe themselves. For example, many non-binary or genderqueer people do not identify as trans. To acknowledge this, this population is sometimes referred to more inclusively as 'trans and non-binary' where they may have shared interests, needs or experiences.

About the researchers

We are three non-binary/genderqueer academics working in HE institutions in London who feel that our experiences and needs as non-binary teachers or students have never been captured by research. For us devising and carrying out this research is an attempt to bring our politics and activism into HE. We recognise our privileged positions as white, non-disabled, securely employed academics and are committed to the dismantling of the racist, classist and ableist structures of academia. We are:

Raf Benato

Senior Lecturer (Education Development) in the School of Health Sciences at City, University of London. Raf works on public health, educational theory and teaches healthcare students about LGBTQ inclusive care.

Jennifer Fraser

University Director of Student Partnership and Principal Lecturer in Social Sciences at the University of Westminster. Jennifer works on critical higher education studies and gender studies.

Francis Ray White

Reader in Sociology at the University of Westminster. Francis Ray works on trans, fat and queer embodiment and teaches modules on gender and sexuality studies.

All information was correct at time of publication in November 2023.

References

Barker, MJ. *et al.* (2016) *Non-Binary Staff and Student Guidance for Higher Education Institutions*. Available at: https://rewriting-the-rules.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Non-BinaryGenderHigherEducationGuidance-1.pdf [Accessed 8/10/23]

Benato, R., Fraser, J. and White, F.R. (forthcoming) 'Peeing and pronouns: Living non-binary gender in higher education'. *Journal of Gender Studies* (Special Issue on Living Gender in Diverse Times).

Fraser, J. (2020) 'The struggle to imagine higher education otherwise: The transformative potential of diverse gender knowledges'. *Feminists@Law*, 10 (2). https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/03/fal.943

Fraser, J. and White, F.R. (2022) 'Practices for gender-inclusive module introductions'. In M. Kitchener (ed) *Handbook for Creating a Gender-Sensitive Curriculum: Teaching and Learning Strategies*. Available at: https://gearingroles.eu/gearing-roles-new-handbook/ [Accessed 8/10/23]

Government Equalities Office (2018) *National LGBT Survey: Summary Report*. 3 July. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-lgbt-survey-summary-report [Accessed 8/10/23]

Lawrence, M. and Mckendry, S. (2019) *Supporting Transgender and Non-Binary Students and Staff in Further and Higher Education*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Mckendry, S. and Lawrence, M. (2017) *TransEdu Scotland: Researching the Experience of Trans and Gender Diverse Applicants, Students and Staff in Scotland's Colleges and Universities*. Available at: https://www.trans.ac.uk/ [Accessed 8/10/23]

Nicolazzo, Z. (2017) *Trans* in College*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2023) *Gender Identity by Age, Census 2021*. 28 April. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/RM035/editions/2021/versions/2 [accessed 8/10/2023]

Richards, C. *et al*. (eds) (2017) *Genderqueer and Non-Binary Genders*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Twist, J. *et al*. (eds) (2020) *Non-Binary Lives: An Anthology of Intersecting Identities*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Vincent, B. (2020) *Non-Binary Genders: Navigating Communities, Identities, and Healthcare*. Bristol: Policy Press.