

**Stonewall**

# ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

**This resource is produced by Stonewall, a UK-based charity that stands for the freedom, equity and potential of all lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning and ace (LGBTQ+) people.**

At Stonewall, we imagine a world where LGBTQ+ people everywhere can live our lives to the full.

Founded in London in 1989, we now work in each nation of the UK and have established partnerships across the globe. Over the last three decades, we have created transformative change in the lives of LGBTQ+ people in the UK, helping win equal rights around marriage, having children and inclusive education.

Our campaigns drive positive change for our communities, and our sustained change and empowerment programmes ensure that LGBTQ+ people can thrive throughout our lives. We make sure that the world hears and learns from our communities, and our work is grounded in evidence and expertise.

To find out more about our work, visit us at [www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk)

**Registered Charity No 1101255 (England and Wales) and SC039681 (Scotland)**

Stonewall is proud to provide information, support and guidance on LGBTQ+ inclusion; working towards a world where we're all free to be. This does not constitute legal advice, and is not intended to be a substitute for legal counsel on any subject matter.

# NEXT STEPS

WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE  
OF LGBT+ STUDENTS IN  
EDUCATION?



# MESSAGE FROM STONEWALL



**Stonewall**

For many people, starting higher education is the start of a new period of possibility in their lives: freedom, independence, and an opportunity to find their place in the world and be their true selves.

We are delighted to have partnered with UCAS on this trailblazing research into the experiences of LGBTQ+ students preparing to start college and university; the first study of its kind in the UK. During a time of global uncertainty and disruption that has hit young people particularly hard, it is heartening to see LGBTQ+ applicants so optimistic about their upcoming student experience, and excited about being more open about their identity in higher education.

However, this research demonstrates how vital it is that LGBTQ+ students receive support as they transition into further and higher education: LGBTQ+ respondents are more likely to declare a mental health condition and, unsurprisingly, are more likely to be interested in LGBTQ+ inclusive health service provision in their chosen college or university. Similarly, most LGBTQ+ applicants cared about the friendliness of the local area, suggesting that safety concerns continue to be part of the decision-making process for LGBTQ+ people.

Trans students, in particular, continue to have to work harder to access a positive further or higher education experience than their non-trans peers. Trans applicants' interest in trans-specific healthcare provision, mental health support, LGBTQ+ support services, and student groups and societies, shows a clear need for universities and colleges to invest in tailored services for their trans students, as well as to ensure teaching and non-teaching staff are confident in how they can provide a trans-inclusive environment.

Encouragingly, LGBTQ+ applicants are already benefiting from the progress made towards creating LGBTQ+ inclusive schools and colleges. This research emphasises the importance of ensuring that LGBTQ+ children and young people are safe, seen and heard. Supportive peers and being able to talk openly are vital, but LGBTQ+ identities need to be embedded into every part of our education system. LGBTQ+ students deserve to see LGBTQ+ people, our families and our histories represented throughout their education; and to be part of an inclusive educational environment where children grow up to accept and champion difference.

We have moved a long way towards creating a world where LGBTQ+ students feel free to be themselves in further and higher education. However, there remains lots to do if we are to build a future where all young LGBTQ+ people are given the start in life they need to unlock their true potential. This research reaffirms that we continue to move in the right direction, and its insights provide solid foundations for educational institutions to build on.

**Nancy Kelley**  
**Chief Executive, Stonewall**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The opportunity of higher and further education is a transformative experience, and for many it marks the start of a new journey in life. The diversity of students is one of the things that makes taking this step such a fulfilling experience, and students can look forward to meeting people from all backgrounds.

In 2020, over 40,000 students shared information about their lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or other (LGBT+) identity in their UCAS application, accounting for 7.2% of total UK domiciled applicants – 2.5 times the national average for all adults. Within this 40,000, 2,395 students identified as transgender, an increase of 86% since 2016, and accounting for 0.4% of the UK applicant cohort.

UCAS has found this cohort of students are excited about their next steps in education. Many LGBT+ students plan to be more open about their sexual orientation or gender and are looking forward to a positive experience. It is through this lens that UCAS presents the findings of this report. Despite this improving picture, it remains vital that universities and colleges put in place support that recognises the individual needs of LGBT+ students.

When looking at students that identify as LGBT+ in their UCAS application, we found:

- ▶ LGBT+ students are more likely to be from disadvantaged areas – 17% of LGBT+ students are from the most disadvantaged areas (POLAR4), compared to 13% of those that selected heterosexual, prefer not to say, or chose not to answer this question (non-LGBT+ students). Furthermore, 12% of LGBT+ students are from the lowest group in UCAS' Multiple Equality Measure (MEM)<sup>1</sup>, compared to 7% of non-LGBT+ students.
- ▶ LGBT+ students are more likely to declare a disability than non-LGBT+ students (30% vs 12%), and in particular, a mental health condition (13% vs 2.9%). Individuals that identify as transgender are the most likely to declare a disability (47%), which includes the 22% of trans applicants who declare a mental health condition. Our findings indicate that mental health support provision is an important consideration for these students when exploring their options.
- ▶ LGBT+ students have a slightly higher level of attainment compared to non-LGBT+ students. When examining the identities within the LGBT+ group, gay men have the highest average attainment (0.5 A level points<sup>2</sup> above the mean). Those who identify as transgender have a lower-than-average A level attainment (0.3 points below the mean).
- ▶ LGBT+ students are most likely to enter creative courses, as opposed to non-LGBT+ students who favour subjects allied to medicine and business and administrative studies.

<sup>1</sup> The multiple equality measure (MEM) is UCAS' principal measure of equality. It brings together several equality dimensions, for which large differences in the probability of progression into higher education exist. These equality dimensions include gender, ethnic group, where people live (using the POLAR3 and IMD classifications), secondary education school type, and income background (as measured by whether a person was in receipt of free school meals [FSM], a means-tested benefit while at school).

<sup>2</sup> A level points are the numeric scores awarded to A level grades, e.g. A\* is 6 points, A is 5 points, etc. The sum of the highest three A level grades will count towards a student's point score, and only 18 year olds with at least three achieved A levels are included.



**“BY BEING OPENLY TRANSGENDER I CAN ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS STUDENTS AND TEACHERS MAY HAVE SO THEY CAN HELP OTHER TRANS PEOPLE.”**

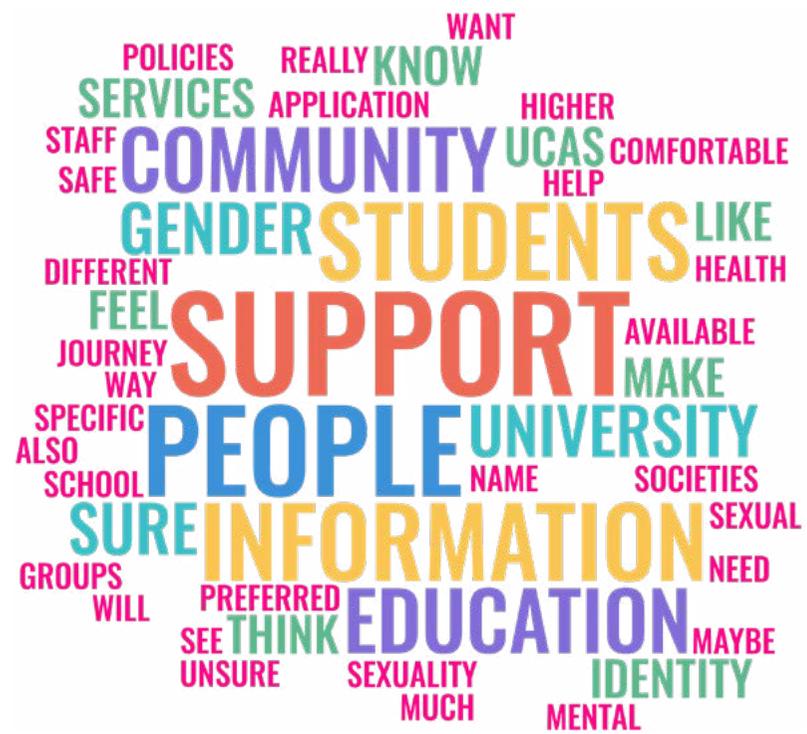
In addition to UCAS application data, we surveyed 3,000 school and college students who identified as LGBT+ in their UCAS application to gain a deeper understanding of their experience of education:

- 47% said that their experience being LGBT+ at school or college was good, and 41% said their experience was neutral. Of those that had a good experience, over three-quarters said this was due to being accepted by their peers.
- 12% said that they did not have a good experience. Of those, 70% said the reason was that their identity was not reflected in things they learned at school or college.
- Students identifying as transgender were more likely (17%) to report having a bad experience at school or college, most of whom attributed bullying as the main reason. This, coupled with the lower attainment and higher rates of mental health conditions among trans students, highlights the additional issues faced by this group of students at school or college.
- Students are really looking forward to a positive experience in higher education – 53% of LGBT+ students expect their overall student experience to be good, and a further 24% expect it to be very good.

- Students intend to be more open about their sexual orientation and gender identity in higher education, with overall levels of openness increasing from 64% at school or college to an expected 82% at university or college<sup>3</sup>. However, there is still a feeling of uncertainty, which accounts for 13% of students being unable to say how open they will be as they take the next step into higher education. More than half of LGBT+ students plan to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity with all of their housemates, academic peers and friendship groups.
- When researching their choices, 31% of LGBT+ students paid specific attention to LGBT+ services. These included mental health support services (47% extremely interested) and university or college reputation in equality and diversity (46% extremely interested). 30% were extremely interested in LGBT+ societies and 21% were extremely interested in support networks for LGBT+ students.

Our findings indicate LGBT+ students are largely having a positive experience in education and are looking forward to their next steps. However, our findings also highlight individuals that identify as transgender tend to have a less positive experience, with these individuals being less likely to be open about their gender identity, more likely to have a mental health condition and achieve lower grades at school or college. These findings indicate that specific attention should be given to this group of students to ensure that their experience is as positive as others, and that they are supported through their time at school and college and as they enter higher education or training.

<sup>3</sup> Openness level calculated from the number of students choosing to be open with all or open with most in each group, divided by the number of students choosing any option other than 'I don't know yet'.



**Figure 1:** The most common key words in free text responses to the question: “As a member of the LGBT+ community, how could your journey to higher education be improved?”

As with all cohorts of students, LGBT+ students are not a homogeneous group – as our report shows, their needs, values, and motivations are varied and wide ranging. It is also clear that being LGBT+ overlaps with a range of other characteristics, such as regional inequality, and areas that universities, colleges and employers offer support for, such as mental health and wellbeing, recruitment and outreach and accommodation. In the delivery of these services, universities, colleges, and employers should be mindful and accommodating of the specific concerns and needs of LGBT+ students.

Those involved in supporting students are increasingly mindful of the relationship between different characteristics and cohorts, and how factoring these multiple dimensions allows for a truer understanding of an individual’s circumstance (as can be evidenced through UCAS’ Multiple Equality Measure). As part of the ‘Next Steps’ series, not only will we examine the experience of specific cohorts in education and training, but also how their experiences, needs and values intersect with other areas.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

WHAT	WHEN	WHO
<p>UCAS to improve the experiences and journey of LGBT+ students when applying to higher education or an apprenticeship, including implementing revised questions that are more inclusive, and greater collection of data regarding student's gender identity and sexual orientation.</p> <p>UCAS has already undertaken extensive research to scope an enhanced journey for LGBT+ students that wish to progress to their next step, working closely with partners as we seek to ensure the full diversity of students that wish to benefit from higher education and training are reflected in the admissions process including exploration, choice making and application.</p> <p>UCAS understands that the experiences of LGBT+ apprentices will be different to their peers embarking on a three-year undergraduate course, owing to the nature of an apprenticeship being conducted in the workplace. UCAS is committed to supporting students regardless of their next steps after school or college and is keen to find out more about the experiences of LGBT+ apprentices through its future research outputs.</p>	2023	UCAS and partners, including universities and colleges.
<p>The evidence of this report has highlighted specific support needs for some LGBT+ students progressing to higher education and training, particularly trans individuals. It is recommended that further steps are taken to support these individuals as they seek to progress with their education and training, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Universities and colleges should ensure LGBT+ individuals have tailored and relevant support – such as information and advice, mental health support, specific services on campuses – as they progress, taking account of their full student experience, including accommodation.</li> <li>&gt; Given the higher rates of mental health issues, universities and colleges need to ensure support is focussed effectively on LGBT+ people.</li> <li>&gt; Signpost to LGBT+ support services available within a local area to allow for a much greater level of support.</li> <li>&gt; Specific focus should be placed on the support for trans individuals, recognising their lower levels of satisfaction and educational attainment, as we seek to level up support and opportunity.</li> <li>&gt; Further promotion of LGBT+ societies and their wide range of interests by both NUS and individual universities and colleges to enable a greater feeling of inclusivity.</li> <li>&gt; UCAS to publish data regarding LGBT+ applicants that apply to higher education to increase transparency around their experience.</li> </ul>	Ongoing	UCAS, universities, colleges, government departments and regulators, support services and charities

The continued encouragement of an inclusive curriculum and learning environment, with evidence from this report indicating this contributes to a positive experience for LGBT+ students in education. This includes:

- Creating visible LGBT+ friendly policies and environments to promote inclusion, including anti-bullying policies;
- Enhanced awareness of support available for LGBT+ individuals as they progress with their next steps.

To support with this, it is recommended that the Department for Education continues to fund its anti-bullying initiatives to train school and college staff in England and provide support for pupils affected by homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying. This funding should be reintroduced and targeted at supporting primary, secondary schools and FE colleges to implement successful anti-bullying policies.

Furthermore, UCAS would encourage the Scottish Government through its Respect Me campaign, the Welsh Government through the Anti-Bullying Forum for Wales and the Northern Ireland Executive through the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum to provide similar training to school and college staff and to develop and enhance existing resources to tackle homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in education settings.

Ongoing

Government departments, schools, colleges, support services and charities



# WHO ARE THE LGBT+ COHORT IN EDUCATION?

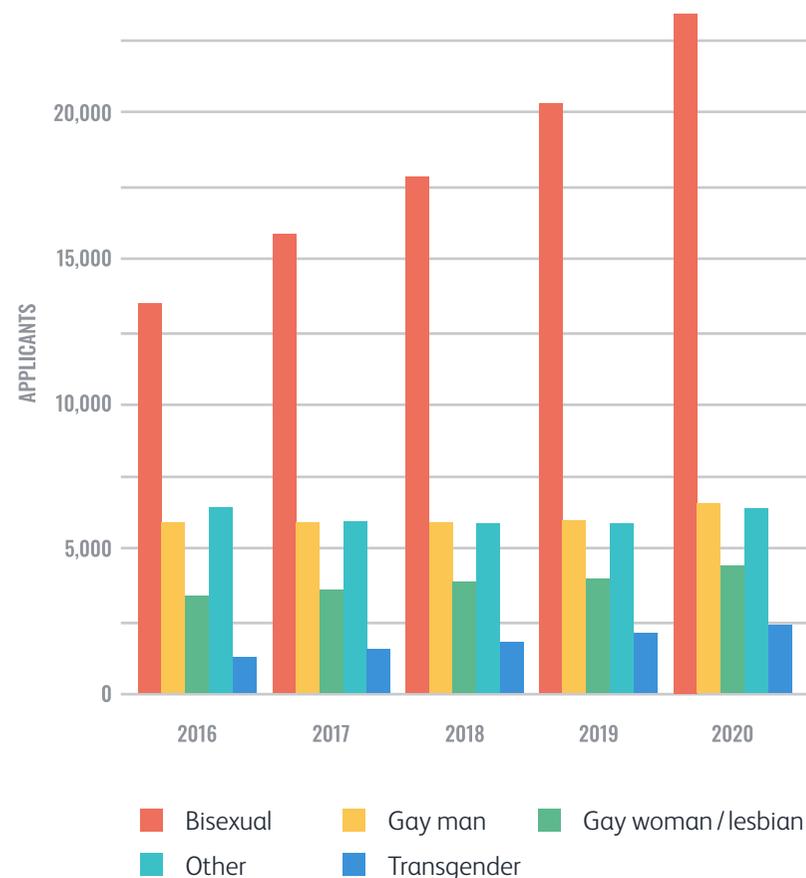
The transition to higher or further education or training is an exciting and potentially daunting time for all students. For some it has an added poignancy – it can be an opportunity to start afresh, experience additional independence to live your life how you wish. For lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and other (LGBT+, please see annex for definitions and terminology) students, it can offer the chance to consider how they discuss their identity.

As a new academic year begins, and many students move to their chosen university, college or employer, UCAS is publishing a first-of-its-kind insight looking at the behaviours and sentiment of LGBT+ students as they prepare for starting their courses in the autumn. This provides a valuable insight into the experience of LGBT+ students, and how their experience in education can be improved.

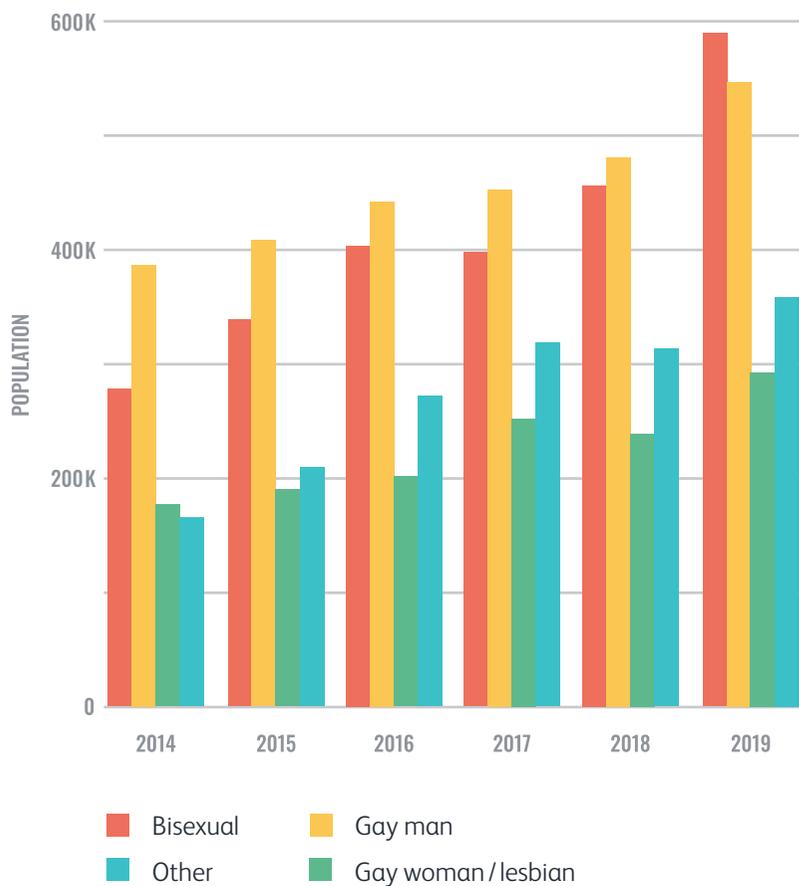
This report forms the first of UCAS' 'Next Steps' series, where UCAS will shine a light on the experience of different student groups and how we ensure equality of opportunity. We have looked already at those with mental health issues, while future publications will explore the experience of students with disabilities, veterans, different ethnic groups, and those with care experience.

## PEOPLE FEEL MORE ABLE THAN EVER TO DECLARE THEIR LGBT+ IDENTITY

As part of the application process, UCAS asks applicants several questions for the purposes of monitoring equality, diversity and inclusion. These data – along with other protected characteristics such as ethnicity – are only provided to universities and colleges after an admissions decision has been made – meaning it does not form part of the academic assessment of a student. Of the nearly 600,000 people living in the UK who apply through UCAS every year, between 20,000 and 45,000 choose to declare an LGBT+ identity.



**Figure 2:** The number of UK domiciled students sharing information about their LGBT+ identity through the UCAS application each year



**Figure 3:** The number of people sharing their sexual orientation through the Annual Population survey<sup>5</sup>. The latest available data goes up to 2019.

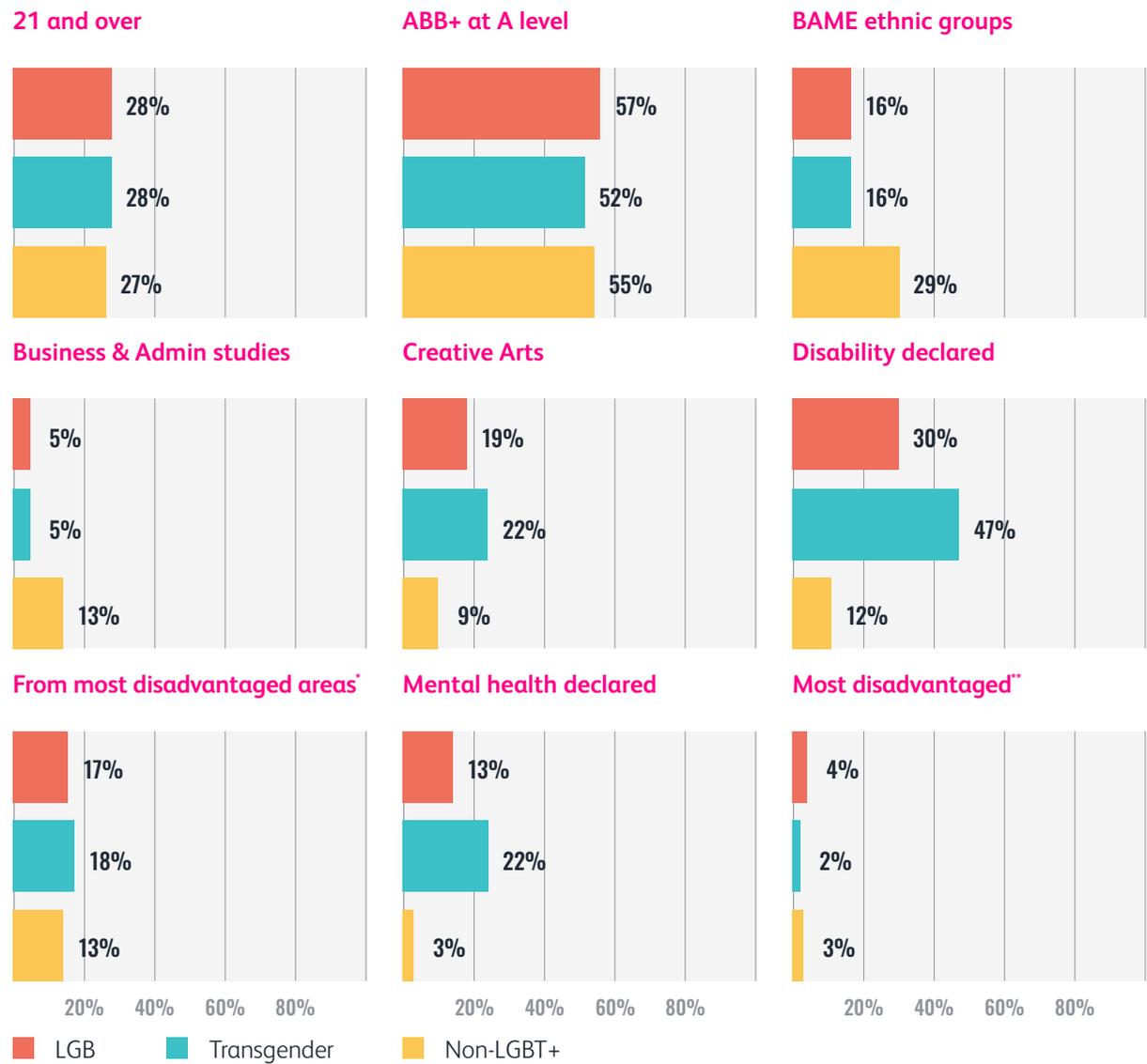
The number of individuals feeling able to share information about their LGBT+ identity has increased significantly since the questions were first introduced<sup>4</sup> from 29,770 in 2016 to 41,680 in 2020. The make-up of these applicants is predominantly from the UCAS sexual orientation question, with 40,755 selecting lesbian, gay, bisexual or other (LGB) identities in 2020, seeing a 40% increase since 2016. As illustrated in Figure 2, this growth has largely been driven by an increasing number of bisexual declarations. With 7% of applicants declaring an LGB identity, this is 2.5 times higher than the representation of the country as a whole, based on data for all adults<sup>5</sup>. National figures also show that younger people are more likely to be bisexual than older people; over three quarters of people who apply through UCAS each year are under the age of 21, which may explain the inflated figures for bisexual UCAS applicants, in comparison to the general population figures seen in Figure 3.

Meanwhile, 2,395 applicants used the UCAS gender identity question to declare a trans identity in 2020; while a smaller cohort of applicants, the number has seen an 85% increase since the questions were introduced. 0.4% of the 2020 applicant cohort identified in this way, measuring up with estimates for the national picture<sup>6</sup>. The transgender group is not mutually exclusive with the LGB group, due to the two independent application questions, but this report examines the two groups individually as well as the LGBT+ group as a whole.

<sup>4</sup> The sexual orientation and gender identity questions were both introduced in 2015, but the gender identity question was significantly reworded in 2016, causing very different response numbers. For the purposes of this report, 2016 will be treated as the first year of the time series.

<sup>5</sup> National LGB declarations from the Office of National Statistics (ONS): [www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/datasets/sexualidentityuk](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/datasets/sexualidentityuk)

<sup>6</sup> National transgender population estimates from the Government Equalities Office: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/721704/LGBT-survey-research-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721704/LGBT-survey-research-report.pdf)



**Figure 4:** The proportion of LGB applicants, transgender applicants, and non-LGBT+ applicants in the 2020 cycle, for a range of characteristics.

\* Applicants from the lowest POLAR4 quintile

\*\* Applicants with the lowest Multiple Equality Measure (MEM) quintile

## MENTAL HEALTH AND DISABILITY

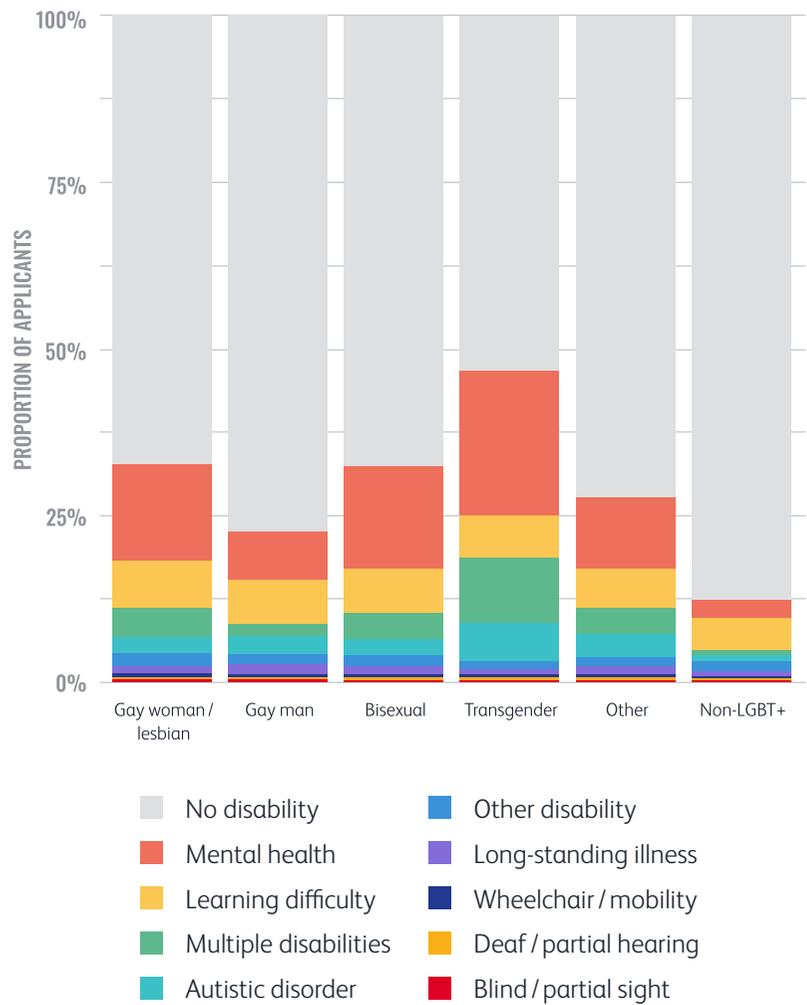
LGBT+ students are more likely to declare a mental health condition or disability than their heterosexual peers. Students who told UCAS they are LGBT+ in their application are more likely to declare a disability than non-LGBT+ applicants (30% vs 12%).

Bisexual applicants and gay women are also more likely to declare a disability (32% and 33% respectively) than non-LGBT+ students. Nearly half of these applicants declare a mental health condition (16% bisexual applicants and 15% gay women).

Trans applicants are the most likely to declare a mental health condition or disability at 47% - with mental health declarations (22%) the highest, then multiple disabilities (10%), 6% declare a learning difficulty and 6% declare an autistic disorder.

These numbers are broadly comparable to the national picture, which shows that 33% of trans people in the UK declare having a disability<sup>7</sup>, however the number of disability declarations for all LGBT+ people (17%) is lower than that of the general population (22%).

In its recent report, *Starting the Conversation: UCAS report on student mental health*, UCAS found some LGBT+ groups to be around six times more likely to share a mental health condition<sup>8</sup>. Given that half of students choose not to disclose a mental health condition, this is likely to be an under-representation. Therefore, when delivering support in relation to mental health, universities, colleges, and employers should be mindful of the overlap between this and LGBT+ individuals.



**Figure 5:** The proportion of applicants declaring a disability for each LGBT+ identity, compared to those not declaring an LGBT+ identity, for the 2020 cycle

<sup>7</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/721704/LGBT-survey-research-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721704/LGBT-survey-research-report.pdf)  
<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/450-increase-student-mental-health-declarations-over-last-decade-progress-still-needed-address>





## LGBT+ STUDENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO STUDY CREATIVE COURSES

LGBT+ students are more likely to study creative higher education courses, with 18% of accepted LGBT+ applicants being placed on a creative arts and design course, including 22% of accepted transgender applicants, compared to 9% for non-LGBT+ students. Conversely, 13% of non-LGBT+ applicants are placed on business and administrative courses, compared to 5% of LGBT+ applicants and 5% of transgender applicants.

While there is little variation in the attainment of LGBT+ applicants compared to non-LGBT+ applicants, there is more variation within the group itself. When examining the A level point attainment<sup>9</sup> of the 18 year olds in this group, the distribution of grades is slightly higher than that of the non-LGBT+ group.

However, this is driven mainly by gay men and women; the picture for the 'Other' group (please see annex for further information), and even more so, for trans individuals, is much less positive. These groups of applicants consistently have lower than average grades. The individuals are also less likely to apply for a course with a 15 October deadline<sup>10</sup>, and less likely to apply for a higher tariff provider<sup>11</sup>. BTEC attainment among 18 year olds also sees bisexual and other applicants deviating below the mean, as well as trans applicants, whereas gay women have above average BTEC grades<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> A level points are the numeric scores awarded to A level grades, e.g. A\* is 6 points, A is 5 points, etc. The sum of the highest three A level grades will count towards a student's point score, and only 18 year olds with at least three achieved A levels are included.

<sup>10</sup> The deadline for any course at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, or for most courses in medicine, veterinary medicine/science, and dentistry.

<sup>11</sup> The grouping of providers (higher, medium and lower) based on the average levels of attainment of their UK 18 year old accepted applicants (summarised through UCAS Tariff points) in recent cycles.

<sup>12</sup> Examining 18 year old reformed and non-reformed BTEC Extended Diploma points.

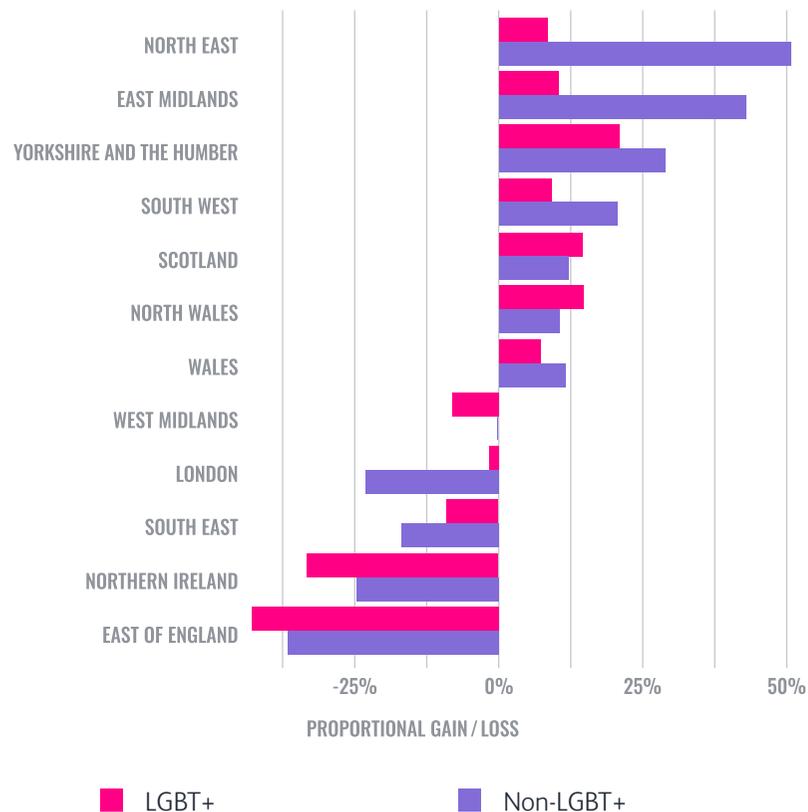


### THERE IS A NET LOSS OF LGBT+ STUDENTS FROM THE EAST OF ENGLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

The movement between regions and the net gain or net loss of students from a region, gives us more insight into the behaviours of LGBT+ applicants. The regional distribution of LGBT+ applicants across the UK is largely similar to that of their non-LGBT+ counterparts. UCAS data shows LGBT+ students are more likely to be placed at universities or colleges in urban areas, with a larger bias towards being placed at providers in Yorkshire and the Humber, the North West, and Scotland. There is a net gain for urban areas in terms of LGBT+ student population.

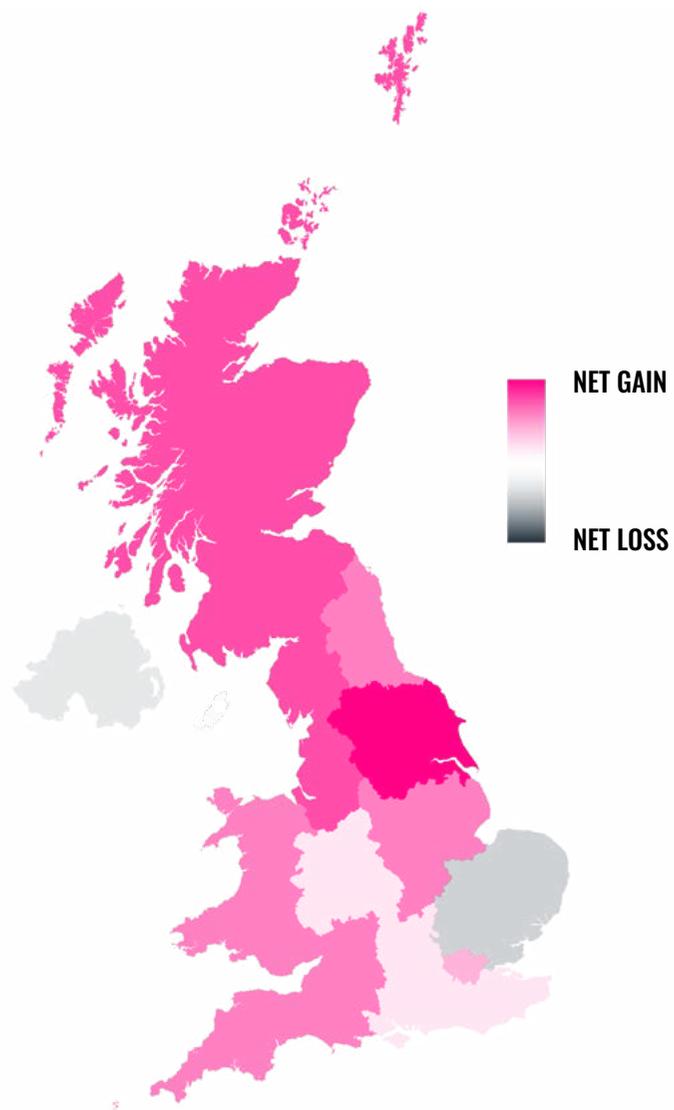
In total, 40% of LGBT+ applicants are from an urban area, compared to 35% of non-LGBT+ applicants, with 29% of LGBT+ applicants being from big cities compared to 36% of non-LGBT+ applicants. The number of LGBT+ applicants coming from rural areas (15%), compared to non-LGBT+ applicants (14%) is broadly similar. 3.5% of placed LGBT+ applicants choose rural universities and colleges, compared to 2.7% for non-LGBT+ placed applicants. Consequently, the net loss from rural areas is smaller for LGBT+ students than for non-LGBT+.

The net gain to the North West and Scotland is larger for LGBT+ students than non-LGBT+ students; the only gaining regions where this is true. Notably, the North East has the highest net gain for non-LGBT+ people at 51%, whereas the gain from LGBT+ students is 9%. The areas LGBT+ students are leaving in higher proportions than their non-LGBT+ counterparts are the West Midlands, East of England and Northern Ireland, where there is a net loss of LGBT+ students.



**Figure 6:** The proportional net change in placed LGBT+ applicants and non-LGBT+ applicants for each UK region in 2020.

**“I AM INTERESTED TO KNOW HOW (IF I RAN INTO ANY HOMOPHOBIA) THE UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE WOULD HANDLE IT.”**



**Figure 7:** The proportional net change in placed LGBT+ applicants for each UK region in 2020.





## ETHNICITY

As with questions about gender identity and sexual orientation, UCAS collects information regarding ethnicity to help understand the differing experiences of students and support equalities monitoring. This data is only provided to universities and colleges after an admissions decision has been made, meaning it does not form part of the academic assessment of a student. UCAS is committed to ensuring that students are fully aware of how their data is used as part of the application, so that they remain confident when sharing this information.

	ASIAN	BLACK	MIXED	WHITE	OTHER
<b>Gay woman / lesbian</b>	2%	3%	5%	89%	1%
<b>Gay man</b>	4%	2%	5%	87%	1%
<b>Bisexual</b>	4%	3%	6%	85%	1%
<b>Transgender</b>	4%	4%	6%	83%	2%
<b>Other</b>	13%	11%	6%	65%	4%
<b>Non-LGBT+</b>	14%	9%	5%	68%	2%

**Figure 8:** The proportion of applicants of each ethnic group that make up the five LGBT+ identity groups, and the Non-LGBT+ group, in 2020

LGBT+ applicants are more likely to have declared they are white than non-LGBT+ applicants, with 82% of LGBT+ applicants being white compared to 68% of non-LGBT+ applicants. Within the LGBT+ group, the most diverse identity is the 'Other' sexual orientation, with 65% of these applicants being white, 13% being Asian, and 11% being Black. Gay women/lesbians are the least ethnically diverse group, with 89% being white, 2% being Asian and 3% being Black.

# HOW DO LGBT+ STUDENTS FEEL ABOUT THEIR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES?

In May 2021, UCAS surveyed nearly 3,000 LGBT+ students that shared information about their sexual orientation or gender identity to understand how they were feeling about their journey into higher education. Given the good response rate<sup>13</sup>, this survey provides a robust evidence base for how LGBT+ students are feeling as they prepare to enter higher education in the autumn. A breakdown of these students can be found below:

GROUP	RESPONDENTS	APPLICANTS	PROPORTION OF APPLICANTS THAT RESPONDED
LGB	2,880	24,270	12%
Transgender	220	1,310	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,920</b>	<b>24,670</b>	<b>12%</b>

**Figure 9:** The number of respondents to the LGBT+ survey in each group, and the corresponding proportion of applicants that responded

## HOW HAVE LGBT+ STUDENTS FOUND THEIR EXPERIENCE IN SECONDARY EDUCATION AND COLLEGE?

Broadly, those LGBT+ students who responded to this survey said their experience at school or college was positive – 47% said that their experience as a member of the LGBT+ community at school or college was good or very good, 41% said their experience was neutral, and 12% said that they had a negative experience. 48% of students who identified as trans had a positive experience at school or college, but 17% had a negative experience.

When reporting a positive experience, the most common reason was that students felt accepted in school or college by their peers (selected by 80% of these students). 84% of trans students who said their experience was good attributed this to being able to talk openly about their identity at school or college.

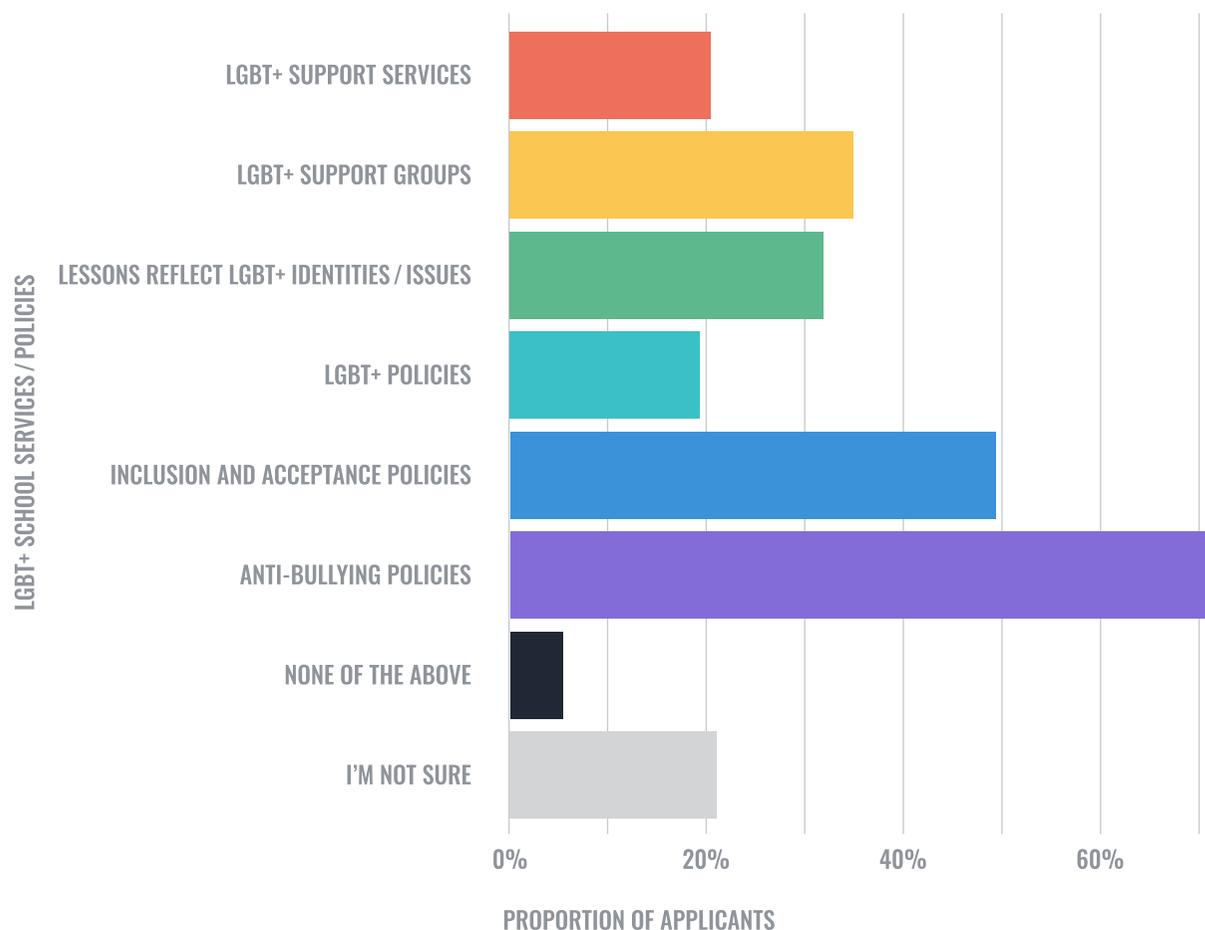
Of the 12% that said their experience in school or college was not positive, the most common reason was that their identity was not reflected in the things they learned at school or college (selected by 70% of these students). This highlights the importance of a diverse and inclusive subject content and curriculum.

Of the 17% of transgender students who reported not having a good experience in school or college, the most common reason was bullying – 85% of these students reported experiencing bullying during their time in school or college, reflecting the findings of other research such as that undertaken by Stonewall<sup>14</sup> and Just Like Us<sup>15</sup>. While a significant number of students report a positive experience, work must continue to promote inclusivity within schools and colleges to ensure the experience of these students improves. This report recommends the reintroduction of specific funding to tackle these issues.

<sup>13</sup> The response rate is consistent with other surveys carried out by UCAS, and the response rate for trans students is above average. All survey results have been weighted to represent the population of LGBT+ applicants.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/school-report-2017>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.justlikeus.org/single-post/growing-up-lgbt-just-like-us-research-report>



**Figure 10:** The proportion of surveyed LGBT+ applicants that is aware of each service or policy at their school or college

We also asked students about whether their school or college had specific LGBT+ policies and services in place – 72% of students said that their school or college had anti-bullying policies, and 49% said that they had inclusion and acceptance policies. Student-run LGBT+ clubs and societies were mentioned frequently using the free text option<sup>16</sup>, once again highlighting the importance of a diverse and inclusive environment for students.

In terms of applying through UCAS, 19% of surveyed applicants believed that the transgender identity question and sexual orientation question were asked as part of the academic assessment of the application. This shows that UCAS needs to do more to make clear why this information is collected – which is for the purposes of monitoring equality, diversity and inclusion. This information is not used for fulfilling so-called ‘diversity quotas’ which was raised by some students responding to this survey. The data is not shared with universities or colleges until after the point of acceptance by students. It was also raised independently in the free text option by some students that the wording and options available in these questions needed reviewing. UCAS is committed to doing this, as it seeks to reflect the full diversity of students that wish to benefit from higher education and training.

<sup>16</sup> Those responding to the survey were given the option to input their own answers to some of the questions using a free text option box.



## HIGHER EDUCATION IS A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

Starting university or college can be an exciting and daunting experience – for many it involves moving away from home, meeting new people, and being exposed to new environments. For LGBT+ students, this can also involve the added consideration of how open to be about their sexual orientation and gender identity.

The LGBT+ students that UCAS surveyed were overwhelmingly positive about starting higher education and are looking forward to taking that next step. More than three quarters (77%) of LGBT+ students, including two thirds (69%) of transgender students, expect their experience to be “good” or “very good”. Students are more likely to be open with their peers and with teaching staff at university than they were at school or college about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Despite this, a small but significant number of students (1.6%) feel apprehensive about their next steps and will require support.

When asked about specific concerns that these students have about starting higher education, 6% of responses mentioned accommodation or housemates; 20% of these responses were from trans students.

Taken together, these findings present higher education as being a transformative and positive experience for LGBT+ young people. It is important that universities and colleges are aware of this to ensure that support services are in place for students who need them, with moving-in arrangements tailored to promote recognition and inclusivity, and make those who may feel nervous feel at ease.

More than half of LGBT+ students plan to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity with their housemates, academic peers and friendship groups. However, this still leaves a large cohort who are either unsure or uncertain about whether they want to be, or indeed feel able to be open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. This suggests a need for specific support around student accommodation and as part of course inductions to create a safe and supportive environment for LGBT+ students when they are starting at university or college.

Those surveyed revealed they are more uncertain about being open with their teaching staff. While this could be down to personal choice, staff may benefit from resources to support LGBT+ students. Many academic staff at universities and colleges also have a pastoral element to their roles, so making sure LGBT+ students feel they can approach staff with issues relating to their sexual orientation or gender identity is important for student welfare.



**Figure 13:** The proportion of surveyed applicants that said they are open with all or open with most in each group of people they encounter at school or college, and that said they intend to be open with all or open with most in each group they will encounter at university or college, split by LGBT and transgender identities (excluding those who were not sure how open they would be yet)

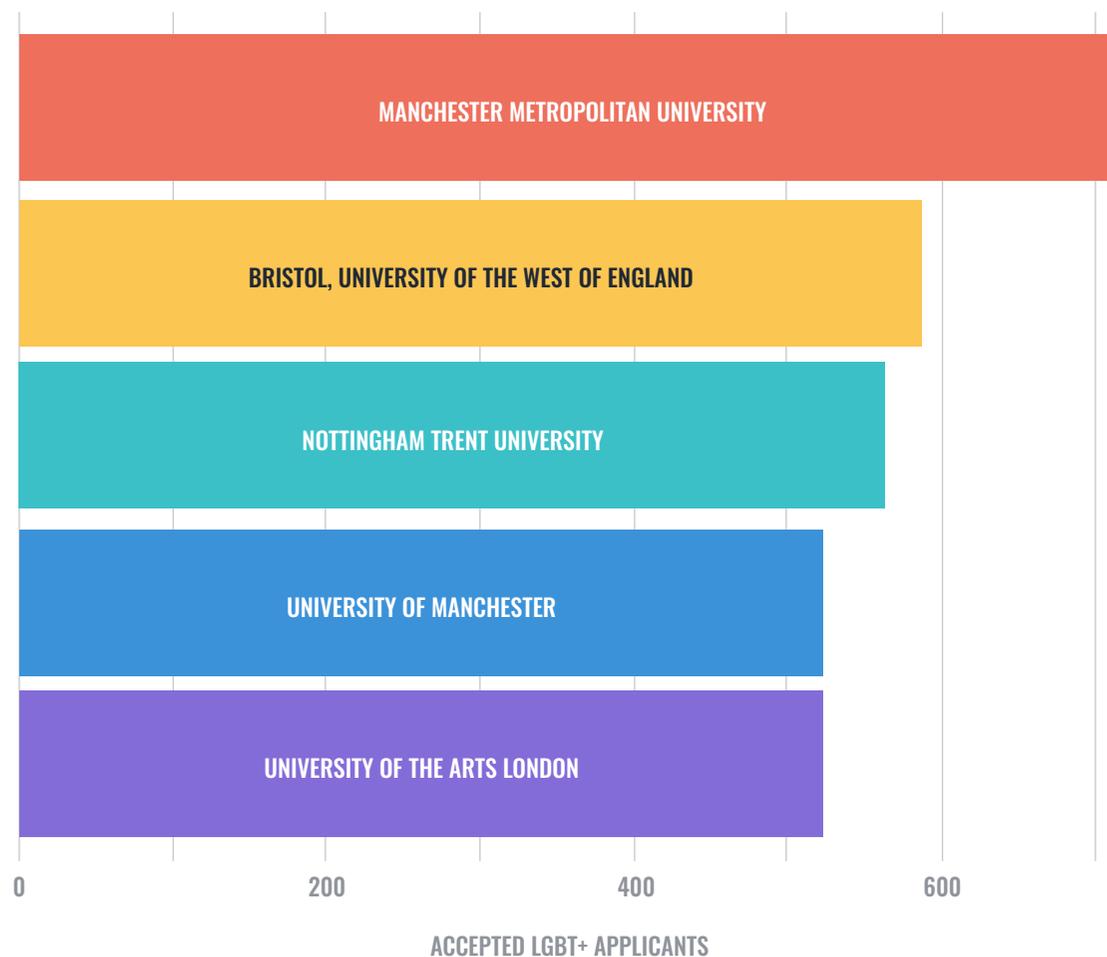
## THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT SERVICES

Almost a third of LGBT+ students (31%), including over half of transgender students (55%), have already looked into what specific services are available to cater for their needs ahead of starting at university or college in the autumn. Given the significantly higher level of interest in LGBT+ support services from transgender students, universities and colleges should look to introduce bespoke resources for these students to ensure they are fully aware of the support available.

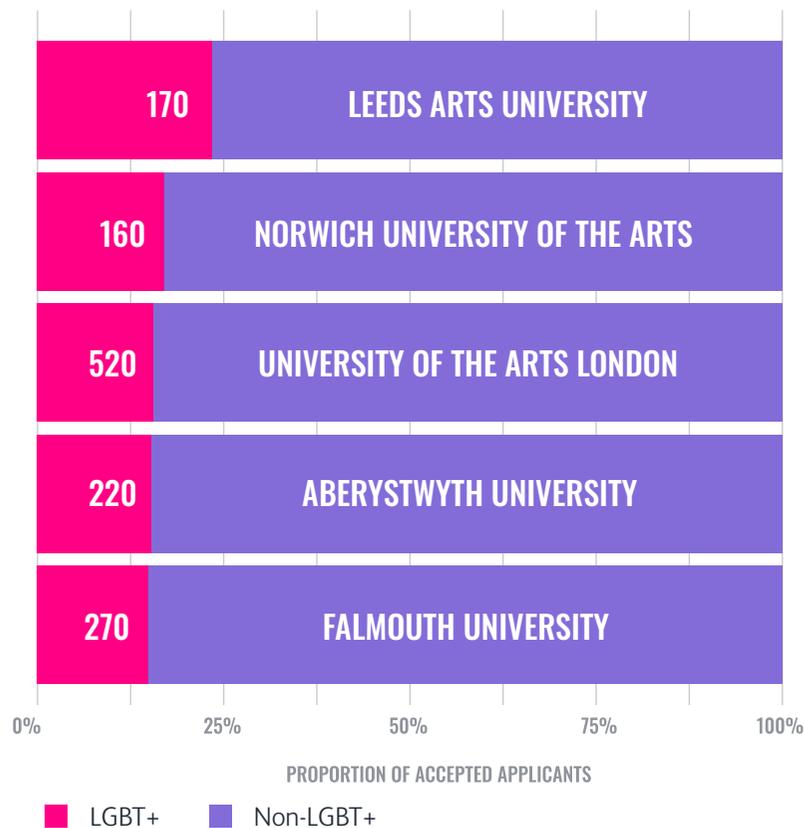
Almost nine in 10 LGBT+ students who researched LGBT+ specific services used the university or college's website or prospectus to find out information, and 48% used peer-based reviews such as social media or other online forums – 43% said that it was one of a number of important factors when making their decision, and 8% said that they only applied to providers with their preferred level of LGBT+ specific support.

The most popular services or factors that people showed interest in were mental health support services (47% of LGBT+ students said they were extremely interested) and university or college reputation in equality and diversity (46% extremely interested). Transgender students in particular showed additional interest in LGBT+ societies (46% extremely interested).

## WHERE DO LGBT+ STUDENTS STUDY?



**Figure 14:** The number of all accepted LGBT+ applicants for the five highest recruiting universities or colleges of LGBT+ applicants in 2020

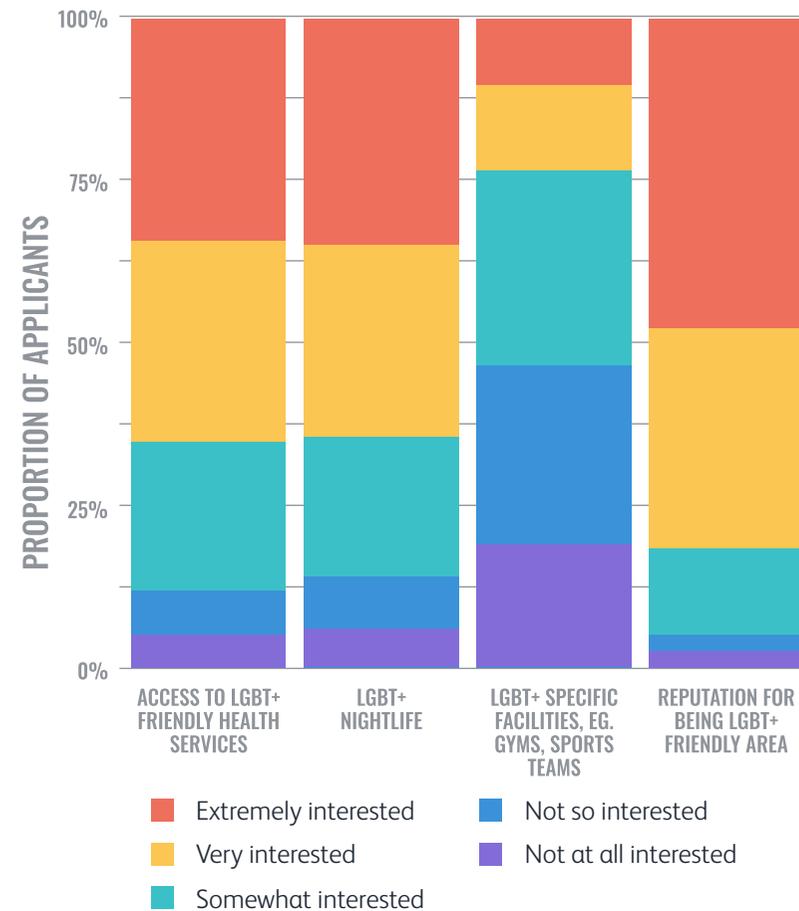


**Figure 15:** The top five\* universities or colleges with the highest representation of LGBT+ students in their 2020 intake, displayed by the proportional divide of LGBT+/non-LGBT+ acceptances, and the number of acceptances that represents.

Almost half (48%) of LGBT+ students said they were 'extremely interested' in finding out how friendly towards LGBT+ people the area in which they are choosing to study is, and almost two thirds (63%) of transgender students said they were "extremely interested" in access to LGBT+ friendly health services. As part of providing information to prospective students, universities and colleges should consider providing information about services and local cultural activities for LGBT+ students.

Of those surveyed, 42% of LGBT+ students said that they researched the local area of the universities and colleges they applied to and, of those, a further four in 10 (42%) said it had some influence on their decision, but that there were more important factors to take into account. 14% of transgender students who researched the local area said that they only applied to unis and colleges in areas with a strong LGBT+ community or culture, compared to 7% of LGB students. LGBT+ students were less interested in LGBT+ specific facilities, such as gyms and sports teams.

\* Only universities or colleges with at least 500 acceptances were included in the ranking



**Figure 16:** The distribution of the interest in different types of LGBT+ community settings and different aspects of the town or city in which they applied to university or college

**“I [...] FEEL LIKE JUST BEING WHO I AM WILL ALLOW ME TO HAVE A VERY GOOD TIME AT UNI.”**

## NEXT STEPS

This report provides unrivalled insight into the experience of LGBT+ students as they make the step from school or college to higher education. Alongside the recommendations outlined at the start of the report, these findings should be used to improve the journey of LGBT+ students into higher education.

UCAS intends to follow-up this report with longitudinal research, starting in 2022, looking at how this cohort fared once they started at university or college and will continue to work with partners to ensure the recommendations from this report are implemented. This is part of UCAS' ongoing research to support under-represented groups of students as they progress to higher education using data-driven insights.



## ANNEX A: COLLECTION OF INFORMATION REGARDING GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

As part of the application process, UCAS asks applicants from the UK several optional questions for the purposes of monitoring equality, diversity and inclusion. Of the nearly 600,000 people living in the UK who apply through UCAS every year, between 20,000 and 45,000 choose to declare an LGBT+ identity. This is by answering at least one of the below application questions as follows:

	WHAT IS YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION?	DO YOU IDENTIFY AS TRANSGENDER?
<b>LGBT+</b>	Gay woman/lesbian Gay man Bisexual Other	Yes
<b>Non-LGBT+</b>	Heterosexual I prefer not to say	No I prefer not to say

As part of UCAS' continuous development, we constantly review the information we collect from students to ensure it remains fit for purpose. To this end, we are currently reviewing the information we collect, and options we present, to students relating to their gender identity and sexual orientation, as outlined in the recommendation above.

## ANNEX B: TERMINOLOGY

<b>Applicants</b>	In this report, refers to people living in the UK who have applied to an undergraduate course using the UCAS application form. International applicants have been excluded from analysis because they are not asked the sexual orientation or gender identity application questions. Unless otherwise stated, this refers to applicants in the 2020 application cycle.
<b>Students</b>	In this report, refers to applicants who responded to the survey sent by UCAS in May 2021. These were UK domiciled 18 year old applicants in the 2021 cycle, who declared an LGBT+ identity in their UCAS application.
<b>LGBT+</b>	Refers to all those who selected the Gay woman/lesbian (L), Gay man (G), Bisexual (B) or Other (+) option in the sexual orientation question and/or those who selected Yes in the transgender (T) question.
<b>LGB</b>	Refers to all those who selected the Gay woman/lesbian (L), Gay man (G), Bisexual (B) or Other (+) option in the sexual orientation question.
<b>Trans(gender)</b>	Refers to those who selected Yes in the transgender (T) question.
	<i>Please note that the LGB group and the transgender group are not mutually exclusive, so some students may appear in both groups.</i>
<b>Non-LGBT+</b>	Refers to those not declaring and LGBT+ identity; that is, those that selected heterosexual, prefer not to say or chose not to answer the sexual orientation question, and that also selected No, prefer not to say or chose not to answer the transgender question.
<b>Other</b>	Refers to those who selected the 'Other' box under the sexual orientation question.

UCAS is using the term LGBT+ as it relates to identities available in the UCAS application, along with 'other'. We recognise there are many more identities in the LGBTQIA+ community. As noted in the report, UCAS is reviewing the experience of LGBT+ students as they progress to their next step. We seek to ensure the full diversity of students who wish to benefit from higher education and training are reflected in the admissions process, including exploration, choice making and application.





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