Investigating the Experiences of Transgender Students in Higher Education in the UK

Thesis

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INVESTIGATING THE EXPERIENCES OF TRANSGENDER STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UK

Lynne Mary Regan

BA, BSc, MEd, MA

Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology

Doctorate in Education (EdD)

23rd October 2021
Abstract

Negotiating the university environment can be difficult for many students but for transgender students there can be additional hurdles. With university often being the first experience of real independence for young people it may also be a place where young trans people feel they can be themselves for the first time, as they navigate an environment away from family and friendship ties from the past.

Transgender studies is a growing field, yet there is very little published research into the experiences of trans students in higher education (HE) in the UK.

This study employed a transformative paradigm and used qualitative methods to increase understanding of trans students' experiences in this area. An online survey of 164 trans students investigated the breadth of experiences across different higher education institutions (HEIs), and remote one-to-one interviews with seven students allowed for in-depth exploration of trans students' perspectives and voices. The study explored the challenges that these students faced around themes of harassment, bullying and transphobia; inclusion/exclusion; representation in the curriculum; and institutional facilities and administration. The study also investigated eight HEI transgender student policies to identify how/whether the needs of this student group are being met.

Feelings of segregation and otherness were illustrated by difficulties changing names and/or gender markers on HEI systems and insufficient gender-neutral facilities on campus. A lack of trans representation in the curriculum was clear and particular issues were identified regarding professional health science courses. Obstacles accessing mental health support services were also revealed.
Key findings were that there is a disconnect between what policies say and what trans students experience, and exclusion of this student group as a result of institutional cisnormativity. The research provided insights into the effect of this disconnect and suggested areas of improvement for professional practice, provision of support, and policy and procedure implementation.
This thesis is dedicated to Alex, my inspiration – if that is the correct word – for the topic of this study.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my main supervisor, Dr Naomi Holford, and co-supervisor Dr Angela Srivastava, for their undying belief in me and their constant guidance, encouragement and support throughout the EdD journey, and my third supervisor Dr Clare Lee for her constructive and honest feedback towards the end of the journey when it was needed most. I would also like to thank Dr Judith Lathlean for her excellence in proofreading.

I would like to thank all my family, who have supported me not only during the last three and a half years of EdD study, but for the last 27 years that I have been studying with the Open University in one form or another. In particular, I thank my husband Tony and children Joseph, Emily and Alex for their understanding and patience through all the hours they have lost me to books and to the computer screen as I have busied myself with reading, research and writing. Special thanks go to Alex, whose own experience as a trans student at a UK university made me angry enough to motivate me to begin this research.

Huge thanks go to the participants who took part in this study, without whom it could not have taken place, and I hope that as a result of their willingness to share their experiences, I can help to improve the experiences of those who follow in their footsteps. I would also like to thank the Student Union Trans Officer at the university where I work for their input into wording the survey, and a trans member of staff who listened patiently as I toyed with various ideas. I am also grateful to the attendees and other presenters at all the conferences where I have been fortunate to present my findings, for giving me feedback and giving me confidence in my understanding of the thesis topic.
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Glossary of Terms

The following glossary is limited to terms used in this thesis, and reflects the current terminology at the time of writing.

**Affirmed Gender**: A term used to describe a person’s post-transition gender status.

**Binary**: A system only encompassing two options. This term is used as an adjective to describe the genders female/male or woman/man.

**Cisgender/Cis**: A person who exclusively identifies as the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Cisheteronormativity**: How society is orientated around a presumption of cisgender, heterosexual identities.

**Cisnormativity**: How society is orientated around the assumption that a person’s gender matches the biological sex they were assigned at birth.

**Coming Out**: The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

**Deadnaming**: Using the name that a person was given at birth where they have changed this name as part of the process of transition.

**Gender Binary**: A system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two, opposite categories, termed “male and female.”
**Gender Dysphoria:** Anxiety and/or discomfort experienced by a person regarding the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Gender Expression/Presentation:** The physical manifestation of gender identity through clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. (typically referred to as masculine or feminine).

**Gender Fluid:** A changing gender identity and/or presentation.

**Gender Identity:** A person’s internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both, or other gender(s).

**Gender Identity Disorder / GID:** The diagnosis given to transgender and other gender-nonconforming people in the DSM-III and DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 3rd and 4th editions). Because it labels people as “disordered,” Gender Identity Disorder is often considered offensive and this term was replaced by the term “gender dysphoria” in DSM-V.

**Gender Incongruence:** A term that describes the mismatch between sex assigned at birth, and gender identity.

**Gender Non-Conforming:** A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category. Not all gender non-conforming people identify as transgender.

**Genderqueer:** A term commonly used by people who do not identify or express their gender within the gender binary. They may identify as neither male nor female, may
see themselves as outside of or in between the binary gender boxes, or may simply feel restricted by gender labels. Not everyone who identifies as genderqueer identifies as trans or nonbinary.

**Heteronormative / Heteronormativity:** The concept that society is orientated around a presumption that heterosexuality is the norm.

**Nonbinary (Also Non-Binary):** A term to describe all genders other than the binary female/male or woman/man.

**Outing/Being outed:** Exposing someone’s LGBT+ identity to others without their permission.

**Passing:** Refers to a trans person’s ability to be perceived as cisgender, typically through physical gender cues and stereotypical behaviours associated with a particular gender.

**Queer:** This was once considered a slur and some people still think of it that way, but it has now been reclaimed as an umbrella term generally used by rather than about gender and sexual minorities who are not cisgender and/or heterosexual.

**Sex:** A set of characteristics associated with reproduction and biology that generally assign individuals into categories of “male” and “female.”

**Sex Assigned at Birth:** The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex at birth usually based on physical anatomy at birth and/or genetic examination.
Sexual Orientation: A person’s physical, romantic, emotional, aesthetic, and/or other form of attraction to others, e.g. homosexual, heterosexual.

Transgender/Trans: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Transition: A person’s process of developing and assuming a gender expression to match their gender identity. Transition can include coming out to family, friends, and/or co-workers; changing name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) some form of surgery.

Transphobia: Fear of or aversion to trans people, associated with attitudes such as fear, discomfort, distrust, or disdain. This word is used similarly to homophobia, xenophobia, misogyny, etc.

Transsexual: A term that is often considered derogatory and outdated, similar to transgender in that it indicates a difference between a person’s gender identity and sex assigned at birth. Transsexual often – though not always – implies hormonal/surgical transition from one binary gender to the other.

Trans Woman / Trans Man: Trans woman generally describes someone assigned male at birth who identifies as a woman. Trans man generally describes someone assigned female at birth who identifies as a man. Sometimes trans women are referred to as male-to-female (also MTF, M2F, or trans feminine) and sometimes trans men are referred to as female-to-male (also FTM, F2M, or trans masculine).
Definitions based on Trans Student Educational Resources (no date); Gender Identity Research & Education Society (2019); Human Rights Campaign (no date) – as at the time of writing.
# Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BACP</td>
<td>British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAME or BME</td>
<td>Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic; or Black and Minority Ethnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BERA</td>
<td>British Educational Research Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRT</td>
<td>Critical Race Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECU</td>
<td>Equality Challenge Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDI</td>
<td>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIC</td>
<td>Gender Identity Clinic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRA</td>
<td>Gender Recognition Act 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRC</td>
<td>Gender Recognition Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HESA</td>
<td>Higher Education Statistics Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HREC</td>
<td>Human Research Ethics Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGB</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBT+</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender plus. The ‘plus’ is inclusive of other groups, such as asexual, intersex, queer, questioning, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQI+</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex plus. The ‘plus’ indicates that any and all kinds of trans, non-binary and non-gender presentations and sexual orientations are welcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUS</td>
<td>National Union of Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TERF</td>
<td>Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism/Feminist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TGNC</td>
<td>Transgender and gender non-conforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCAS</td>
<td>University College Admission Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter defines the rationale for undertaking the research and provides a background to the contemporary political and social context to the study and how this is relevant in terms of the thesis aims, before providing an outline for the structure of the thesis.

Section 1.1 looks at the increased visibility of trans people in society and in an educational context, and sections 1.2 and 1.3 give an overview of the law and current political and social issues related to transgender people in the UK in order to situate the research within the contemporary context in which trans students are navigating their identities outside of as well as within Higher Education (HE). Section 1.4 examines the impact of some of these issues on HE, and section 1.5 introduces the research questions and outlines the structure of the thesis.

Transgender is used as an umbrella term for those whose gender identity and/or gender expression does not match the sex they were assigned at birth, or who do not conform to conventional gender binaries of man/woman. Within this thesis I use the terms ‘trans’ and ‘transgender’ as inclusive terms to reflect the full spectrum of identities within this, including but not exclusive to transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, gender fluid, non-binary and gender non-conforming. A more comprehensive explanation of terminology can be found in the Glossary of Terms. It is noted that terminology is rapidly changing, and that “today’s ‘edgy’ language can become tomorrow’s oppressive cliché” (Henrickson et al., 2020, p. 10) and as such, this glossary has been updated several times throughout the duration of this study.
This thesis uses the term HEI for Higher Education Institutions, as this incorporates all higher education – universities, colleges and alternative providers of Level 5 or above education in the UK (UK Government, no date b).

1.1 Rationale

This study takes place at a time when the experiences of trans people are becoming more visible through national, international and social media. There appears to be an increase in the number of people in the UK identifying as transgender and the Gender Identity Clinic (GIC) in London, which accepts referrals from across the UK for adults with issues related to gender identity, reported an “unprecedented rise in referrals… [outstripping] the number of available first appointments by a factor of 2 to 1” (Gender Identity Clinic, 2018) with an estimated 206 referrals made in October 2020 alone and a 33-36-month wait for first appointments at that time (Gender Identity Clinic, 2020). As of September 2021, the GIC had 9,667 people on the waiting list and were offering first appointments to people who were referred in October 2017 (Gender Identity Clinic, 2021).

Increased visibility has enabled some change to take place, in terms of perceptions of trans individuals and with regards to rights, equality, and social justice, but considering the political and social issues discussed later in this chapter it is clear there is still a long way to go. There is a need for trans people to navigate the gender expectations and reactions of others as well as the threat of violence when coming out. For trans people ‘out’ could mean starting to express their gender identity by the way they present themselves to others, or being open with others about being trans. Those who ‘pass’ – that is they are perceived by others as the gender they identify as without question – may not wish to disclose their trans identity, whereas others
feel that not coming out is erasing part of their identity (Pryor, 2015) (Catalano, 2015). Because of this trans people are often not able to stay out, instead having to make strategic decisions about whether to declare their gender identity depending on specific social contexts (Brumbaugh-Johnson and Hull, 2019). As Marques (2019) argues, the way trans people display their gender differs with context and whether they feel enabled or constrained in the way they present.

Interest in transgender studies has increased exponentially in recent years (Marques, 2019), yet despite this, gender identity remains under-researched within post-compulsory education (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2018). Beemyn (2003) proposed that it is often at college that students first have the opportunity to question their assigned gender, as they are away from the confines of family and childhood friends. From my own professional experience working with students in HE, I have observed that it is often a student’s first real experience of independence and a time when boundaries are pushed as they discard the constraints of school and family life. This gives students an opportunity to identify or present themselves in a way that they feel most comfortable, as they are mostly away from people who have known them as they were growing up. For these students, being able to experiment with how they feel in a safe environment is a key factor and one that will be discussed in Chapter 6 when considering how HEIs can support trans students.

In contrast to the time in which Beemyn was writing (2003), it is likely that there are also now more students who are already living in their affirmed gender – that is, the gender they have transitioned to – when they arrive at university (Renn and Reason, 2012). The UK Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS), which supports children and young people under the age of 18 with regards to difficulties surrounding the development of gender identity, reported referrals having almost
doubled from 1,409 in the financial year 2015/16 to 2,748 in 2019/20, showing an increase in the number of young people seeking help about questioning their gender (Gender Identity Development Service, 2020). Students entering HE who have already transitioned, socially and/or medically, may encounter different issues such as being able to live their lives without being ‘outed’ – that is, their trans identity being exposed to others without their permission – and again, clear and consistent HEI policy and practice is important for this to happen, and will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Identifying the numbers of trans students in HE has, until fairly recently, been quite difficult, and without clear statistics some HEIs may be hesitant to, for example, spend money on gender-neutral facilities without clear information on how many, if any, students at the HEI would be impacted by any lack of such facilities. As shown in Table 1 below, during the 2014 application cycle the University College Admission Services (UCAS) amended the student application process and ‘legal sex’ was changed to ‘gender’ with male and female options and an additional question regarding transgender identity (Cooke, 2019). This change came with the understanding that although historically the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ were used interchangeably, their uses had become more distinct with ‘sex’ being the biological difference used to assign male or female at birth, and ‘gender’ being an individual’s concept of themselves (Newman, 2018). At the time of writing, these questions have not changed.
In order to get a clearer picture of the number of trans students in HE in the UK, data were obtained from UCAS (Heron, 2021) which indicated the number of students responding that they identified as transgender on their UCAS application, as shown in Table 2. I have left the 2014/15 cycle out of the figures due to the changes in wording mentioned above, as this may warrant data from this cycle year to be treated more cautiously:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application cycle</th>
<th>Total number of applicants</th>
<th>Number responding that they identify as transgender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>498,350</td>
<td>1,285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>480,220</td>
<td>1,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>465,045</td>
<td>1,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>463,190</td>
<td>2,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>477,310</td>
<td>2,385</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Data from UCAS on the number of students identifying as transgender at application (Heron, 2021)
This clear increase in students identifying as transgender indicates a need for HEIs to improve the university experience for trans students (Marzetti, 2018).

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) publishes figures based on data collected annually from HEIs about their student population. Looking at the latest figures in Table 3 (HESA, 2020), it can be seen how use of the ‘other’ category has increased greatly in recent years, although still a small proportion of the total number of students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,314,730</td>
<td>1,344,635</td>
<td>1,372,860</td>
<td>1,402,970</td>
<td>1,440,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,017,245</td>
<td>1,031,120</td>
<td>1,040,755</td>
<td>1,051,220</td>
<td>1,087,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>1,070</td>
<td>1,765</td>
<td>2,645</td>
<td>3,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 HE student enrolments by personal characteristics (sex) (HESA, 2020)

However, these figures are not necessarily a true representation of the number of students identifying as transgender: firstly because it asked for sex and not gender, but also because there is no explanation as to what ‘other’ might include or why there is a ‘not known’ category, and because ‘male’ and ‘female’ categories will probably include trans students who have registered at university as their affirmed gender.

Table 4 shows how the Office for Students statistics break down the number for those students identifying their gender as being different to the gender assigned at birth, according to HEI HESA returns.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student characteristic</th>
<th>2016-17</th>
<th>2017-18</th>
<th>2018-19</th>
<th>2019-20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not the same as the gender assigned at birth</td>
<td>2,795 (0.9%)</td>
<td>2,515 (0.7%)</td>
<td>3,130 (0.9%)</td>
<td>3,640 (1.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Gender identity data 2016/17 to 2019/20 (The Office for Students, 2020a; The Office for Students, 2021)

Although this data is limited in that it covers only UK-domiciled students, and as such the number of trans students may be even higher, the increasing numbers highlight the timeliness of my research to understand the experiences of this growing population and thereby contribute to supporting trans students in HE in the UK.

1.2 UK Law

1.2.1 Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 extended protection to ‘gender reassignment’ as one of the ‘protected characteristics’. Gender reassignment, despite the name, does not specifically relate to trans people who have undergone medical treatment or surgery, but to all trans people at any stage of transition, from proposing to reassign their gender onwards. Under the Act, HEIs along with other public sector organisations are required by the Public Sector Equality Duty to endeavour to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity, moving towards the prevention of discrimination, harassment and victimisation. In the HE environment, to support trans students this may include updating student records to reflect name and/or gender changes, provision of appropriate toilets and changing rooms, and ensuring equality of education. It will involve ensuring policies and procedures include a commitment to trans equality, providing staff training, creating safe working and social spaces for trans students and challenging inappropriate/transphobic behaviour. As will be
considered in Chapter 6, trans students should always be involved in any decisions being made.

Following the changes made by the Equality Act 2010, the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) (Pugh, 2010) revised their guidance to HEIs first published in 2008, regarding trans staff and students. This guidance set out to help HEIs meet their legal responsibilities to ensure policies and procedures met the needs of trans people and to provide support to trans staff and students, and it is against this guidance that a selection of HEI trans student policies will be examined in Chapter 4.

1.2.2 Gender Recognition Act 2004

An area of concern for trans people is the challenging process involved in changing legal gender, as set out in the Gender Recognition Act 2004. It is possible for trans people to change their name and gender marker on most legal documents, including their passport and driving licence, with a deed poll and a letter of confirmation from a Gender Identity Clinic of ‘stable and permanent’ gender dysphoria. Changes between binary genders only are possible on these documents in the UK at the time of writing, which means that non-binary and gender non-conforming people – those who do not identify within the binary man/woman or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category – have to choose between ‘male’ and ‘female’. Although a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) is not required in order for trans people to be protected under the Equality Act 2010, it is required for certain things that are controlled by law, including pension eligibility, marriage rights, prison allocation, and death registration, without which trans people may be treated as the gender on their birth certificate regardless of gender identity (UK Trans Info, 2019).
Although the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) does not require people to have undergone surgical procedures or hormone therapy in order to apply for a GRC, it does require people who wish to legally change their gender to: provide two medical reports evidencing a diagnosis of gender dysphoria; provide documentation that proves they have lived in their ‘acquired’ gender for at least two years; submit a “statutory declaration of their intention to live in their acquired gender until death” (Gender Recognition Act, 2004, chapter 7, p2); and, if married, either obtain the consent of their spouse or end their marriage.

When gender recognition is granted, the GRC can be used as evidence of a person’s new legal gender; for those born or adopted in the UK they can also obtain a new birth/adoption certificate, which will include all the details on the original certificate but with the name and sex changed.

Acquiring a GRC is costly, £140 at the time of writing (UK Government, no date, accessed 10\textsuperscript{th} March 2021), plus the cost of obtaining relevant medical evidence and the solicitor’s charge when signing the statutory declaration. There is also no option currently for people who identify as non-binary (i.e. identifying outside of the binary female/male or woman/man) to have this acknowledged. It is suggested that even law and social policy that is aimed at supporting trans people, focuses on “binary conceptualisations of the body” (Hines, 2018, p39), whereby gender fluidity is further ‘silenced’. Despite more recent awareness of non-binary identity, the experiences of these individuals is poorly understood, leading to greater social exclusion (Taylor \textit{et al.}, 2018). Section 1.3 will highlight the impact of a 2018 consultation around changes to the GRA.
1.3 Social and political context in the UK 2018-2021

This section examines some of the political and social issues faced by trans people and the increase in media coverage about trans people, during the period in which this research was undertaken (2018-2021), in order to provide the contemporary context in which trans students are navigating their day-to-day lives at the time of this study.

1.3.1 Gender Recognition Act Reform

In 2018, the UK Government undertook a consultation (Government Equalities Office, 2018a) to identify people’s views on how best to reform the Gender Recognition Act 2004 (GRA). One of the main issues of contention from the perspective of trans people was the pathologisation of transgender identity through the requirement for psychiatrists to ‘diagnose’ gender dysphoria, as this further disempowers trans people who cannot, or do not wish to, medically transition (Johnson, 2016), as without a formal medical diagnosis they are unable to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC). The dominance of the medical model has been questioned (Cannoot, 2019) as it forces people to conform to a set definition of being trans and makes medical authorities “gatekeepers with the power to regulate gender identity” (p. 17). The ICD-10 (International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, 10th Revision) diagnostic manual, which is the global standard for the identification of health trends and statistics (World Health Organisation, 2016) classified gender identity ‘disorders’ under the section ‘Mental and behavioural disorders’. However, the latest diagnostic manual, ICD-11, (World Health Organisation, 2019) no longer classifies gender identity-related health as a disorder or as a mental illness, categorising instead under the section ‘Conditions
related to sexual health’ and being described as ‘characterized by a marked and persistent incongruence between an individual’s experienced gender and the assigned sex’. This change has been made because of a better understanding that identifying as transgender is not a mental health disorder and that being categorised in this way was causing stigma (Say, 2018). However, the medical model of diagnosis remains; those applying to change their name and gender on documents such as a driving licence or passport are required to provide evidence of gender dysphoria, and those requesting a GRC in the UK are required to provide a diagnosis of gender dysphoria and reports from a doctor or psychologist that detail any treatment received to change sexual characteristics, such as hormone therapy or surgery, or if no treatment has been received, a report that includes details of any planned treatment or surgery.

The UK Government consultation closed on 22nd October 2018, after which responses were due to be analysed and a report published indicating what action the Government intended to take (Government Equalities Office, 2018a).

In April 2020, the UK Government’s Women and Equalities Minister, Liz Truss, in a speech to the Women and Equalities Select Committee, reported that the GRA reform response would be published by summer 2020, and emphasised three priorities in relation to this:

- Protecting single-sex spaces.
- Making sure transgender adults are free to live their lives without fear of persecution, whilst maintaining the proper checks and balances in the system.
- Making sure that under-18s are protected from decisions that they could make that are irreversible in the future.
Despite the fact that the GRA reforms were about whether trans people should be able to apply for a GRC more easily, the mis-implication that the GRA would dictate who could use single-sex spaces further increased a growing backlash from anti-trans movements, which will be described further in section 1.3.3.

With the consultation response imminent, June 2020 saw *The Sunday Times* suggesting that reforms to the GRA were being shelved, and that the exclusion of trans people from single sex spaces would be increased with “new protections [being] offered to safeguard female-only spaces, including refuges and public lavatories, to stop them being used by those with male anatomy” (Shipman, 2020). This prompted activism across social media by pro-trans organisations such as the trans-led charity Gendered Intelligence, who ran the ‘#TRUSSTME – Don’t roll back on trans rights’ campaign (Gendered Intelligence, 2020), urging people to write to their MPs and to the Prime Minister directly.

In a written statement to the House of Commons on 22nd September 2020, Liz Truss, the Minister for Women and Equalities, discussed the response to the consultation (Government Equalities Office, 2020b), this time outlining the following changes:

- Placing the application for a GRC online to reduce bureaucracy.
- A reduction in the cost of obtaining a GRC to “a nominal amount”.
- Opening at least three new gender clinics to reduce NHS waiting times and provide better geographical coverage, making it easier to fulfil the medical requirements of obtaining a GRC.
With regards to female-only spaces, the statement confirmed, “The Equality Act 2010 clearly protects transgender people from discrimination. The same act allows service providers to restrict access to single sex spaces on the basis of biological sex if there is a clear justification.” The statement also noted no proposed changes to the Gender Recognition Act 2004.

Responses to this were mixed, with Stonewall Chief Executive Nancy Kelley commenting that whilst the “minimal administrative changes” would improve the process of applying for a GRC, the proposed changes did not “go anywhere near far enough toward meaningfully reforming the Act to make it easier for all trans people to go about their daily life” (Stonewall, 2020), and compared the UK to the Republic of Ireland which removed the medicalisation of the GRC application process by allowing self-determination in 2015. The charity Mermaids welcomed the changes to GRC cost and the increase in clinic provision, but noted disappointment that there was no mention of non-binary identities and that self-declaration had been ignored (Mermaids, 2020).

1.3.2 Exclusion and hostility towards trans people

The announcement of the pending consultation regarding reform of the Gender Recognition Act 2004 (GRA) was followed by an upsurge in public anti-trans sentiment in the UK (Pearce et al., 2020b). As other formal documents, including passports and driving licences, could already be changed without a GRC, the reform plans were mainly proposing that birth certificates could also be changed in the same manner. The 2018 consultation was welcomed by many trans people and LGBT+ organisations; however, despite the limited changes being proposed, it was met by a backlash of campaigns against the proposals, particularly after the April 2020 statement from Women and Equalities Minister Liz Truss (mentioned in section
1.3.1) appeared to state that the protection of women-only spaces would be included in the reformed GRA. Trans-exclusionary rhetoric began to spread through not only social media, but also mainstream media outlets such as newspapers and television, buoyed by supporters with high media profiles bringing ideas from far-right and trans-exclusionary branches of feminism to a mass audience (Pearce et al., 2020a, p. 882), suggesting that anti-trans expression had become an establishment position.

The main points of the backlash concerned “women’s sex-based rights” and definitions of sex as an immutable biological reality (Pearce et al., 2020b, p. 679) which included arguments that trans women are ‘male’ and trans men are ‘female’. There was also resistance to self-determination with arguments that this would enable men ‘posing as women’ access to women-only spaces and how this would be a danger to cis women. This resulted in arguments that trans women/girls should be excluded from such spaces, despite the lack of evidence that this has happened in other countries where self-identification is already in place (Hasenbush et al., 2019). However, as under the Equality Act, 2010, trans women do not require a GRC to access these spaces, the proposed GRC reforms would not make any difference to current access of trans women to women-only spaces.

The exponents of the backlash have been described as ‘trans-exclusionary radical feminists’ (TERFs). This has been a matter of objection by the campaigners, many of whom view this as a slur and more recently have preferred to be identified as ‘gender critical’, with an emphasis on “biological defined notions of femaleness and womanhood over gender identity and social concepts of gender” (Pearce et al., 2020b, p. 681) and on reserving women’s spaces for cisgender (or cis) women – i.e. those whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.
(Zanghellini, 2020). However, the trans-exclusionary radical/gender-critical feminist perspective represents just a marginal number of feminists, with much of feminism strongly opposing these views. An open letter signed by nearly 700 “feminist leaders in advocacy, business, entertainment, media, politics, and social justice” was issued supporting trans women and girls (Glaad, 2021). Pearce et al., 2020a described the ‘TERF wars’ as a distraction from more urgent priorities, such as equitable access to areas such as healthcare, employment and education for trans people, and cited alliances between trans and feminist activists to fight back against oppression and hostility.

1.3.3 Gendered spaces

Trans-exclusionary and trans-hostile debates around the use of gendered spaces by trans people, and more commonly the use of women’s spaces (such as toilets, changing rooms, refuges) by trans women (Hines, 2019), became high on the media agenda at the time of writing, with the rise of trans-exclusionary radical/gender-critical feminism as described in section 1.3.2. Toilets are one of the few explicitly gender-separated spaces and arguments were made that trans women presented a danger to cisgender women (women who exclusively identify with the sex they were assigned at birth), placing them at risk of violence. An example of media representation of this was seen in The Sunday Times article from July 2018, which announced that ladies’ toilets at London landmarks would be open to “self-identifying” trans women “whether or not they have transitioned” (Gilligan, 2018). The article was later withdrawn and a correction issued six months later (The Sunday Times, 2019) due to complaints that it was misleading, having not explained that under the Equality Act, trans people could already use single-sex spaces that corresponded with their gender identity. Despite this fact, and that trans people had
been using their ‘preferred’ toilet for many years without question or any evidence of harm, a debate was sparked amongst many trans-exclusionary radical/gender-critical feminists, that allowing trans women into women-only facilities would remove access to what they consider to be a ‘safe’ space for cisgender women (Jones and Slater, 2020). The argument that trans women are predatory and threaten harm in itself represents cisgender women’s privilege, as no consideration is made in that excluding trans women from women-only spaces and forcing them into male-only spaces increases the danger of violence to trans women. With trans-inclusive approaches to toilet provision being seen as an infringement of cisgender women’s rights this has become high on the trans-exclusionary radical/gender-critical feminist agenda.

1.3.4 The impact of negative media coverage

As has been described in sections 1.3.1-1.3.3 above, at the time of writing there was increased media coverage about the proposed reforms to the Gender Recognition Act, which created a level of hostility towards trans people – and trans women in particular, with regards to the use of ‘women-only’ spaces – and this was played out in both social and national media in the UK. Mocarski et al. (2019) described how according to their research into trans representation in the media, increased media coverage can have both negative and positive impacts. A positive impact is that through increased exposure, awareness of and support for the trans community can be heightened. However, this is frequently outweighed by the negative impact. Investigating the effects of trans representation in UK newspapers on trans audiences even before the social and political changes of 2018-2021 discussed earlier in this chapter, Humphrey (2016) found that many participants in their interviews and focus groups felt that media coverage was often detrimental, with
misrepresentation and sensationalism often used to “boost sales and readership” (p.34).

The image below shows a selection of headlines from UK mainstream media during 2020 and the first six months of 2021, and highlights some of the day-to-day negative messages found in national media about trans people.

Koshkarova et al. (2019) examined media coverage of transgender discourse in British and American mass media and suggested that this can form and shape public opinion and Mcbride (2020), in their paper informed by empirical research looking at trans individuals’ lived experiences of harm relating to their gender identity, referred to how media organisations:
“...produce and reinforce perceptions of trans individuals... to influence, empower and mobilize their audience in the daily regulation of identity, a form of gender policing that characterizes many trans individuals’ everyday experience. In this way, there has been a form of ‘net widening’ whereby regulation, previously the domain of psycho-medical professionals, has expanded beyond these professional boundaries into mainstream media and the general public serves as judge and jury, declaring recognition (or not) and acceptance (or not) within the bosom of mainstream, normative society” (p. 169).

These convey the way in which the media informed the negative impression of and hostility towards trans people discussed in the previous sections, as well as limiting the capacity of trans people to highlight political and issues that impact on their lives through regulating when and where trans individuals can speak. During the period of social and political change described in this chapter, many of the ‘debates’ on television about trans people, did not include trans people. For example, the BBC’s current affairs programme Newsnight was criticised for airing segments about trans issues that not only did not have any trans participants, but often included input from people identified as being ‘anti-trans’ or holding gender critical viewpoints (Parsons, 2019; Duffy, 2021).

Research carried out on behalf of Mermaids, a charity supporting trans children, young people and their families, compared British press coverage of trans people in 2012 with coverage in 2018/19 and found that this had increased threefold, and that although some of the more inappropriate use of language had decreased since 2012, and that there were more stories around transphobia and inclusivity, trans people were increasingly being written about in negative and hostile ways (Baker,
The increase in negative media can be harmful for trans people. In a study of 545 transgender adults in the USA, using an online survey, Hughto et al. (2021) quantitatively assessed the association between exposure to negative trans-related media and poor mental health, and concluded that frequent exposure to negative media messages was associated with symptoms of depression, anxiety, PTSD and psychological distress. Similarly, qualitative research based on interviews with 23 young trans people by Pham et al. (2020) identified increased levels of stress amongst trans young people as a result of exposure to negative and inaccurate portrayals of the trans community in the news. However, they noted that viewed through the lens of the Youth Resilience Framework, their findings suggested that positive news coverage may counterbalance negative portrayals and promote resilience and improved mental wellbeing.

1.4 Higher education context in the UK 2019-2021

On 16th June 2019, an open letter signed by 35 academics from across 22 universities was published in The Times newspaper (Stock et al., 2019) arguing that university policies for the inclusion of trans people, in particular with regards to institutional membership of the Stonewall Diversity Champions programme (Stonewall, no date), were in tension with “academic freedom of thought”. They argued that with the programme’s definition of transphobia including the denial or refusal to accept gender identity, they, as academics, had been left “unable to question the contested notion of ‘gender identity’ without fear of sanction.” They also argued that the programme’s guidance that HEIs should avoid inviting speakers who would deny the right for trans people to be the gender they say they are, was an “unacceptable restriction upon free academic debate”. They argued against the
requirement for HEI staff to undergo ‘trans awareness training’ and to be subjected to “tendentious and anti-scientific claims” about gender, and against the suggestion that they should “ask the pronouns of students”. They questioned Stonewall’s “doctrine that female-attracted trans women with penises, are ‘lesbians’” and stated that they felt inhibited from “interrogating the radical shifts in thinking” because of Stonewall’s influence. The letter ended with a call for Stonewall to confirm that it supports academic freedom of thought, or failing this, a call for universities to sever links with Stonewall.

The publication of this letter must have been difficult for trans students and staff at the 22 HEIs, whether taught by the signature academics or not, and mention of this is made by some of the interview participants and described in section 4.2. The letter was met with repercussion both within and outside of the academic community and on 19th July 2019 an open letter signed by almost 7000 academics and other university colleagues was published in the Independent newspaper (Dodds, 2019) backing trans-inclusive policies and practices in HE. They stated that criticism and critique of programmes such as the Stonewall Diversity Champions were not unwelcomed, but that “the primary concern must be with the wellbeing of the people subject to those policies” and that as educators, there is a duty of care to students and colleagues which includes respect for gender identity. They stated that “It is inconceivable that this duty should be considered antithetical to academic freedom” and that denying it “precludes our fellow academics and colleagues… from experiencing a secure and supportive environment safely to pursue their own freedom.” The letter ended with a statement that “We support the rights of colleagues to free speech, and safe debate, but until all LGBTQIA+ people can live, work and learn in our universities without fear or intimidation, it is vital that we stand
up and say that we support the rights of trans and other gender-diverse people to be who they are.”

A response from the LGBT+ Network of Networks in Higher Education (2019) suggested that the letter in The Times “muddles the distinction between the concept of academic freedom, and the statutory public sector equality duties of higher education institutions” and argued that “debating gender pronouns within an academic context is part of academic freedom whereas refusal to respect the gender pronouns of an individual to be used in class is not.” Lavery (2021) argued that “deadnaming and misgendering are not acceptable scholarly practices, and… they are not covered by the principle of academic freedom” (p. 166). The ability for HEIs to make this distinction will be an important one in developing trans policies, and this will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Carrera-Fernández and DePalma (2020) suggested that educators are “committed to broadening understandings, promoting empathy and providing dialogic alternatives to violence” and that these goals are hindered by trans-exclusionary/gender-critical perspectives that “render invisible the social injustices perpetrated by a heteronormative patriarchy” (p. 755). They contended that trans-exclusionary/gender-critical arguments denied cisgender privilege, failed to recognise transphobia by arguing that trans women do not lose their male privilege through transition, and created a false incompatibility between trans and cis (cis) women’s rights. They called for unity between trans and cis women activists to achieve common feminist goals, to recognise the similarities between cis women’s and trans oppressions and “identify the conscious and unconscious ways in which cisgenderism and sexism, along with obligatory heterosexuality, form part of a hidden school curriculum” (p. 758). Cisgenderism, Ansara (2015) described as being
“Unlike ‘transphobia’, which emphasises individual hostility and negative attitudes”, as it “incorporates both unintentional and well-intentioned practices [and] often functions at systemic and structural levels: even when individuals might reject some aspects of cisgenderist ideology, they may live and work within broader structural contexts that perpetuate and manufacture cisgenderism” (p. 15). In Chapter 3, I will discuss how the theoretical framework of critical theory in education used in this study can address these issues.

In February 2021, the Conservative government launched a policy paper on free speech and academic freedom in higher education. The foreword by The Rt Honourable Gavin Williamson MP, Secretary of State for Education, stated that the right to academic freedom was being challenged:

“There are some in our society who prioritise ‘emotional safety’ over free speech, or who equate speech with violence. This is both misguided and dangerous… The rise of intolerance and ‘cancel culture’ upon our campuses is one that directly affects individuals and their livelihoods… a blind eye has been turned to the creeping culture of censorship”

(Department for Education, 2021a).

The foreword went on to suggest that some university policies limited free speech, that students had been given too much control over deciding who can and cannot speak on campus, and that academics had been "pressured to adjust their reading lists for ideological reasons". The policy paper suggested implicit backing by the institutionally-powerful of the freedom of transphobic speech, and, in May 2021, the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill was introduced (UK Parliament. House
of Commons, 2021) to protect freedom of speech on HE campuses in England and to “stamp out unlawful ‘silencing’” (Department for Education, 2021b).

In Chapter 6, I will reflect on how HEIs can consider the disparity between freedom of speech and responsibility for the protection of staff and students from discrimination.

1.5 Research aims and outline of the thesis structure

1.5.1 Research questions

The main purpose of my research is to identify any obstacles that are encountered by trans students in higher education (HE) in the UK, and identify policy and procedure changes for higher education institutions (HEIs) to address areas of concern. The questions driving my research are:

- What are the experiences of trans students in HE in respect of support services, institutional administration, peers, academics and curriculum, social experience and facilities?

- How well are HEIs supporting trans students, including the development and implementation of trans student policy?

This thesis argues that there is insufficient UK-specific research regarding the experiences of trans students in HE as a discrete group, and also regarding the apparent disconnect between trans student policy and practice in HEIs in the UK. The thesis considers the impact of assumptions of cisnormativity in HE on the experiences of trans students and on the writing and implementation of policies, and proposes policy and procedural changes that could address areas of concern, with an aim to improve the experiences of trans students in HE in the UK.
1.5.2 Structure of the thesis

In Chapter 2, I critically review available literature relating to the experiences of trans students in higher education, identifying key themes. Much of the academic literature was found to be related to trans students in USA college environments, or to LGBT+ experiences rather than being trans-specific, so the chapter will also draw on UK-based research reports from non-governmental organisations. The literature review identified gaps in knowledge that will be investigated in my study.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology, starting by introducing the theoretical framework and discussing researcher positionality. The chapter goes on to discuss the research design, data collection and analysis processes before considering ethical considerations relating to this study.

In Chapter 4, I present the findings of my research arising from thematic analysis of the data from online surveys, one-to-one interviews and document analysis of HEI trans student policies. Key thematic areas are identified and discussed in relation to the existing literature. Chapter 5 focuses on a discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions, and introduces themes that arose from this study, some of which had not been identified in existing literature.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusion, discussing the contribution of the findings to knowledge in the field and the implications of the research for professional practice and policy, and examining limitations of the study and suggestions for areas of further research.
1.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has introduced the rationale for the study and examined the political and social context related to trans people in the UK at the time of this research, in an effort to understand some of the issues that trans students face both within and outside of education, and the impact that these issues may have for trans students in HE, particularly in the shadow of arguments about academic freedom and free speech. It is important to understand these aspects in order to understand the social context in which trans students are navigating their identities outside of as well as within HE. As will be discussed in the next chapter, there is an absence of academic writing in the field of trans students in higher education in the UK, and this study seeks to address this gap.
Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the available literature relating to the experiences of transgender students in higher education (HE) in the UK. It critically reviews the pre-existing academic literature pertaining to trans HE students in the UK, and also, both owing to the limited UK research available and because students in other countries may face similar challenges, from outside the UK. In a similar vein, where appropriate it also examines some of the literature relating to parallel experiences of other marginalised groups to identify where/whether they may reflect trans student experiences, for example providing an insight into processes of exclusion and marginalisation that may be relevant to trans student experiences.

The chapter also reviews some non-academic literature of relevance, such as reports of research conducted by or on behalf of organisations such as the National Union of Students (NUS), TransEdu Scotland, and Stonewall. Investigation of this ‘grey’ literature is important due to the shortage of existing academic peer-reviewed work, and the current and relatively under-researched nature of the topic. It is clear that there is much valuable research being carried out by non-governmental organisations and reviewing these publications can provide access to a wider variety of up-to-date information on research and policy. With research into trans experiences being such a current and rapidly-evolving topic, there is a risk that peer-reviewed research is out of date by the time of publication due to the long process involved (Hoffecker, 2021). However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations to using grey literature, such as the possibility of incomplete or inaccurate information,
and that such literature does not have to meet the rigid standards of peer-reviewed publications. Nonetheless, it is often produced by experts in the field and provides an insight into current practice, policy and legislation. Although grey literature could potentially be seen as politically biased, as the publishers of reports and working papers may have their own political or social agendas, it can also be an important method of offsetting publication bias, which refers to the propensity for studies reporting positive findings to be published in academic journals (Paez, 2017). Using both academic and grey literature can therefore increase timeliness of the findings and provide a balanced picture of the available evidence.

Section 2.2 explains the strategies employed to locate relevant literature; section 2.3 looks at the key themes identified in the literature, and section 2.4 concludes, reflecting on how the literature relates to the research questions, and considering the gaps in the literature that this study will address.

2.2 Literature search strategy

A literature search was carried out across a range of databases such as Academic Search Complete and EBSCOHost, and Library Searches using the Open University online library and the online and physical libraries at the institution where I work. The main online search terms included:

- Transgender + university
- Transgender + university + student
- Transgender + United Kingdom or UK or England or Britain
• Transgender or transsexual or transexual or gender variant or gender non-conforming + university or college or higher education + United Kingdom or UK or England or Britain

• Trans + student + university + United Kingdom or UK or England or Britain or Wales or Scotland or Northern Ireland

• LGBT* + student + university + United Kingdom or UK or England or Britain or Wales or Scotland or Northern Ireland

I set up Zetoc Alerts to email me the contents list when new issues of relevant journals were released. I also subscribed to the Association of University Administrators quarterly publication, *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, the British Psychological Society (BPS) monthly publication *The Psychologist* and the BPS Psychology of Sexuality Section peer-reviewed publication *The Psychology of Sexualities Review*, and the peer-reviewed journal *LGBT Health*. I used Mendeley as a reference manager and this sent weekly suggestions for articles, based on what I already had saved to my Mendeley library. Search methods also included snowballing techniques (using key words from reviewed publications to search for further references), and identifying references that cite, or have been cited by, key publications.

I also kept abreast of news websites and social media for current news and events relating to transgender people in the UK and saved these links to Evernote so that I could refer to them when relevant to my writing. This also ensured I was up to date with current news representation and social media coverage when interviewing participants.
In my initial search for academic research in 2017, there was remarkably little on the subject of trans students in HE, with far more focused on sexual orientation or the experiences of the LGBT+ student community as a whole rather than trans students as an independent group. Most research that had been published regarding trans students in HE had been carried out in the USA, where there are different laws and standards. As such, I cast a wider research net, looking critically at LGBT+ research in the UK to find out whether trans identities were included and looking again at trans and LGBT+ research from outside the UK to see how relevant they were in terms of transferability to the UK context.

Towards the end of 2018, more academic research on trans students began to emerge, and into 2019/2020 it was becoming clear how quickly this area of research was growing. The experiences of trans students in HE in the UK, however, remained significantly under-researched.

2.3 Issues affecting transgender students in HE

My own experience working in HE has indicated that university is often a space where students feel able to be themselves, away from family and childhood friends, and for many students this can be a place where they are first able to freely express their identity, and this is supported in research which suggested that exposure to a diversity of social interactions can encourage students to rethink normative assumptions, such as that around gender, sexuality and social class (Kaufman and Feldman, 2004). In Storrie and Rohleder's (2018) study, trans students identified attending university as being a key point in their gender transition; a place where they could make a ‘new start’ as a trans person, amongst people who had not known them in their previous gender presentation. Goldberg and Kuvalanka (2018) noted
how students felt that college offered a place where they could explore their gender identity more fully than they were able to at school, as well as providing them with a community of peers who had shared experiences of questioning gender identity.

Findings from the literature review identified four main themes that impacted on the experience of trans students in HE: harassment, bullying and transphobia; inclusion/exclusion; a lack of representation in the curriculum; and problems with institutional facilities and administration. The following sections look at these themes in relation to the experiences of trans students in HE as well as identifying some areas where these experiences are comparable to those of other marginalised groups, and identifies gaps in the literature.

2.3.1 Harassment, bullying and transphobia

This section explores examples of harassment and bullying experienced by LGBT+ students in HE and the trans-specific bullying and transphobia that many trans students reported experiencing from both their peers and members of HEI staff.

2.3.1.1 Harassment and bullying of LGBT+ students in higher education

Experiences of harassment, bullying, homophobia and transphobia, and ineffective or absent methods of dealing with these issues were reported in a great deal of the literature, although much of the previous research had focused on LGBT+ experiences rather than the experiences of trans students as a distinct group. In a study of LGBT+ students from one institution in Scotland, the university was found to be failing to protect LGBT+ people on campus from harassment and discrimination (Marzetti, 2018). Using semi-structured interviews with seven students and underpinned by an intersectional, queer, feminist methodological framework looking at how sexuality-based and gender-based oppression interacts with other
oppressions, Marzetti identified areas such as verbal abuse and homophobic and transphobic comments, and physical and sexual abuse, and suggested that halls of residence and social spaces were the most likely places where such harassment would occur. Although their research mainly identified harassment and bullying across the LGBT+ spectrum, challenging cisgender normativity and identifying both gender and sexuality-based oppression, it also discussed specific examples of trans students being harassed online which, they suggested, was also reflective of the experiences of LGBT+ people in wider society. However, although participants had expressed a need for ‘safe spaces’ on campus for LGBT+ students, despite the researcher stating that they were “looking optimistically for ways to strengthen policies and practice to improve the inclusion of LGBT+ people” (p. 704), they failed to suggest ways in which the HEI might address issues identified around the theme of harassment and bullying, other than “by providing tailored support for queer students” (p. 711) and the rather reactive suggestion to “consult with queer students to develop training to empower staff to challenge queerphobia if it arises” (p. 712).

The research did acknowledge that although “queerphobia” (p. 713) was present at the studied HEI, this may not be the case at all institutions.

Social spaces were a complex and contested issue in the literature. In addition to the correlation between social spaces and harassment suggested by Marzetti (2018), a qualitative study of six trans students studying in different UK universities reported the increased risk of transphobic abuse within drinking spaces at university and how some trans students felt unable to take part in social events even within the LGBT+ societies due to the strong drinking culture associated with these events (Storrie and Rohleder, 2018). Again, this research sought to identify the challenges, but other than suggesting that a lack of awareness about trans identities was the driving force
behind the problems, did not suggest potential approaches to improving awareness and reducing harassment. The study did not identify the theoretical perspective it was using, but did align findings around discrimination with minority stress theory’s explanation of mental health difficulties for marginalised populations. Minority stress theory has been used by Meyer (2003) as a model to describe the prevalence of mental health disorders in LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual) people in comparison to heterosexual (straight) people, and explained how stigma, prejudice, homophobia and discrimination experienced by LGB people creates hostile and stressful social environments that impact negatively on mental health. The Storrie and Rohleder (2018) study reported that transgender participants had described challenges including micro-aggressions and discrimination at both interpersonal and institutional levels that might contribute to higher levels of mental health difficulties. What this study did provide was an insight into aspects of trans-specific student experiences around bullying and harassment that could be investigated further.

In contrast to the suggestion that trans students might find some LGBT+ social events challenging due to the behaviour of others towards them, a study using interviews with 15 trans staff and students based at one HEI in the north-east of England, suggested that many of the student participants found the LGBT+ society welcoming (Hopkins et al., 2018). Although this study was based at one HEI and was an internal research report rather than a peer-reviewed article, the contrast with Storrie and Rohleder’s (2018) findings indicated that the culture of LGBT+ societies across different HEIs may differ substantially, affecting trans students’ experiences. However, it was helpful in identifying an area for further research into why some societies were welcoming when others were not, and was particularly useful as the research was specific to the experiences of trans students in the UK.
Safety on campus was another area that was mentioned in much of the literature. Online research commissioned by the National Union of Students with LGBT+ HE students (n=3,880) highlighted that only 21% of trans students (in comparison to 37% of LGB students) felt completely safe on campus, and that one in three trans participants (in comparison to one in five LGB participants) had experienced bullying or harassment on campus (Acciari, 2014). Most of the trans respondents reported not knowing how or where to report abuse. Although not stating the theoretical perspective underpinning the study, the authors did note the transformative potential of queer theory as a method of analysing students’ multiple experiences regarding sexuality and gender identity in higher education. In a smaller study outside of the UK investigating LGBT+ experiences of 12 students at one HEI in New Zealand, Allen et al. (2020) used a ‘photo-elicitation’ method in preference to surveys, and noted its “queer capacity to uncover mundane and ignored lived experiences of daily life” (p. 1079). Using this method, participants were asked to take ten photographs of their experience as LGBT+ students on campus, and this was followed by interviews using the photographs as prompts. The authors identified that although the HEI supported LGBT+ students with a ‘Zero tolerance for discrimination’ policy, this was not reinforced by inclusive processes, leaving students feeling “safe but not safe” (p. 1081), often resulting in them hiding their sexual and gender identities in fear of being treated differently. However, in contrast to these findings, Storrie and Rohleder (2018) noted that trans students in their study felt safer on campus than in other locations. These findings could be as a result of the differing number of students questioned by each study, by the dates the studies were undertaken, or the methodology used and the questions asked, making a clear comparison problematic, but highlighting a need for further research.
Research on behalf of the LGBT+ rights organisation and charity Stonewall (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018c) asked 522 LGBT+ students, of whom 17% (88) said they identified as trans, about their experience at British universities. The report stated that 36% of trans students and 7% of LGB students had faced negative comments and conduct from university staff, and 60% of trans students and 22% of LGB students had faced negative comments and conduct from other students. A small proportion (7%) of trans students who responded to the survey reported having been physically attacked by a student or staff member at university within the previous year, because of being trans.

The identification in the Bachmann and Gooch research discussed above, of the higher number of trans students experiencing harassment and negative comments in comparison to LGB students, suggested that this is a particularly prominent problem. However, as the research was conducted on behalf of Stonewall, an LGBT+ rights organisation, the results should be viewed with consideration to potential political bias, as discussed in section 2.1; for example, participants may have been more likely to respond to a questionnaire from a well-known LGBT+ rights organisation if they had faced negative experiences, or the wording of questions in the survey may have resulted in fewer trans students logging their experiences.

2.3.1.2 Transphobia and trans-specific bullying and harassment

As described in Chapter 1, transphobia is a concern for trans people from all areas of life, not just within HE. In a study looking at the impact of discrimination, violence and exclusion commissioned by Stonewall, Bachmann and Gooch (2018b) reported that, of 871 trans participants across England, Scotland and Wales, 41% had experienced a hate crime or incident because of their gender identity in the 12 months previous to the survey, with younger trans adults (aged 18-24) – the age
group for the majority of HE students – at higher risk with 53% having experienced such occurrences. This research was particularly relevant because it looked exclusively at the impact of discrimination, violence and exclusion on trans people, but again, should be viewed in consideration of the fact that it was commissioned by an LGBT+ rights organisation, so participants may have been more likely to take part if they had negative experiences to convey.

Harassment, bullying and transphobia can take many forms, including physical violence, verbal abuse, discrimination when accessing services, and micro-aggressions. Microaggressions are subtle forms of discrimination directed towards people who are part of a marginalised community, such as women, disabled people, people of colour and LGBT+ people; in the case of trans people, this can include actions such as misgendering, dehumanisation and objectification, disapproval or condemnation of trans identities (Nadal et al., 2014), showing intrusive curiosity, or asking about ‘real’ names or ‘preferred’ pronouns (Khan, 2019). Asking a trans person for a ‘preferred’ pronoun is suggesting that trans identities are less valid or less authentic than cis identities, or that being trans is a choice or preference rather than an inherent characteristic (Sevelius et al., 2020), where just asking what pronouns a person uses avoids this. Similarly, unless there is a requirement to know whether a person has a different legal name, asking this may be seen as an unwelcome and unnecessary intrusion, by which trans identities are invalidated (Turton, 2021).

Hopkins et al. (2018) discussed how trans staff and students interviewed at their HEI felt uncomfortable about being misgendered, particularly with regards to power relations, whereby students did not feel they could correct staff who misgendered them, and similarly postgraduate students did not feel they could correct their
supervisors. This was an internal report from just one HEI, but similar results were found in peer-reviewed mixed-methods research (146 questionnaire responses, semi-structured interviews with five youth workers and four teachers, and eight focus groups with 65 young people) informed by sociological understanding, looking at homosexuality, homophobia, transgender identities and transphobia amongst LGBT+ young people in the north of England, which reported that misnaming and misgendering were particular issues for trans students (Formby, 2015). They suggested that this could be symptomatic of a lack of awareness amongst peers and academics, something also borne out in other research. For example, Storrie and Rohleder (2018) described trans students experiencing ‘micro-aggressions’ including being misgendered, especially where there were conflicting gender signals such as their physical presentation not matching their gender identity. The research by Formby was limited in that although it discussed transphobia, it did not identify how many of the LGBT+ participants were trans. The Storrie and Rohleder research was research specifically into the experiences of trans students in the UK and therefore particularly relevant in feeding into the emerging theme of harassment, bullying and transphobia that I expanded upon in my research. In a section looking specifically at higher education, the Stonewall research (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018b) reported that one in seven trans students had either dropped out or considered dropping out of a course because of harassment or discrimination. This provided a good foundation on which to base my own research into this area, which appears lacking in UK academic literature.

**2.3.1.3 Section summary**

In summary, previous literature has indicated that many trans students experience harassment, bullying and transphobia in various forms including physical violence
and threat, hostility, emotional and verbal abuse, discrimination, and micro-aggressions such as misgendering and deadnaming.

2.3.2 Inclusion/exclusion in higher education

The previous section explored the persecution and discrimination that many trans students reported from both their peers and members of HEI staff. This section identifies areas more aligned with perceived discrimination and exclusion within the university environment.

2.3.2.1 Feelings of otherness or belonging

‘Othering’ is where certain individuals or groups are defined as not fitting in with the norms of society and, as such, experience marginalisation and inequality (Powell and Menendian, 2016). Feelings of ‘otherness’ can arise from the perceived advantages and disadvantages that occur as a result of deviation from ‘the norm’, and can be imposed by institutions where ‘the norm’ is the common body of the institution from which certain groups deviate (Santis, 2021). “Institutional cisheteronormativity” (Marzetti, 2018, p. 702) is used to describe how society in general, and in this case university education, is orientated around a presumption of cisgender, heterosexual identities. Research participants in Marzetti’s (2018) study, discussed in the previous section, illustrated how their university acknowledged LGBT+ student issues at a superficial level only, hosting events during LGBT History Month but not openly supporting students or understanding the issues they face. For trans students, I would suggest that ‘cismorativity’ in the HEI environment is the ‘norm’ from which trans students can be said to ‘deviate’.

Feelings of otherness are not just reported by trans communities, and with limited literature on trans student experiences of otherness and belonging in HE, it was
important to look wider and identify whether/where the experiences of other minority student groups might have reflected the experiences of trans students. Widening participation strategies in the UK aim to address barriers to entering HE that are experienced by students from under-represented groups, and to address the attainment gap to improve graduate outcomes and employability for these groups (UK Parliament. House of Commons, 2018). These interventions were mainly focused on social class, gender (the male/female attainment and outcome gap), disability, and ethnicity, with UK government data reporting on the characteristics of eligibility for free school meals, gender, ethnicity, special educational needs status and first language (UK Government, 2020). Although values of belonging are important for all new students entering HE, and creating a sense of belonging can improve retention and attainment for all students (Meehan and Howells, 2018), achieving this sense of belonging can be more difficult for students from marginalised groups (Vaccaro et al, 2015) such as trans students.

Feelings of belonging have been identified as a key human need, and one that Maslow (1954) placed as the first of the psychological needs, immediately after the basic physiological and safety needs, yet students with lower socioeconomic status can find it difficult to establish informal networks through clubs, societies and social events if they need to work part-time to subsidise living costs (Weiss, 2021), or because they live at home and commute rather than live in campus accommodation, to reduce costs. A lack of belonging experienced by women studying science, technology, mathematics and engineering (STEM) subjects has been reported as a contributing factor to these students leaving their course (Andrews et al, 2021). My own experience as a disability adviser in HE has been that disabled students can find it hard to achieve a sense of belonging where social inclusion is undermined by
financial difficulties, struggles with socialising due to hidden disabilities such as long-term medical conditions, mental health difficulties and autism spectrum conditions, or inability to participate due to physical barriers to attending clubs or societies. Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students, particularly those in predominantly white HEIs, face barriers as a result of cultural differences, and failure of HEIs to accommodate the needs of BAME students in areas such as food provision (e.g. not offering halal or kosher food) and social activities (e.g. events being centred around alcohol or run at licensed premises) can lead to these students feeling othered (Bunce et al., 2019). I propose that trans students would encounter similar barriers to informal networks, clubs and societies resulting in reduced feelings of belonging consequential to exclusion by others’ lack of understanding and knowledge, and this will be explained further in the next section.

There is a level of intersection between some of the above minority groups, such as socioeconomic status and disability, and gender identity. For example, trans people are more likely to experience homelessness and difficulty finding employment, meaning that trans students may also fit into the lower socioeconomic status bracket. The study for Stonewall reported one in four trans people had experienced homelessness at some point (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018b), where Shelter’s 2019 estimate for homelessness in England was one in 200 (Shelter England, 2019).

There is also evidence that trans people are overrepresented in the diagnosis of autism spectrum conditions (Warrier et al., 2020), and are also at high risk of mental health difficulties (De Vries et al., 2020).

LGBT+ HE student experiences of belonging have not been specifically studied in UK academic literature. A statistical analysis of first-year students at one HEI in New Zealand (n=896 where 113 identified as LGBT+) compared reported feelings of
belonging to motivation and academic performance, and reported on differences between responses from LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ students (Sotardi et al., 2021). The research, which adopted a social cognitive perspective to examine the relationship between sense of belonging, academic self-efficacy and academic performance, identified no differences in attainment but reported LGBT+ students had lower perceptions of peer belonging, social adjustment and subjective wellbeing and suggested that this may be as a result of belongingness for LGBT+ students involving “all elements of their identity, including their sexual orientation, to be valued and respected” (p. 8).

It is clear from previous research that a student’s background can have a bearing on their university experience, both academic and social, and on how they experience the challenges faced. Where these backgrounds intersect, students can experience otherness from multiple angles.

2.3.2.2 The impact of otherness/belonging for trans students

There is very limited academic research about the experiences and impact of feelings of otherness or belonging for trans students in HE as a distinct group. However, parallels can be drawn with some of the experiences of other minority groups as described in the previous section. It is possible that trans students may face barriers to developing social networks or attending clubs and societies if they do not feel welcomed and understood, and/or that a perceived lack of belonging may contribute towards trans students leaving university. It is also possible that a lack of understanding about transition and difficulties with social adjustment could impact on motivation and academic achievement.
Using a minority stress theory framework adapted and applied to gender minorities, research conducted in the USA (Lefevor et al., 2019) looked specifically at the difference in levels of various types of support (social, family, religious and living-situation) between cisgender \((n=2060)\) and trans and gender non-conforming \((n=1030)\) students, and how these types of support might buffer psychological distress. The research highlighted disparities in distress and support between trans and cisgender students, and concluded that trans students may have more difficulty building and accessing support networks due to a lack of societal acknowledgement and understanding of their experience, and that this can result in a reduction in feelings of belonging, a consequence of which is increased mental health difficulties. In contrast, qualitative research by Hill et al. (2020) drawing from 60 interviews with LGBT+ students in college in the USA, used the broaden-and-build theory and the concept of thriving to investigate how LGBT+ students’ experiences of positive emotions help them to thrive. The research suggested that trans students’ “resiliency makes them capable of persisting and thriving at institutions that continue to not be created for them” (Hill et al., 2020, p. 3), and that beyond gender and sexuality, these students find belonging in intersecting identities such as race, ethnicity or disability. Conflicting themes have also been identified in UK research: “University as a space of potential acceptance and empowerment, and university as unwelcoming social spaces” (Storrie and Rohleder, 2018, p. 4); the former included students describing university as a place where they could be themselves and make a new start, but that policies were not consistent in supporting and accepting trans students; the latter included reports of stigma, discrimination and being ‘othered’. It has been suggested that the opportunity for activism within student societies, whereby students can be involved in challenging institutional discrimination and
supporting change, has helped some trans students to feel more included and allowed them to forge relationships with others who understood their issues (Storrie and Rohleder, 2018). This research is particularly valuable as it was exclusively composed of trans participants in the UK and although not specifically focused on belonging, the use of semi-structured interviews enabled the researchers to bring to the interview a set of common themes whilst also enabling the students to participate in a way that would provide additional information. The same research also suggested that trans students are frequently “objectified and othered”, describing examples of students being asked inappropriate questions about being trans, but noted that some trans students also related a need to answer these questions, however inappropriate, as they felt responsible for educating others about trans issues (Storrie and Rohleder, 2018, p. 7). Similarly, research in the USA using grounded theory and an inductive analysis of transcripts from focus groups with seven non-binary trans students (Goldberg and Kuvalanka, 2018), suggested that non-binary participants were often burdened with having to explain gender identity to cisgender peers, educating others about both trans identities and non-binary identities.

2.3.2.3 Section summary

This section has identified experiences of both otherness and belonging, but found that although it is clear that university is an important place for trans students to feel included, there is limited research to identify whether or how this is achieved for trans HE students in the UK.
2.3.3 Representation in the curriculum

This section looks at why representation in the curriculum is important for minority group students, and how/whether trans experiences specifically are represented in the content taught.

2.3.3.1 Why representation in the curriculum is important for minority groups

It can be argued that as the curriculum is a main component of university life, the experiences of all students should be reflected and represented in the subjects they study, and there is a push in HE in the UK to develop more diverse reading lists which are typically dominated by white, male Euro-centric authors (Schucan Bird and Pitman, 2020).

Many universities are currently looking at better inclusion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students in the curriculum after student campaigns such as ‘Why is my curriculum white?’ arguing that teaching should be more representative of the modern world with regards to non-white communities in the UK (Hussain, 2015). This question of representation in the curriculum is an issue across all subjects, but manifests itself in different ways in different subjects. For example, a lack of minority representation for women and BAME students in case studies in the curriculum for business courses can be said to reinforce the existing issues of power and dominance of ‘white male privilege’ in business and discourage entrepreneurship from these students (Chaudhury, 2020). With the growing numbers of women entering university to study STEM subjects, it can be argued that there is a need to adequately reflect these students in what has traditionally been a male-orientated arena (Ertl et al., 2017). Research into reading lists for social science and science HE courses in the UK reported that the reading lists for science subjects had proportionally fewer female authors than social sciences, and that across both
disciplines, the majority of authors were white/non-BAME and from the 'global north' (countries with developed economies such as North America and Europe), and that both were more representative of the academic community than the student body (Schucan Bird and Pitman, 2020). This research was conducted at one HEI in the UK, and similar research by Taylor et al. (2021) investigating reading lists from the School of Life Sciences at another UK HEI, reported similar findings, with a proportionately high number of white, male authors, mostly from the UK and USA.

Working in disability support in HE, I am aware that disabled students are accommodated in education through inclusive teaching – ensuring that these students have equitable access to the curriculum. However, these adjustments, required by law under the *Equality Act* (2010) are about being able to fairly access the course materials and the HE environment, not about disabled students being able to see themselves represented in what they learn. For a disabled student, seeing themselves represented in the curriculum can change how they relate to themselves and is important for identity development (Mueller, 2021) and excluding this representation could also be said to perpetuate discrimination against disabled people (Ohajunwa et al., 2014).

### 2.3.3.2 Trans representation and inclusion in the curriculum

Limited previous literature exists about trans inclusion in the HE curriculum, with most looking at the LGBT+ school curriculum, and mainly from outside the UK. Where HE-specific research was found, this was on LGBT+ students rather than trans students as a distinct group. As discussed in section 2.3.2, LGBT+ students were said to thrive in classes where they could see themselves represented, although representation was often only included in specific modules, such as LGBT+ studies or gender studies, rather than being embedded into the curriculum (Hill *et al.*, 2014).
Despite this, I suggest that parallels can be drawn with the representation of other minority groups as described in the previous section, where issues of power and dominance, privilege and discrimination are equally applicable.

Table 5 below shows the results of the NUS survey (Acciari, 2014) with regards to perceptions of LGBT+ representation in the curriculum as experienced by LGB and by trans students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I see LGB experiences and history reflected in my curriculum</th>
<th>I see trans* experiences and history reflected in my curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGB+</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 On a scale of 1-10, where 1 means strongly disagree and 10 strongly agree, how much do you agree with the following statements? (n=3,421) (Acciari, 2014)

Looking at LGBT+ students as a whole, rather than independently looking at trans representation, the NUS report (Acciari, 2014) acknowledged that some subject disciplines were ‘better’ than others at including LGBT+ representation in the curriculum, noting that humanities subjects received the ‘highest scores’ with STEM subjects receiving the lowest. They suggested that even within humanities subjects, more still could be done to improve representation by diversifying the authors cited and including critical theories such as queer and gender studies into the curriculum.

This study has strengths in the number of trans students included in the sample, as it was the only literature found which specifically included trans experiences about representation in the curriculum. Although not peer-reviewed academic research, it is
also valuable as its sample was from students attending HEIs across the UK, indicating these issues may be widespread across institutions.

Research by Formby (2017), discussed earlier in this chapter, suggested that trans students felt ‘forgotten’ within the content of their learning, or if included this felt ‘tagged on’ or, at times, inaccurate. They reported one participant’s description of an example used in a statistics class where gender was used as a binary statistic, making the assumption that all participants would be either male or female, without consideration that some may identify as non-binary or in another way outside of the male/female binary. This is a good example of the previously mentioned cisnormativity being identified in teaching.

In a survey of trans staff and students on their experiences at a single university in northeast England, Hopkins et al. (2018) reported that some participants felt that transgender issues were rarely discussed in the curriculum, and recommendations in the report included integration of trans identities into the curriculum in all disciplines. Additionally, it is not just in relation to the formal representation of trans people/perspectives in the curriculum, but also about how staff and students react to the subject. For example, where trans identities are discussed, research has suggested that negative comments from peers can make trans students feel uncomfortable, especially where this goes unchallenged by staff (Marzetti, 2018).

Such experiences of problematic or inaccurate trans representation in the curriculum or negativity not being challenged by staff, potentially opens up space for exclusion or harassment, as described in the previous sections.

Research in the USA reported that inclusion in the curriculum helped to create a safer and more supportive climate for LGBT+ students, especially where that
inclusion was perceived as affirming (Snapp, Mcguire, et al., 2015). However, although the article was fairly recent (2015) it was based on a study of the responses from a 2008 Preventing School Harassment survey of 1232 students from 154 American high schools, of which only 28.5% identified as LGBT+, and of these, only three participants identified as transgender. This makes it impossible to draw conclusions related to the current experiences of trans students in HE in the UK.

Pino, (2016) suggests that, based on the results of a 2019 National School Climate survey looking at the experience of LGBT+ school students in the USA (Joseph Kosciw et al., 2020) which included a chapter on the experiences of trans students, learning about the accomplishments of trans people as part of the curriculum provides all students with a more positive image of their trans peers, with the potential to reduce bullying and prepare students for the diverse world they will be entering when they leave education.

2.3.3.3 The importance of trans-inclusion in professional health sciences curricula

The previous sections have discussed how trans representation in curricula is important across the board. However, it is arguably even more important in professional health sciences subjects because, in addition to these general issues of ensuring trans students on the course feel represented, all students need sufficient knowledge around trans identities to enable them to work effectively with trans patients/clients when on placement and in their future careers.

Using a qualitative phenomenological approach driven by anti-oppressive theory (AOT), Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019) looked specifically at the experiences of 12 LGBT+ social work students in the USA. Using a phenomenological approach
enabled researchers to focus on the lived experiences of participants with shared identities, and using AOT, which argues that in order to engage in anti-oppression work organisations need to understand how individuals engaged in the work hold power and how power is used, they were able to explore and understand the experiences of oppression. They found a mixture of marginalisation and harmful discourse, including enforcing cisheteronormativity, and issues with the language being used including misgendering students and clients. The research reported a gap between the values that social work teaches and how social work education is delivered.

Specific education for health science students, particularly those entering professions such as nursing, medicine and social work, is key but lacking according to Click et al. (2020) whose research identified significant gaps in medical education regarding supporting trans patients. The theoretical basis to the study was not disclosed, but the study investigated the attitudes and perceived knowledge of 138 first- and second-year medical students in the USA before and after a half-day educational intervention about transgender medicine and medical standards of care, and reported that this relatively simple intervention increased understanding and improved attitudes, whilst acknowledging that the disparities between trans and non-trans experiences of healthcare in the USA warranted continued and improved education for medical students and qualified healthcare providers.

A paper outlining gapes in health science curricula (De Vries et al., 2020) concluded that current curricula for health professionals in the UK do not provide sufficient teaching about gender-affirming healthcare, and health professional ignorance, as well as systemic biases that reduce access to care, increase the inequalities that trans people face in the medical system.
It is very likely that students studying professional health sciences courses such as medicine, nursing, social work and paramedic science will come into contact with trans patients or clients. Suitable training for students in mental health related courses is also key, as struggles with body image (body dysphoria) can lead to increased risk of mental health difficulties, as trans people may feel self-conscious about how they walk, talk and look during transition, and as trans people are often at higher risk of mental health difficulties due to a number of factors, including having experienced social exclusion, hostility, discrimination and violence, or having kept their identity hidden due to fear or anxiety about how others might react. In elderly care settings, a history of discrimination may mean that aged LGBT+ patients may be less comfortable disclosing their sexuality or gender identity. Using a systematic evaluation of peer-reviewed papers, a study of educational interventions in the USA and Canada was used to fill gaps in the knowledge of health and social care practitioners working in these settings; Jurček et al. (2020) found that whilst most interventions focused on educating health and social care professionals about LGBT+ issues in general, few addressed the specific health and social care needs of trans older adults.

I would suggest that for trans students on these professional courses who have had negative experiences of accessing medical and mental health support themselves, constantly carrying these emotions and anxieties can make concentrating on studies challenging, and when faced by negative representation in the curriculum this can be compounded further.

2.3.3.4 Section summary

In summary, previous trans-specific literature is scarce but research into other minority groups has discussed the importance of representation in the curriculum.
The limited LGBT+ research that was examined has suggested that trans students are not well represented in the HE curriculum, and that even where representation has been attempted, this is too little or even inaccurate at times. In as much as this identifies an issue of non-representation in the curriculum, it also identifies a potential need for better staff awareness of how to support the needs of trans students. This is another apparent gap in UK-based research bridged by my own study.

Issues relating specifically to students completing a professional degree that would lead to employment in a role where practitioners would most likely come across trans clients or patients, or the parents of trans children, such as medical care, social work and mental health care, are something that I did not find in UK academic research and was investigated further in my own research to address this gap.

2.3.4 Institutional facilities and administration

Whereas in the previous sections there were frequently parallels to be drawn between the experiences of trans students and those of other minority groups, the difficulties trans students face with regards to institutional facilities and administration are more distinct. With reference to trans students in HE, the theme of institutional facilities and administration covers areas such as changing names/gender on electronic records, alternative gender options on forms and systems, and the provision of suitable toilet and changing facilities along with the acceptance of trans students being able to use the facility of their choice.

2.3.4.1 Administration

Problems with institutional administration were identified throughout the literature. In a study in the USA investigating institutional policy and procedure on college
campuses, Seelman (2014) conducted secondary data analysis of the US National Transgender Discrimination Survey data set (n=2772) which was collected between September 2008 and March 2009. Using a selection of variables driven by structural social work theory, which suggests that experiences of institutional oppression vary according to identification within marginalised and/or privileged groups, they uncovered improvements that could be introduced to address issues of marginalisation and victimisation of trans students and recommendations were made for improving college campuses, including a need for improved procedures for recording names and gender, and simplified processes for requesting changes including designation of a “preferred name” (p. 627). However, as with the research by Snapp et al. (2015) discussed earlier, although the article was written in 2014 it was based on survey data from 2008/09. Concerns specific to the experiences of trans college students in the USA also identified lack of clarity in how to change names and pronouns on university computer systems, as well as knowing that until a name had been changed legally, their birth name would be used on legal documentation such as degree certificates (Goldberg and Kuvalanka, 2018). Although these studies were conducted in the USA where there are differences in the political, legal and cultural contexts compared to the UK, the findings were relevant to my research as these were also supported by the following UK based studies.

As a result of research involving six trans students studying in different HEIs in the UK, recommendations were made for policies to be consistent across HEIs and that they should include procedures for transitioning students to change their name and pronouns easily, as well as ensuring the inclusion of trans students in discussions when planning changes to facilities and policies (Storrie and Rohleder, 2018).
of a third gender option for non-binary students was a barrier reported in an overview of empirical research conducted by TransEdu Scotland with trans staff and students from HEIs across Scotland, which reported trans students’ fear of being ‘outed’ by ineffective administrative processes, after navigating the challenging administrative and bureaucratic systems to change their name and/or gender on university records (McKendry and Lawrence, 2017). Similarly, in a national online survey of over 4,000 students from 80 HEIs in the UK, trans participants reported difficulties with updating records such as changing their name in the register, and it was suggested this could lead to students being ‘outed’ to tutors or classmates (Acciari, 2014). Using the concept of microclimates in reviewing key quantitative and qualitative findings to explain how trans students encounter various forms of discrimination on campus, Siegel (2019) reported that policy changes to avoid ‘digital misgendering’ through ineffective HEI systems would reduce “acts of unintentional transphobia”, especially where software can be updated to include gender-neutral pronouns/gender markers.

2.3.4.2 Facilities

Exploration of literature pertaining to institutional facilities suggested that gendered spaces were problematic. The failure of HEIs to provide gender-neutral toilets was reported by participants in a study by Allen et al., (2020) of a university in New Zealand, and non-binary students in particular found the lack of gender-neutral toilets on campus challenging (Marzetti, 2018). As described in Chapter 1, trans-hostile debates around the use of women’s toilets by trans women have made it challenging for trans people to use toilets that corresponded with their gender identity in many areas of life, not just in HE, and gendered facilities based on a male/female binary can result in non-binary people experiencing harassment whichever toilet they used (Jones and Slater, 2020). Non-binary people not being
able to use a toilet without having to mis-identify in order to conform is representative of the view reported by Taylor et al. (2018), in a focus group study of service users of a National Health Service (NHS) gender identity clinic in the UK, which reported how non-binary individuals felt expected to fit in with binary perceptions with little understanding or sympathy with their specific needs. Their study used an inductive thematic analysis approach, in order to enable the analysis to be “free from underlying theory” (p. 4). In the HE environment, Acciari (2014) proposed that a lack of gender-neutral toilets and facilities on campus was a major issue which could lead to trans students avoiding using them or feeling unsafe doing so, and research for Stonewall (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018c) reported that one in six trans students reported feeling unable to use the toilet they felt comfortable with at university.

2.3.4.3 Section summary

In conclusion, it is clear that trans students continue to experience difficulties with institutional administration and facilities as a result of institutional cisnormativity. From my own professional experience working in HE, I have come across poor administrative processes and a lack of suitable gender-neutral facilities on campus impacting on the experience of trans students. The TransEdu Scotland research (Mckendry and Lawrence, 2017), suggested that individually small issues, such as binary options on forms, difficulties updating names and a lack of gender-neutral toilets, collectively added to a feeling of ‘otherness’ for trans students and it is with a consideration of reducing/removing this feeling for the trans student group within HEI that I include this theme in my research.
Chapter summary

The literature review investigated a variety of UK and non-UK academic literature and some non-academic UK studies, regarding trans students in HE and, where appropriate, drew parallels with the experiences of other minority groups. Findings from across the review identified four main issues faced by trans students in HE: harassment, bullying and transphobia; inclusion/exclusion; lack of representation in the curriculum; and problems with institutional facilities and administration.

Although some examples were not from peer-reviewed academic literature, the results provided a useful way of identifying key themes as a way forward for more in-depth academic study. Whilst the limitations of such literature have already been addressed in section 2.1, these reports can be seen as useful in their timeliness as the results are from more recent research than can often be found in academic literature due to the delay between research and publication.

2.3.5 How the literature relates to the research questions

This review of previous literature underpinned my research aims, to establish any obstacles that might be encountered by trans students in HE in the UK, and to identify policy and procedure changes for higher education institutions (HEIs) to address areas of concern. The review contributed to the construction of my research questions:

- What are the experiences of trans students in HE in respect of support services, institutional administration, peers, academics and curriculum, social experience and facilities?
• How well are HEIs supporting trans students, including the development and implementation of trans student policy?

2.3.6 Gaps in the literature

The review of the literature presented in this chapter identified a paucity of qualitative research that has sought to investigate the experiences of trans HE students in the UK as a distinct group, rather than as part of research into LGBT+ students or as part of research into trans individuals in wider society. Although a number of researchers have demonstrated inequalities for this student group, there has been no investigation into the specific experiences of trans students in HE in the UK and how these experiences and any potential challenges are being addressed through policy and procedure. In the last five years there has been a growing interest in trans people both in academia and in the wider social context, and my research plays a vital role in increasing understanding and reducing inequality for trans HE students.

With regards to harassment, bullying and transphobia, the literature reviewed lacked clarity regarding alternatives to support change in HEI policy and practice. My research sought to address this gap by investigating both the experiences of trans HE students in the UK in respect of instances and impact of harassment, bullying and transphobia and the reporting systems in place, and the appropriateness of HEI trans student policies to address harassment, bullying and transphobia on campus.

In respect of inclusion/exclusion, previous studies have largely failed to consider the impact of institutional cisnormativity and I investigated this further in my research both in speaking to trans students about their views, and in identifying where current HE policy was lacking. Relating to representation in the curriculum, although there has been some LGBT+ student research, a lack of trans-specific academic research provided a timely opportunity for my study to investigate further. Finally, concerning
in institutional facilities and administration, literature reviewed identified that trans students experience difficulties with institutional administration and facilities, and my research explored the current situation across UK HEIs and how/whether HEI policies are addressing these issues.

Many of the peer-reviewed articles examined did not provide a clear explanation of the theoretical perspective being used. Where this was identified, for example feminist/queer theory (Marzetti, 2018; Acciari, 2014), minority stress theory (Lefevor et al., 2019; Storrie and Rohleder, 2018) and grounded theory (Goldberg and Kuvalanka, 2018), I identified a need for broadening this to account for cisnormative institutional power. Where feminist/queer theory had been used, this was looking at the LGBT+ population rather than specifically at trans student experiences, and was therefore not focused on cisnormative structural power, and although where used by Lefevor et al. (2019) minority stress theory had been adapted and applied to gender research it only looked at the subject of support with regards to psychological distress amongst trans students, and not the wider HE experience. It is through a theoretical lens of cisnormativity, within the framework of critical theory, that my research was undertaken, and will be discussed in the following chapter.

With the number of people identifying trans increasing, and their experiences and ‘existence’ often being “rendered silent” where academic research includes them under the LGBT+ umbrella (Fiani and Han, 2018, p. 1), the primary aim of the current study was to investigate the gaps in research into the specific experiences of trans HE students in the UK in relation to the research questions, explore the experiences of trans students in HE, and identify institutional policy and procedure changes that could address areas of concern.
Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The main purpose of my research is to identify any obstacles encountered by trans students in HE in the UK, to establish what these obstacles may be, and to investigate how/whether HEIs are supporting trans students appropriately through policy and procedure. Previous literature and statistical data showed that there is a need for such research in order to uncover areas of inequality and identify how they may be addressed, and my research aims to show how cisnormativity – that is, how society is orientated around the assumption that a person’s gender matches their biological sex as assigned at birth – may be enforced and reproduced in educational settings, as it is in broader societal settings (Goldberg et al, 2019).

Before commencing the study, I considered the most appropriate methodological stance and methods to explore the research questions. Section 3.2 introduces the theoretical framework, looking at critical theory in education and the transformative paradigm, and justifies the use of surveys, interviews and policy analysis chosen as the approach to my study. Section 3.3 considers my own position in relation to the research.

Section 3.4 discusses the research design and methods for data collection and analysis, including how the research was informed by conducting a pilot study, and section 3.5 highlights the ethical considerations in relation to my study.
3.2 Theoretical framework

My study seeks to address a gap in research into the lived experiences of trans HE students in the UK, exploring how/whether their needs are being met by HEIs and investigating what policies and processes HEIs are implementing to support this student group. ‘Lived experiences’ refers to a person’s human experiences, choices and options, how those factors influence the perception of knowledge, and how experiences are shaped by individual characteristics of identity including, for example, race, class, gender and sexuality (Boylorn, 2008).

This section focuses on the philosophical paradigm informing the study, the theoretical perspectives considered, and the rationale behind the paradigm and the methodological approach for the study.

The questions driving my research are:

- What are the experiences of trans students in HE in respect of support services, institutional administration, peers, academics and curriculum, social experience and facilities?

- How well are HEIs supporting trans students, including the development and implementation of trans student policy?

3.2.1 A transformative paradigm

I first considered using a constructionist/interpretivist paradigm, which suggests that reality is constructed by individuals and groups and needs to be interpreted to discover the underlying meaning of events/activities. Constructionist/interpretivist research tends to consider the participants’ views of the topic being studied whilst also recognising how the researcher’s own background and experiences can impact
on the study (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). However, the transformative paradigm fitted more precisely, with its emphasis on addressing issues of social injustice experienced by marginalised groups.

The transformative paradigm grew out of dissatisfaction with existing dominant research paradigms in the 1980s and 1990s (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006), which had been developed from a “white, able-bodied male perspective” (Mertens, 2005, p. 17). It was considered that although constructivist/interpretive approaches had begun to consider how a researcher with privilege associated with areas such as race, gender or social class for example could conduct research relating to those populations without these privileges in an ethical way (Mertens, 2019), these approaches were still not addressing issues of social justice and marginalised people adequately. The transformative approach was designed to allow research to change the lives of participants, as well as the institutions in which individuals work or live (Creswell, 2003), or in this case study, by directly confronting social oppression (Mertens, 2019).

The following characteristics define the transformative paradigm and distinguish it from constructivist/interpretive approaches:

1. It places central importance on the lives and experiences of marginalised communities, including the way oppression is structured and reproduced, and how lives are constrained by the actions of oppressors.

2. It analyses how and why inequities are reflected in asymmetric power relations.

3. It links social inquiry to political and social action.
4. It uses a transformative theory to develop a program theory and inquiry approach.

(Mertens, 2009; Mertens, 2019)

This fits very well with my study which investigates the experiences of a marginalised group – trans HE students – and the power imbalance of learning within a privileged cisnormative society, and which aims to influence policy change within that environment to reduce inequality.

With no explicit examples of the transformative paradigm being used for research into the experiences of trans students in the previous literature examined in Chapter 2, its use for research into other marginalised groups was investigated to establish whether parallels could be drawn to justify its application to my study. A transformative mixed-methods design was used by Geary (2009) to investigate the experiences of women in HE attending women-only leadership development programs, the findings of which suggested that although women face socio-cultural and structural barriers in HE which reduce advancement in leadership roles, completion of these programs built self-confidence in developing leadership ability enabling them to return to their HEIs with “self-efficacy and agency” (p. 110). Dhunna et al. (2021) employed a transformative approach to challenge dominant ideologies in research investigating intimate partner violence against young Māori mothers in New Zealand, explaining that the approach allowed for the use of Māori modes of engagement and the focusing of Māori voices in the research process. Findings proposed that “racism at the frontlines of government agencies, pervasive victim-blaming, and a lack of earnest decolonial structural change at the institutional level” (p. 6192) required a change to social services to provide culturally safe specialist support to these mothers. Researching disability inclusion in the workplace,
Sampana and De La Cruz (2020) employed a transformative mixed methods approach to gather data from organisations and disabled staff, the results of which found barriers such as lack of awareness from managers and poor inclusivity policies, and suggested financial support, capability building, inclusive policy, and partnership programs as potential solutions.

The above examples show parallels with my study of trans students, another marginalised group, in respect of their experiences of institutional oppression and/or constraint, and how the transformative paradigm is relevant to my research.

Figure 2 below outlines the axiological, ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of the transformative paradigm, and these are expanded upon in the sections to follow, describing how my research meets these assumptions.

![Transformative paradigm diagram]

**Figure 2 - Axiology, ontology, epistemology and methodology of the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2007) (Mertens, 2010) (Phelps, 2021)**

### 3.2.1.1 Axiology

Axiology refers to the ethical issues and principles that need to be considered when planning research (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). This requires consideration about the
basis on which ethical theory and practice is defined, what is regarded as ethical or moral behaviour, how to address issues of ethics when conducting research, and how to address ethical dilemmas that arise (Mertens, 2007). Within the transformative paradigm the axiological assumption is given priority, driving the formulation of the ontology, epistemology and methodology (Mertens, 2010). The principles of transformative axiology are the advancement of human rights, enhancement of social justice, and respect for cultural norms in terms of interaction within and across communities (Mertens, 2007).

Ethical considerations for my study are discussed in section 3.5.

3.2.1.2 Ontology

Ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of existence or reality, and refers to the assumptions made in order to believe that something makes sense or is real, and is crucial for to understand how to make meaning of the data (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). The ontology the transformative paradigm adopts is that reality is socially constructed and shaped, and constantly changing with different realities emerging because of the privileging of some views of reality and the underrepresentation of others (Mertens, 2007). It requires the interrogation of dimensions of diversity that, through unearned privileges, for example race, gender, (dis)ability or socioeconomic status, are used as a basis for discrimination and oppression, and identifying that the bases of social inequities and injustices are contextually dependent (Mertens, 2010).

The transformative ontological assumption fits well with my study, which examines how trans students are discriminated against and oppressed by a socially-constructed and largely privileged cisnormative institutional environment.
The ontology of the transformative paradigm is that realities are socially constructed, with an awareness of different levels of privilege and power associated with the characteristics of participants and researchers (Mertens, 2010). As a researcher, I needed to be aware of societal values and privileges in order to determine the reality that could potentially lead to social transformation and increased social justice. I consider this issue later in this chapter (section 3.3), when discussing researcher positionality. Also, as a cis researcher, it was essential for the trans student to be given a voice, which could indicate what the real issues are, rather than those issues conceived from a cisgender existence. Further examination of the ethical considerations around this are discussed in section 3.5.

3.2.1.3 Epistemology

Epistemology describes what counts as knowledge within the world; “its nature, and forms and how it can be acquired, and how it can be communicated to other human beings” (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017, p. 27). The transformative paradigm assumes knowledge is legitimate if it can be turned into practice that empowers and transforms the lives of the participants. The epistemology of transformative research is that reality and knowledge are socially constructed and influenced by power relations within society which are involved in determining what is considered legitimate knowledge (Mertens, 2019). In the same way as Haraway (1988) describes feminist objectivity as “situated knowledge” (p. 581) – reflecting the particular conditions in which knowledge is produced, and reflecting the social identities and social locations of knowledge producers (Mertens, 2019) – so in my study transformative objectivity reflects the social and historical influences on LGBT+, and in particular trans people, and examines the values and social position of the researcher on the topics and concepts of the research.
3.2.1.4 Methodology

Methodology refers to the research design, methods, approaches and procedures used in research and considers how the data collection methods result in the knowledge and understanding that will answer the research question (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). For transformative methodology, an “interactive link” is required between the researcher and participants, and methods should “accommodate cultural complexity” (Mertens, 2007, p. 216) and explicitly address power issues and issues of discrimination and oppression. Framing methodological decisions to align with the transformative epistemology and ontology requires developing ways of collecting and analysing data that will “capture the reality in an ethical manner and… lead to the enhancement of social justice” (Mertens, 2010, p. 472).

Whereas the positivist paradigm uses mainly quantitative methods, and the constructionist/interpretivist paradigm mostly qualitative, the transformative paradigm might involve quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods; however, what is required is that the researcher consults with key contributors in defining which method(s) to use (Romm, 2015).

Methods used in my study were an online survey, one-to-one interviews and document analyses. Although mixed methods research is a valid method in the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2010), the quantitative data collected from the survey in this study was used to deliver descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics describe what the data shows in a manageable form (Trochim, 2022), rather than this being used to understand patterns exhibited by the data (Babones, 2016). This enabled me to collate evidence in a way that would be valued and understood by the senior HEI managers that this research sought to reach in order to bring about change. Using a survey allowed me to reach as wide a group as possible to obtain
information about the experiences of this marginalised group and investigate the power imbalance of learning within a privileged cisnormative educational environment. The survey also gave me access to participants for the one-to-one interviews in order to achieve a more in-depth exploration of their experiences and perspectives; participants who would have been extremely difficult to reach without the survey.

My study did not use a fully qualitative survey, in which participants would respond to all questions in their own words (Braun et al., 2020); although there were some open questions the bulk of the survey was designed to provide a background to the interviews, a starting place for further debate, and a way of referencing the current experiences of students to the existing literature and to the policies held by HEIs. Such surveys are especially useful when researching an under-explored area and offer a “wide-angle lens” on the subject being investigated (Braun et al., 2020, p. 3). Using the survey allowed me to hear from 164 participants from a large geographical area and from a marginalised group, about their individual experiences, with the aim of gaining rich insights as opposed to achieving statistical representativeness. The data provided me with the ability to make wider presumptions without claiming statistical validity.

Investigating the methods of the academic literature reviewed in Chapter 2, one study that had used a similar approach was Formby (2015). Their research, investigating the limitations of focusing on homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying to understand and address LGBT+ young people’s experiences, used an online survey with a hard copy freepost alternative option, which resulted in 146 responses, followed by individual semi-structured interviews with five participants. Their survey used mainly closed questions, with a small number of open questions,
similar to the method used in my study, with survey data being used to provide an overview of current practice and to inform the interview stage. Snapp et al. (2015) also used an online survey as a method to recruit LGBT+ high school students for a focus group on LGBT+-inclusive curriculum experiences, but did not include an analysis of survey results as part of their study, using just the qualitative analysis of the focus groups.

Online surveys are useful methods as they provide increased access to marginalised communities that are digitally active but less visible and therefore less studied in offline contexts (McInroy, 2016). Latest data (Office for National Statistics, 2021) indicates that 99% of adults aged 16-44 in the UK were recent internet users (in the three months prior to the data collection), and with most students in HE being under the age of 30 (HESA, 2020) this was a suitable method of data collection for my study. The diversity of voices that the survey was able to provide was as important as the more in-depth personal information provided by the seven individual interviews, giving voice to participants who might not be comfortable with face-to-face questions due to the personal nature of the topic. A similar method was used by Harding and Peel (2007), researching the legal recognition of same-sex relationships, who reported positive aspects of using this method including the ability to reach a large number of people, the ability to reach people without geographical boundaries, the quantity and diversity of voices that could be collected, and the speed of data collection. Online surveys are frequently used where a level of anonymity is expected by participants (Braun and Clarke, 2020), and has been included as a key element in method choice in studies that may be sensitive or require privacy, such as that of people living with alopecia (Davey et al., 2019), and a study of bullying prevalence in adolescents (Flowers et al., 2020). Robertson et al.
(2018) examined various methods of surveying LGB participants in the USA and reported that the higher number of participants came as a result of internet-based self-administered surveys, in comparison to interviewer-administered methods such as telephone surveys, suggesting that the former was less intrusive and provided more anonymity. Using an online survey in my study provided an element of anonymity that meant the participants may have been more inclined to disclose information that they may not have done in person (Braun et al., 2020).

The second method in my study was one-to-one interviews. When considering the transformative basis for interviews as a data collection method, I deliberated about the fact that I was a cis person interviewing trans participants, questioning whether this could potentially result in further marginalisation. However, the transformative paradigm, in viewing the researcher and participants as co-constructors of knowledge, giving active voice to the participants (Pollack and Eldridge, 2015), balances the insider-outsider differences. There were also overlaps – I am not trans, but I am a student. I discuss the ethical questions considered in section 3.5.

In order to reflect the transformative framework being employed, at first, I considered an informal conversational style interview; however, although this style allows for interviews to be fully open in that questions emerge from the immediate context (Mcgrath et al., 2018), it would lead to data that would be less systematic, and difficult to organise and analyse, and as the research is focused on questions relevant to policy and practice, systematic methods would produce data that could more effectively justify any recommendations being made (O’Neal, 2012).

Standardised structured interviews were also disregarded as, although having set questions would improve comparability of responses for analysis, this would limit the
flexibility of input from the participants and would not reflect the transformative theoretical framework. Instead, the interviews used a semi-structured interview guide approach, whereby topics and issues were identified in advance in outline form, with the sequence and working of the questions decided in the course of the interview. This method of interviewing had been employed by some of the qualitative research examined as part of the review of previous literature in Chapter 2, for example, Formby (2015) and Ertl et al. (2017). Using this method, the interview remained participant-led so as to reflect the perspective and direction of this marginalised group, whilst also providing data collection that was systematic for each participant.

In discussing researching trans communities in particular, Vincent (2018b) suggested that there is a “moral imperative to pursue research agendas which contribute towards resisting and dismantling inequalities” (p. 107), and making sure that members of the trans community were involved in the production of the survey questions was important in respect of how the transformative paradigm addresses power at each stage of the research process (Mertens, 2007). As such, my study was built on discussion with the Trans Officer from the student union at the HEI where I work, and with a trans staff member where I work, and from feedback from a trans family member who had pre-tested the survey questions for both the pilot study and the main study. This provided input into the research questions and methods, and helped to ensure results were empowering those who the study intended to support, rather than manipulating results to fit pre-conceived ideas of the topics the research should address, which could result in reducing power further.

The third method in my study was to conduct a document analysis of a selection of HEI trans student policies. The transformative paradigm, in relation to my study, sets out not only to identify areas of inequality and oppression and to change the lives of
trans students, but also to identify how this oppression is reproduced by the HEIs in which these individuals study, with an aim to influencing change. Browne et al. (2019) suggested that how policy is described and deployed can result in “individual freedom or social control” (p. 1042). Policy analysis has been used in similar areas of research, for example looking at the implications of trans-affirmative policies in schools in Canada (Martino et al., 2018; Omercajic and Martino, 2020). Analysing a selection of HEI trans student policies allowed me identify areas where my research might facilitate change.

The methods used in my study will be discussed further in section 3.4.

3.2.2 Critical theory

The aim of critical theory is to not only understand situations, but to change them (Fischer and Tepe, 2011). Critical theory was informed by Marxism, which centred on class-based struggle and economic oppression, but was developed by the so-called ‘Frankfurt School’ with emphasis on a concern for alienation and reification and on the role of ideology and commitment to “resist the deformation of the individual” (Bronner, 2017, p. 3). Leading members of the Frankfurt School from the 1920s were Theodore W. Adorno, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, Jürgen Habermas and Max Horkheimer, who agreed that increased education was needed to counteract authoritarian trends. Horkheimer proposed a distinction between traditional theory and critical theory, with the latter seeking to explain, understand, interpret and change society (Mckernan, 2013). This escalated somewhat after the Nazi atrocities in World War II; however, their work did not reach greater appeal until the 1960s when it began to be applied by radical intellectuals to ideas of family, sexuality and education, although until late in the 1980s, critical theory was “still considered eccentric in mainstream academic circles” (Bronner,
With the collapse of the New Left – a political activism movement of the 1960s and 1970s that campaigned for social issues – it became more recognised within academic study and led to the rise of, for example, critical legal studies, critical race theory and critical gender studies.

The methodology of critical theory is “explanatory, normative and practical” exploring not only “what is, but… what could and should be” (Govender, 2020, p. 208).

### 3.2.2.1 Consideration of feminist theory, queer theory and transgender theory

Theoretical perspectives that fall under the transformative paradigm discussed in section 3.2.1 include critical theory, and under the umbrella of critical theory, feminist theory and queer theory (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006), and more recently transgender theory (Nagoshi and Brzuzy, 2010). I investigated these theories to identify whether they met the needs of my research.

Feminist theory challenges male social dominance and addresses issues of sexism and the subordination of women. It has been argued that there is not a “distinctive feminist sociological approach” (Mccann, 2016, p. 225), but that there are various forms of approach, including liberal, Marxist, radical or postmodern, as well as various methodological approaches. Within feminist theory there is also a contested assumption about the category of ‘woman’ (Mccann, 2016) which, as described in section 1.3, has resulted in a small number of radical feminist trans-exclusionary views (Pearce et al., 2020a).

Queer theory developed in the 1990s, influenced by feminist theory. It explores the factors that feed into heteronormativity – the concept that society is orientated around a presumption that heterosexuality is the norm – and analyses heteronormativity as a system of privilege, marginalising those who deviate from it.
Queer theory also challenges gender binaries, but more within social roles than within individual identity (Few-Demo et al., 2016) and it is argued that queer theory does not fully address the implications of a system of enforced gender binaries for those who live outside of this (Schilt and Lagos, 2017).

Transgender theory, which focuses on gender and the gender identity experiences of trans people, emerged from feminist and queer theories. It has been argued that trans and non-binary identities present challenges to both feminist and queer theories, which assume male versus female gender categories (Nagoshi and Brzuzy, 2010), with some areas of feminism struggling to combat “exclusionary assumptions” of womanhood, and queer studies perpetuating “homonormativity”, both of which can potentially exclude trans people (Stryker and Whittle, 2006, p. 7).

Although my research was influenced by aspects of all the above theories, critical theory in education was more relevant to the focus on policy, practice and institutions in addressing issues specific to the experiences of trans students in a largely cisnormative HE environment. I considered that the area of critical theory as it applies in education was more appropriate and will discuss this in the following section.

### 3.2.2.2 Using critical theory in education

Adopting a critical approach in education in relation to my research meant exploring the roles played by HEIs in constructing power and privilege and whether or not these work towards greater equity (Hodges, 2014), and it required a commitment to participate in change when studying the place of trans students in HE.

Critical theory as applied to higher education in the UK was influenced by Fabian Socialist thinking (Mckernan, 2013), which was established in Britain in 1884 and
focused on a wide-ranging critique of social policies. Like critical theory, Fabianism was informed by Marxism and was responsible for the setting up of the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1895 to “study and eradicate social injustices and societal ills” in Britain (Mckernan, 2013, p. 418). After the work of the Fabian Socialists, and the Frankfurt School described earlier in this chapter, new critical theorists such as Paulo Freire founded a critical pedagogy movement around relationships between teaching and learning (Govender, 2020) to enable students to gain a critical self-consciousness and social awareness and to take action against oppression (Mckernan, 2013).

The aim of critical theory in education is both practical and political: to question how the education system can offer the best education to all people by understanding the different perspectives of students who are at a disadvantage as a result of inequality in society, for example as a result of race, colour, lower income, disability, sexuality or, in the case of my study, gender identity; to examine how the education system perpetuates or reduces inequality; and to eradicate the effects of illegitimate power (Cohen et al., 2018).

Critical theory is a powerful framework for understanding disparities as functions of power, domination and exploitation in education, both within the curriculum and within the HE environment. Strunk and Bettles (2019) suggested that by using critical theory in education, systemic and ideological issues are addressed through a focus on “systems, ideologies and institutions rather than on individuals” (p. 77), whereby although the data are collected from individual students, the focus is on the systems in which the students study. In respect of my study, critical theory as it applies in education investigates the challenges of trans students in the largely cisnormative
environment of higher education and examines how these can be addressed by improving the systems and environments in which these students exist.

3.2.2.3 How does critical theory relate to the existing literature?

With no explicit references to critical theory being used for research into the experiences of trans students in the previous literature examined in Chapter 2, I investigated some of the academic research using critical race theory around issues of institutional racism in the HE environment in the UK, to establish whether parallels could be drawn to justify the use of critical theory in education to investigate institutional cisnormativity in my study. Institutional racism was chosen as the comparator as there are many parallels in the experiences of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) students in HE, and the experiences of trans students that form part of my study – such as experiences of harassment, bullying and exclusion and a lack of, or poor, representation in the curriculum as discussed in Chapter 2.

Some research into race and policy making in HE in the UK (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020) was similar to my study as it used critical policy analysis and interviews to argue that, despite the Race Equality Charter (Advance HE, 2020), racism continued to play a key role in the experiences of BAME students, and in HEI policy making, by adhering to white normative practices and systems that reinforce white privilege. Similarly, research by Rollock (2021) drew on critical race theory, examining a qualitative study into the career experiences of black female professors in HE in the UK, investigating themes such as “racial battle fatigue” (p. 212), isolation and disillusion. Although looking at the experiences of staff rather than students, this study revealed similar experiences to those in my study, with regards to isolation and exclusion in an institutional context.
3.2.3 Cisnormativity

Cisnormativity is a social construct in which cisgender identities are assumed and upheld as the norm; "a cultural phenomenon in which people privilege and normalise non-trans experiences which leads to marginalising and oppressing transgender people" (Boe et al., 2020, p 158). Using cisnormativity as a lens through which to examine the “micro level of interpersonal interactions [and] the macro level of institutional structures” which reinforce the marginalisation of trans people (Shelton and Dodd, 2020, p 182), can help to identify how and where cisnormative practice is perpetuated and to recognise ways of challenging and disrupting cisnormativity and moving towards a more trans-inclusive environment. Cisnormativity provides a basis from which to understand the marginalisation of trans people and is a valuable perspective for analysing the data from this study. It provides a focused and relevant lens with which to explore the marginalisation of trans students within HE, for example in areas identified in the literature such as structure (institutional facilities and administration), culture (harassment, bullying and transphobia and inclusion/exclusion) and process (representation in the curriculum).

Cisnormativity can be positioned within critical theory as it acknowledges how identities such as gender binaries are constructed and can govern institutional power, and how within these constructions, some identities are valued more and others are more oppressed. Using cisnormativity as the theoretical lens through which to analyse the data enabled me to investigate how the construction of gender binaries governs what Foucault (1991) terms “disciplinary power” – a mechanism of power that relies on everyday institutions and interactions rather than on force or coercion, and that is “exercised through its invisibility” (Foucault, 1991 p 187). Within HE, educators and administrators are implicated in allowing certain practices to
continue, such as administrative systems that deny a trans student’s identity and reiterate gender as a fixed binary (Frohard-Dourlent, 2016). Foucault’s approach to power focuses on the ‘micro mechanisms’ which operate in everyday life, often unperceived (Crossley, 2012), and in this study of trans students in HE, this relates well to the concept of cisnormativity and how, in the background, it wields power over those outside of cisnormative ideals. For example, gendered toilet facilities uphold the gender binary (Bender-Baird, 2015) and the regulation of bodies by the division of space between “the permitted and the forbidden” (Foucault, 2007 p 46), which sends a negative signal to those outside of the gender binary.

Although the concept of cisnormativity was not found to have been used specifically in studies of trans students in HE, it has been used in analysis of various institutional contexts, such as healthcare (Boe et al., 2020), the workplace (Su Arez et al., 2020), and the immigration system (Collier and Daniel, 2019). Research by Pyne (2011) looked at the experiences of trans people in shelter services. Having found that trans communities were often discussed in social work literature under the LGBT+ banner, Pyne argued that the trans experience should be brought specifically into view, and used cisnormativity as a lens through which to imagine social services that were truly welcoming to trans people. They argued that rather than focusing on discrimination, “the concept of cisnormativity highlights the privileging of a non-trans norm” and that this concept was used to better understand "systemic nuances of marginalisation experienced by trans people as service users and their mistreatment in the shelter system" (p 129). Pyne argued that using a lens of cisnormativity helped to explain how discrimination was possible, as cisnormative processes meant that information on trans communities was not collected or imparted, resulting in "institutional erasure [where] services such as shelters can then be created exclusively in the image of a
cis norm" (p 133). Relating to women's shelters, they argued that trans women were viewed as “anomalies”, non-compliant with cisgender norms, and how this was not solely due to the prejudices of services providers, but because of an unquestioned cisgender norm. They concluded that by using a lens of cisnormativity, they were able to “widen the analytical net to capture systemic nuances of trans marginalisation, capturing not only discrimination but the belief system that empowers it... an opportunity to reconsider access to services for trans people” (p 134).

3.2.3.1 Cisnormativity in education

Oppression in education was described by Kumashiro (2000) as a situation in which certain ways or identities, are privileged in society whilst others are marginalised and othered. Frohard-Dourlent (2016), in a paper examining the experiences of educators working with trans school pupils, identified that teachers operated within institutional systems of power, and argued that gender conformity and heteronormativity were “embedded in the spaces and routines of everyday life at school, including traditions, facilities, administrative processes, classroom habits, curriculum content and everyday interactions” (p 64).

As identified in Chapter 2, cisnormativity in higher education practices is evident in areas such as the curriculum, and institutional facilities and administration. It permeates and is reproduced through the assumption that a person’s gender corresponds to the sex assigned at birth and how students who identify outside of this expectation are stigmatised and invalidated by non-inclusive and binary-specific policies and practices. According to McBride and Neary (2021), cisgender practices in education include, recognising only two valid genders, the use of language that does not affirm and respect a trans person’s self-stated gender, the refusal to
acknowledge the existence of trans people, the reinforcement of narratives of disorder about trans identities, and the construction of transgender identity as being less legitimate than cisgender (McBride and Neary, 2021).

Calafell (2020) described “discourses of contagion and gatekeeping” (p 68) in higher education in relation to cisnormativity and whiteness in academia. Although their article mainly concerned the cisnormative processes and ways of thinking relating to the hiring of academics, it is also relevant to students in HE where, they suggested, ‘white straight cisgender’ students are more likely to achieve, and where challenges experienced and raised by those students outside of this bracket are dismissed or not taken seriously. Written in 2020 at a time of volatility for trans students in HE, as described in section 1.4, Calafell described how “trans students and faculty are in many cases rendered unintelligible by cisgender faculty who refuse to acknowledge their humanity let alone consider them as colleagues or potential advisees” (p 70).

In HE, cisnormative power and privilege can be expressed through assumptions of binary gender, for example providing only binary (male/female) toilet facilities. Bender-Baird (2015) described how such spaces are where power is enacted, an environment that denies the existence of people who are outside of gender binary norms, forcing them to choose a gendered facility to enter. It can also be expressed through the choice of reading material in the curriculum. An inclusive curriculum challenges the production of norms and disrupts practices that reproduce injustices (Snapp et al., 2015).

An understanding of cisnormativity in HE and how this privileges cisgender students and makes it harder for trans students, is integral to bringing about change, but for cisgender allies supporting this cause, understanding the oppression faced by trans
students is not enough – they also need to examine their complicity in cisnormativity and the privilege they have gained from it, such as a cisgender woman not having to worry about being challenged when entering a space marked for women only, and challenge those notions inside themselves. Section 3.3 will look at researcher positionality, including how, as a cis researcher and trans ally, I needed to do this as part of the research process.

3.2.4 Section summary

This section has considered the validity of the transformative paradigm and its methodology, and critical theory in education, with regards to the research questions.

The transformative paradigm demands the dismantling and disruption of the “pervasive injustices that harm communities” and that researchers “continually work to equalize power, balance opportunity structures, and promote justice” (Phelps, 2021). Aligning my research with a transformative paradigm enabled the experiences of trans students to be explored in order to inform practical change to eradicate the effects of oppression. With a lack of academic research into the subject of trans students in HE, using qualitative surveys as well as one-to-one interviews allowed me to first obtain data from as wide a group as possible, followed by a more in-depth exploration of individual experiences and perspectives. This enabled me to collect and analyse the experiences of this marginalised group and investigate the power imbalance of learning within a privileged cisnormative educational environment.

Critical theory reflects the emancipation of individuals and groups and the redressing inequality – “not merely how things were, but how they might and should be” (Bronner, 2017). Critical theoretical approaches typically acknowledge that social identities are ideological constructions (Strunk and Bettles, 2019); in relation to my
study, this would suggest that gender is a category constructed by society that has taken on the meanings of a cisheteronormative society, with its construction reflecting the way in which those in power justify and extend oppression.

The use of a lens of cisnormativity in applying critical theory provides a more focused way of developing and strengthening the theoretical framing and analysis.

3.3 Researcher background, beliefs and biases

Critical theory recognises the subjectivity of the researcher as a key component in shaping the study. As a cis person researching the experiences of trans students, it was important to consider the insider/outsider dichotomy – that is, whether or not a researcher should be part of the population being investigated when this is a marginalised community – and to clarify my own personal motivation for the research. An insider researcher studying a group or culture that they belong to can bring an understanding of, engagement with and a commitment to the population that an outsider may not have (Breen, 2007); however, for the insider researcher, familiarity can result in the possibility of making assumptions based on their own prior knowledge or experience of the subject (Levy, 2013), with much information in interviews going unsaid and meaning communicated by “shared understanding of vague comments, innuendoes, and incomplete sentences and descriptions” (Breen, 2007, p. 164).

Despite the traditional consideration that research with disenfranchised or marginalised groups is often completed by outsider researchers, there is in fact some contention over the insider/outsider dichotomy in that through self-reflection, a researcher may find themselves positioned as both insider and outsider. Levy argued that as a cisgender heterosexual woman researching LGBTQ populations,
the description of outsider researcher overlooked the similarities that she may have had with the participants and “discounts the diversity within these populations” (Levy, 2013, p. 202). This section examines my own positionality with regards to the research population and how this was considered with regards to design of the research and analysis of the data.

3.3.1 Researcher positionality

I bring several aspects of my identity to my research:

- My job: I work within Student Services at a UK HEI where I am also co-chair of the Staff LGBT+ Network.

- My study life: I have been studying at degree-level almost constantly since 1994.

- My family: I have a trans son, in university himself at the start of my study.

- My privilege: I am white, female, cisgender, straight.

- My motivation: I am an LGBT+ ally, and as such I seek to challenge injustice and take action to support LGBT+ populations.

Breen (2007) argued that the insider/outsider dichotomy is simplistic and that the role of the researcher should be seen as on a continuum. They described how their involvement with supporting someone through bereavement for a family member who had died in a car crash was the motivation to choose to research grief experiences in the aftermath of crashes, and that their personal knowledge of the grief process in this situation, although not having been bereaved themselves, placed them in the middle of this continuum. In a similar way, having a trans son and
having personal knowledge of the difficulties he experienced at university, I consider that this places me in the middle, rather than as an outsider researcher.

Working from a critical theory perspective, subjectivity is important and my own positionality needed to be considered as having an influence on the data which are seen as constructed, rather than being a researcher observing natural occurrences as would occur with a more positivist approach. It is therefore not possible to eliminate bias and seek an objective truth, minimising my own effect on the data. Having designed the study, I am not a ‘disinterested observer’ – the subject is important to me and so is trying to make a positive change for this student group. However, it was important that I considered my own position as a cisgender researcher and identified any potential problems that this might have generated.

Thurairajah (2019) suggested that the nature of the relationship between a qualitative researcher and their participants can affect the outcome of the research, and, as such, researchers need to identify the boundaries (social locations and positionalities) between themselves and participants, and the level to which these boundaries can be exposed or maintained in order to build trust and not compromise the “truth” of the participant’s story.

My own position in my place of employment was not disclosed to the participants. On the Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent form for both the survey and interviews, I was introduced as a Doctoral Researcher studying at the Open University. This placed me as a student rather than someone with a potential position of power. Therefore, participants would not know my job and it is unlikely even that any students from my own HEI taking the survey would have been aware of my ‘insider’ position unless they were based on the same (smaller) campus, recognised my name having had prior contact with me, and made the assumption
that I, as the researcher, was the same person who was at their HEI. No students from my own HEI came forward for interview.

To help them feel more in charge of the process, interview participants were able to choose the day and time for the interview, which was then held by Skype in a confidential environment where there would be no interruptions. Where these were held during the working day, a neutral room was used so as not to identify my own working environment. The use of open-ended interviews also reduced the power conflict as, although steered by me, the participants were able to choose what they spoke about. Participants were allowed time to answer and silences were welcomed as ‘thinking time’ rather than talked over in order to elucidate responses.

Another potential power conflict to consider was my position as a cisgender researcher. I chose not to disclose this to the participants and at the start of the interviews, I only confirmed my name and the pronouns that I used. I considered this to be important so that the focus would be solely on the participant; however, I was also worried about how the participant would feel if they discovered I had been “hiding behind a cloak” (Thurairajah, 2019, p. 138) and the potential power conflict this might cause, particularly as I would be asking participants to share personal information and to be ‘uncloaked’ in their responses. If asked, I would have been transparent and explained my intentions/motives as a cisgender researcher and considered how that may have influenced that participant’s responses. This did in fact happen at a conference where I presented the findings of my pilot study, when a trans audience member asked me to clarify this. However, no interview participants questioned my position during the research. Whether participants assumed I was cisgender because of cisnormative assumptions, or because a trans researcher may
have declared this in order to build trust, or whether they assumed I was trans because of the subject matter, remains unknown.

As a cisgender researcher writing about trans students, there were certain factors that had to be considered, the main one being to ensure that my research ideas did not originate from my own personal experience or from any preconceptions brought about by my own gender identity. Researching transgender issues involves studying an experience that is “positioned as nonnormative and consequentially conceptualised relative to the celebrated (cisgender) norm” (Galupo, 2017, p. 241). I considered how my identity as a cisgender woman might impact upon how I might phrase questions in the survey or interviews and tried to address this by ensuring that trans students were involved in making sure that my research questions addressed their immediate needs, and were not based on my supposition of what their needs may be. The following visual is an excellent example of what I was trying to avoid:

Figure 3 What people think trans issues are versus what trans issues actually are (Kyriacou, 2021)
How my research – as a cisgender researcher of transgender issues – is regarded by others in the field could also be an issue; for example, whether my research is regarded as relatively unbiased and objective where insider research might be considered to have an ‘agenda’ (Henrickson et al., 2020), or whether it is regarded as being out of touch and insensitive (Galupo, 2017). I have tried to address this by adopting the recommendations of other academics around the issues of outsider research (Breen, 2007), (Humphrey, 2012) and (Thurairajah, 2019), and in particular being an outsider with regards to LGBT+ research (Henrickson et al., 2020) and (Levy, 2013), and more specifically transgender research (Galupo, 2017) and (Vincent, 2018b), as discussed above.

As noted in section 3.2, I approached my research using the transformative paradigm, the ontology of which is that realities are socially constructed, with different realities emerging because of different levels of privilege associated with the characteristics of participants and researchers. As a researcher, I needed to be aware of such privileges including my own cisgender privilege and how that may have affected my approach to the study and how my identity may have shaped how I interpreted and framed the results. I was attentive to my own assumptions about gender throughout the research and ensured that I distinguished my views from the views of the participants, remembering that the aim of the research was to collect participants’ realities and experiences.

This section has addressed researcher positionality in respect of the insider/outsider dichotomy and looked at the potential positive and negative impacts this could have on research design and data analysis. The following section will describe the research design and methods used for data collection and analysis.
3.4 Research design, data collection and analysis

As described in section 3.2, an online survey was used to gather information about trans students’ specific experiences in HE, based on the themes that emerged from the literature review, and one-to-one interviews were then undertaken to achieve a deeper understanding of these experiences. A selection of HEI trans policies were then analysed to identify how/whether they were meeting the needs of the students, and where improvements could be made.

In the sections that follow, section 3.4.1 gives a brief overview of the pilot study conducted and how this helped to inform and improve the main study. Section 3.4.2 explains the processes used to collect data, why these processes were chosen, the kind of data collected, and how the data were analysed. It describes the processes used to select participants, analyse interview transcripts and survey responses, and the process for analysing a selection of documentary evidence from relevant HEI policies.

I considered that using a mixture of surveys, interviews and policy analysis provided a better understanding of the research questions than any one approach on its own, addressing both the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ nature of the research questions:

- What are the experiences of trans students in HE in respect of support services, institutional administration, peers, academics and curriculum, social experience and facilities?
- How well are HEIs supporting trans students, including the development and implementation of trans student policy?
The aim was not to generalise findings to all trans HE students, but to explore and explain the range of diverse and different perspectives and experiences of trans students using in-depth data gathered from different methods, from a range of respondent groups, in order to inform policy and practice.

3.4.1 Pilot study

A pilot study enabling me to trial methods was undertaken prior to commencing the full research study. The targeted population for the pilot study was trans students at a single HEI. An online survey link was circulated through the student union, LGBT+ student societies, a peer support group for trans students, the Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Officer, LGBT+ Staff Network and the University’s Corporate Communications department. At the end of the survey, there was a link that participants could click on if they wished to take part in the one-to-one interviews.

The questions were constructed in order to provide data relating to the four main themes identified in the literature review: institutional facilities and administration; harassment, bullying and transphobia; inclusion/exclusion; and representation in the curriculum. Demographic questions included what their academic course of study was, how they described their gender identity and what pronouns they used.

I had decided on what to ask in the survey based on previous research and after discussion with the Trans Officer from the student union at the HEI where I work. My intention was to design a survey that offered participants the opportunity to report on both positive and negative aspects related to the four main themes that I had identified.

Nine participants responded to the survey; one declined to take part and the other eight fully completed the survey. Given the small number of trans students expected
within an HEI, eight completed surveys was considered to be a satisfactory response rate.

The rationale for choosing informal guided interviews as a technique, as discussed in section 3.2, was to further explore the participants’ lived experiences by allowing them to discuss their experiences in greater detail, outside of the defined questions of the survey. Unfortunately, although I had received more survey responses that anticipated, I had predicted at least one participant would come forward for interview, but this did not happen. This caused me to reconsider my research design, methodology and methods as well as my participant recruitment avenues.

After analysing the data, and on receiving feedback from a trans family member who had tested the survey questions, I considered that the survey was somewhat limiting and that further questions were required to provide a better underpinning base from which to explore the experiences of participants more fully. I modified some of the questions in the existing pilot study survey and asked the trans family member and a trans staff member from the HEI where I worked to review these before proceeding to the main study. For example, the question that asks, “Have you experienced or been aware of transphobic violence, bullying or harassment on campus?” was split in order to consider the difference between experiencing this directly, and being aware of it happening, and also to distinguish between physical violence, bullying and other forms of harassment, and a question was added about micro-aggression issues such as misgendering, which might or might not be deliberate harassment but can have a big impact. Furthermore, the question that asks, “Does the student union have a dedicated Trans Officer?” was taken further to identify whether/how this is, or is not, of benefit. Some open questions were added to gain a little more insight into participants’ feelings about the various aspects relating to the four main themes that I
had identified from the literature review. However, it was acknowledged that too many open questions may result in a reduction in participants if this made the survey too long or involved too much typing rather than multiple-choice answers, and care was taken to avoid this. Further details of how the survey questions were chosen and why a survey was used, are covered in section 3.4.2. The option of taking part in a one-to-one interview was still made available as, even if participant numbers were low, I considered that the depth of qualitative information this would provide would be worthwhile for the purpose of analysis.

The pilot study survey results corresponded with the themes that were identified through the initial literature review, but this is because, having identified these themes, these were used to construct the questions that were asked. Interviews may have identified additional themes but as no interviews took place in the pilot, I communicated again with the Trans Officer at the university where I work to identify other areas relevant to the experience of trans students in HE that should be included.

The lack of participants coming forward for interviews in the pilot study highlighted a potential problem with relying on the survey as a recruitment method. People may be willing to take part in an anonymous survey, which does not require a great deal or time or commitment, but may not be willing to volunteer for an interview (Robertson et al., 2018), (Braun et al., 2020). I looked at alternative recruitment avenues, and through existing contacts had spoken to three students who volunteered to take part in interviews for the main study. In addition, through contacts in social media such as the LGBT+ Network of Networks, Queer Britain and LGBT History month, as well as staff contacts active within LGBT+ Networks in HEIs across the country that I had met at conferences over the previous few months, I believed that I would be able to
improve student interview recruitment, and that once I had some students to interview, I might also be able to use a snowball approach to sampling, in which existing participants might refer others to take part.

3.4.2 Methods

This section discusses population sampling for the main study and looks at changes to the overall research design made after the pilot study.

3.4.2.1 Population and participants

Relating to my first research question around the experiences of trans students in HE, I surveyed and interviewed trans students from HEIs across the UK as the most appropriate source of data for my study.

For the survey, the development of which is discussed in the next section, I made contact with 163 HEIs. In the initial contact (26.11. 2019) 748 emails about the survey were sent to the following recipients (where these email addresses were available via the HEI websites): LGBT+ Student Societies, student union representatives (e.g. Welfare Officers, LGBT+ and/or Trans Officers, Union President), Staff LGBT+ Networks, Student Services and Equality & Diversity departments. Emails were also sent to the LGBT Network of Networks in Higher Education and the National Association of Disability Practitioners, both of which shared the link with their members. Twelve emails were also sent to contacts made at conferences. In addition, the survey link was shared via Twitter. From this initial round of contact, 142 survey responses were collected and six expressions of interest for the one-to-one interviews. On 29.01.2020, I re-Tweeted the survey link with a call for interview participants. From this, another 15 survey responses were collected and one more expression of interest in the one-to-one interviews. On
09.02.2020, 172 emails were sent to the following recipients (where these email addresses were available via the HEI websites): LGBT+ Student Societies, student union representatives (e.g. Welfare Officers, LGBT+ and/or Trans Officers, Union President), about the one-to-one interviews and with a reminder that the survey was still open to the end of February 2020. From this, another nine survey responses were collected and two more expressions of interest in the one-to-one interviews. The content of the above contact methods is included in Appendix A.

It was hoped that snowball sampling would also benefit, but no participants came forward based on the recommendation of initial participants sampled.

### 3.4.2.2 Online Survey

As discussed in section 3.2.1.4, the online survey method was chosen due to the sensitive nature of the research topic and to allow the target participants to take part anonymously (Braun et al., 2020). A survey allowed for the gathering of demographics and descriptive data as well as some space for personal input through open questions. It also enabled me to reach a wider range of participants than in-person methods, especially considering that the target population is a relatively small group scattered across different locations, as well as being a marginalised group (McInroy, 2016). Online surveys in particular were identified as the best method to ensure anonymity, confidentiality and privacy, as other survey methods would require access to a known participant group in order to distribute the surveys, whereas online surveys provided the ability to share the survey link widely, for example using web pages, forums, emails to groups and societies, and social media to attract the target participants. Additional benefits to an online survey included financial savings, easier access to large populations, and fewer time limitations (Ward et al., 2012).
Disadvantages and limitations to using online surveys were also considered. Given the sensitivity of the topic, I considered that participants may have been more likely from those target students who were ‘out’ rather than those who were not; there may also have been some degree of bias in the sample, with those more interested in the political agenda or those who have experienced more serious incidents of discrimination more likely to participate. However, no evidence was found to substantiate this, and as critical theory involves owning a clear bias towards the point of view of the marginalised or oppressed group, this method does match well with the theoretical framework. In addition, given the anonymous nature of the survey, it is possible that participants could complete the survey more than once. Another limitation of an online survey in particular could be that those from a higher socioeconomic status may be more likely to participate due to ease of computer and internet access (McInroy, 2016), (Ward et al., 2012), as those relying on HEI computers may not feel comfortable completing the survey in shared study areas on campus (McInroy, 2016). A UCAS report produced in collaboration with Stonewall (UCAS, 2021) suggested that 18% of trans students were from disadvantaged areas, in comparison to 13% of non-LGBT students.

The questions used in the survey, a copy of which can be found in Appendix B, were based on evidence from previous research as discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, and from my own professional and personal experience. I found that the peer-reviewed academic articles I had reviewed where surveys had been used did not include the survey questions; however, research that did help me to establish the type and wording of survey questions included: a pilot study of the experiences of LGBT+ students in a single HEI in Australia (Dau and Strauss, 2016) and the NUS Survey referred to in Chapter 2 (Acciari, 2014), and an article on online survey
methods when researching marginalised participants (McInroy, 2016). The wording for the demographic questions on my survey was informed by the terminology used in other relevant surveys, including a survey I received as a student myself from the National Union of Students (NUS), and demographic questions from the Youth Chances Survey (METRO, 2014) and discussion with the author of this report. All survey questions were then discussed with the Trans Student Rep at the university where I work, and with a trans colleague, to ensure the questions were relevant and appropriate.

The survey began with questions to ascertain the gender identity and pronouns of participants. Questions were then designed around the emerging themes that had been identified through the literature review discussed in Chapter 2, covering institutional facilities and administration (including changes to university records, trans-inclusive facilities, transgender policy and staff/student knowledge of trans issues); harassment, bullying and transphobia (including being aware of/experiencing and reporting); inclusion/exclusion (including LGBT+ societies and representation in student non-academic life); and representation in the curriculum (including whether participants felt represented and how, and whether this is/is not important). The survey offered participants the opportunity to report on both positive and negative aspects related to the four main themes identified. The survey finished with further demographic questions to enable interpretation of the data according to academic course of study, as well as in reference to intersectionality with other protected characteristics.

Using a survey allowed me to collect data that would help to identify patterns in how trans HE students felt about issues relating to the four main themes that I had identified in the literature review. Because the target population, as a marginalised
group, was difficult to reach, and because anonymity and non-traceability of responses was required, an online survey enabled me to reach participants more easily, as a link to the survey could be shared through social media and web pages by HEIs and student unions.

The link to the survey was shared with trans students through emails sent to 163 HEIs across the UK, as detailed in the previous section. At the end of the survey, there was a link that participants could click on if they wished to register interest in the one-to-one interviews.

### 3.4.2.3 Interviews

The rationale for choosing informal guided interviews as a technique was to explore the participants’ lived experiences by allowing them to discuss their experiences in greater detail, outside of the defined questions of the survey. Interviews allow an insight into human experience beyond “who, what, when and where” (Guest *et al.*, 2017, p. 5) and enabled me to build on the data from the surveys, and allowed participants to be relaxed in a familiar environment of their choice (Irani, 2019).

Semi-structured informal guided interviews, as described in section 3.2.1.4, with seven participants were held remotely using the Skype video-calling computer application. Face-to-face in-person interviews were not a feasible option in this study due to the geographical location of the participants (Irani, 2019), as with unfunded research I was unable to travel across the country. As it turned out, had I chosen to do face-to-face in-person interviews, these would have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown that began towards the end of my data collection period.

Using Skype enabled me to be more inclusive of participants across the UK, giving interested participants the opportunity to take part, regardless of geographical
distance. Although video interviews are comparable to in-person interviews (Krouwel *et al.*, 2019) there are limitations such as the requirement for reliable technology, and during some of the interviews in my study there were issues with poor internet connectivity which interrupted the flow of the conversation. Other limitations, such as the need for a computer with a reliable camera and microphone, as well as a confidential area in which to speak, may have resulted in fewer participants coming forward (Saarijärvi and Bratt, 2021). However, despite the limitations I did consider this to be a preferable option to telephone, online chat or email interviews, which would not have given me the ability to see facial expressions and, to a certain extent, body language during the interview (Irani, 2019), and for participants to see me in a one-to-one ‘virtual’ environment.

Allowing participants a degree of anonymity through the use of online interview methods can result in less inhibited responses when discussing sensitive topics, and this method has been used in LGBT+ research (Jowett *et al.*, 2011). Participants in my study were advised that they could disconnect at any time if they decided they did not wish to continue with the interview, something that would be very difficult in an in-person environment.

The list of topics and prompts referred to during the interviews is provided in Appendix C. The calls lasted on average 23 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the participants’ permission and then transcribed electronically in the first instance, using *Otter.ai* transcription software. The interview recordings were then replayed, and the transcriptions edited manually for accuracy, and to remove the names of participants, and any mention of the HEI they were attending or the area of the country where they were studying, to ensure there was nothing in the transcript which could identify the participant.
I used a list of topics and prompts rather than questions in order to allow for participants to lead the discussion and talk about what was significant to them, whilst still being able to direct the flow of the conversation towards answering the research questions, and minimise the risk of the discussion diverting towards interesting topics that were not related to policy/practice. It was also important to ensure consistency across the interviews in order for the data to be analysable, so the list of topics would ensure that key information had been gathered, leaving the conversation open for respondents to raise important but unanticipated issues, but also being able to explore the concepts relevant to the research question.

I transcribed the interviews within two of days of recording them, to help to identify where the data was taking a particular route, or if there was something coming up that I had not considered, allowing me to reflect on how this was co-constructing data with the participants. Transcriptions were sent to participants, and this helped to ensure that it was their voice being represented, and that any interpretation of what they had said was correct.

3.4.2.4 HEI Policies

The second research question, ‘How well are HEIs supporting trans students, including the development and implementation of trans student policy?’, was partly explored using the participant responses to the survey questions and interview analysis, which identified where participants felt their HEIs had, or had not, met their needs. However, to examine this question in more detail, the study also included document analysis of a selection of HEI trans policies to provide supplementary research data. No such similar analysis appears to have been undertaken previously, so there is a gap in academic research into this subject.
By looking at the HEI policies in this way, I was able to identify corroboration between the feelings of students with regards to how well they felt supported, and the policies outlining what support the HEIs should be providing. Document analysis involves examination and interpretation (Bowen, 2009), and through thematic analysis I organised information from the policies into categories related to the central questions of my research – identifying pertinent information and separating it from that which was not relevant. Similar methods have been used to examine policy in other institutional areas such as the NHS (Hawkes et al., 2019) and Government policies (Ritchie, 2014) in the UK.

I looked at HEI transgender policies and procedures selected from some of the HEIs from which survey responses had been gathered. To decide which policies to investigate, responses from the survey were sorted according to declared HEI, and then compared to which HEIs I had identified as having trans policies/guidance available to the public online (as of February 2020). It was important to locate the policies at this time, so that they were representative of the policies available at the time of the interviews taking place. The online search terms used at the HEI websites were: trans student policy / transgender policy / transgender student policy. If not found using the search function, then the Equality & Diversity page was checked, and a general search made in the HEI policies. This method was used, rather than contacting HEIs for policies, in order to replicate the accessibility and visibility of the policies to current and prospective students, as I deemed this representative of the maximum amount of searching that would be likely from a prospective or current student looking for this information, and regarded it as important to consider the accessibility and visibility as well as the content of the policies.
Of the 169 HEI websites searched, 96 had no trans policy/guidance that I could find available to the public online. Policies were then chosen to give a representative geographical spread in relation to the location of survey participant HEIs, with one from Scotland, one from Northern Ireland, one from Wales, and five from HEIs spread across England, rather than in relation to the interview participants who were attending universities in England only. Policies specific to trans students and/or trans students and staff were located, in preference to more broad equality, diversity and inclusivity (EDI) policies that may have included information on trans student support. Broader EDI policies were excluded because, although they may have included policy and procedure information relating to trans students, this would not necessarily have been clear to students looking specifically for this information, and as noted above, it was important to try to replicate a search for policies that would have been undertaken by students – a search method which was informed by personal experience of my son trying to find this information when choosing which HEIs to apply to. Of these, seven were policies for trans students and staff, and one was a policy specifically for trans students. The HEIs also varied in the ‘type’ of institution with two ‘Russell Group’ universities, two ‘Red Brick’, two ‘Plate Glass’ and two ‘Post-92’. Russell Group represents 24 leading research-intensive UK universities with histories between 50 years to 1,000 years (The Russell Group of Universities, no date). Red Brick originally referred to six Civic universities given royal charters in the late 19th Century, before extending to include universities given charters between 1900 and 1963; Plate Glass universities were given royal charters between 1963 and 1992 (UK Universities, 2020), and Post-92 includes former polytechnics given university status through the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and institutions granted university status since 1992 without royal charter,
which are often less research-intensive and offer more vocational courses (Armstrong, 2008). These policies were downloaded and saved so that, when analysed, it could be certain that these were the policies available at the time the participants completed the survey, although it is possible that these may have been updated by the time of writing. The policies were downloaded and saved without viewing them first, so as to ensure a random selection rather than one potentially biased based on how well they were or were not appearing to support students.

### 3.4.3 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis allows for the identification, analysis and interpretation of themes within qualitative data and was used in my study due to its flexibility in terms of research question, varying sample size and different methods of data collection (Clarke and Braun, 2017), enabling this to be used across data gathered from survey responses, interview transcripts and documentary evidence. Thematic analysis fits well with the critical framework being applied to my research, as it allows the interrogation of patterns within the social meaning of the topic and the questioning of implications of the findings.

Braun and Clarke (2006) described two approaches to thematic analysis, and these were considered in respect of my study. Inductive analysis was described as a ‘bottom up’ data-driven process through which themes are identified from the data, not driven by pre-existing knowledge, and achieved through a coding process that does not try to fit into a pre-existing coding frame. Deductive analysis is a ‘top down’ theory-driven process through which themes are identified and coded in order to answer a specific research question. A mixture of inductive and deductive methods was considered more appropriate to my study. The research questions and themes used in the survey and interview questions had been derived from previous research.
on the topic, and aimed to extract specific information from participants in order to address the research questions. However, the transformative approach requires that the voice of the participants is heard, and therefore it was important to also be able to identify any additional themes arising. Although thematic analysis is widely used in healthcare and psychology, it is also applicable to education research, which Xu and Zammit (2020) used to analyse research journals and interviews to examine the learning experiences and identities of students in a ‘Chinese as a Foreign Language’ classroom.

The six stages of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) were applied:

Familiarisation with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; producing the report.

As the survey was ongoing whilst the first interviews were being conducted, the interviews were analysed first. This enabled me to identify any topics outside of the expected themes that I could then look for when analysing the survey responses. The policies were analysed last so that areas of concern identified in interview and survey responses could be examined.

3.4.3.1 Interviews

Transcribing the interviews allowed me to become familiar with the data set. The transcriptions were read several times before being uploaded into NVivo 12 computer software in order to organise the responses and identify patterns within the data that would allow for a detailed examination of the interchanges that took place during the interviews. Each interview was coded using line-by-line coding. As noted previously, a mixture of inductive and deductive methods was used, and as such, the line-by-line coding was not entirely inductive, having already identified the main
themes prior to conducting the study, but this technique, involving reading through each transcript and adding an initial code to each line of text to describe the data, forced a focus on paying attention to what the participants were saying (Gibbs, 2007).

The line-by-line coding resulted in an initial 96 codes. Examples of coding are included as Appendix D and code list as Appendix E. Returning to the data repeatedly and revisiting these codes resulted in identifying 14 emerging categories from similarities in the open codes. These were grouped into the themes being investigated, which were identified from the literature review: institutional facilities and administration; harassment, bullying and transphobia; inclusion/exclusion; and representation in the curriculum. I also used a mind map to visually represent the links between the codes and themes, as shown in Figure 4 below.

![Figure 4 Coding the interview responses](image)

### 3.4.3.2 Online survey

The survey data were collected through Jisc Online Surveys, with participants alerted to the survey using the methods as described in section 3.4.2. The survey
opened for responses on 23rd November 2019 and closed at midnight on 29th February 2020.

Free text responses from the survey were uploaded to NVivo 12 software to enable me to organise the research. Line-by-line coding was applied, in the same way as described above when coding the interview transcripts. This resulted in an initial 32 codes. These were grouped into the same emerging categories identified when coding the interviews, and these were then grouped into the themes being investigated by my study as shown in Figure 5 below. The code list is included as Appendix E).

Figure 5 Coding the survey free text

A total of 166 participants completed the online survey. One transphobic response was excluded from analysis. One response was excluded from analysis as no questions had been answered. Of the remaining 164, 154 participants reported their gender identity was not aligned with the sex assigned at birth. It was considered whether to exclude the participants who reported their gender identity was aligned with the sex assigned at birth, as potentially not trans students, but on checking the data for these participants, one had reported having been outed as trans without consent. In addition, the statement at the start of the survey stated: “The researcher
uses the term trans as an inclusive term which incorporates a diverse range of gender experiences outside of majority social and cultural expectations, and encompasses transsexual and transgender people, genderqueer, gender fluid and non-binary people, and others who challenge gender norms.” Participants may also be ‘questioning’, and one participant stated that they were “unsure – not cis but due to dissociation and C-PTSD unsure if non-binary or transsexual.” Participants could also have selected the response in error. It was therefore considered that these responses should be treated as valid.

The closed question responses from the survey provided descriptive data to determine the number and type of institutions the participants attended, the gender identity and pronouns of participants, and demographic information, as well as providing a background when asking participants views on various subjects related to the open questions – for example, closed questions asked whether participants had requested a change of name to their university record, and if so, whether they felt this had filtered down to relevant academics, which were then followed by an open question about how easy participants found this process; similarly, closed questions about the level of support provided by LGBT+ student societies and whether there was a dedicated trans officer in the student union preceded open questions about the usefulness of having a dedicated trans officer. These closed questions were analysed using the Jisc Online Surveys analysis tools, which allowed me to translate this into visual information by way of tables and charts.

3.4.3.3 HEI policies

A selection of HEI trans policies were reviewed and evaluated. Eight policies were uploaded to NVivo 12. Thematic analysis was used to make an in-depth study of these policies with regards to support for trans students, to identify how/whether the
policies meet the needs of this student group. This time a more deductive method of coding was used, beginning with pre-determined categories to form the basis of the codes. The code list is included in Appendix E. This is a more appropriate method for document analysis because documents are developed for a specific purpose, but may also include a great deal of data not related to the research topic (Gross, 2018). Data were grouped into themes against which they would be analysed relating to the revised guidance to HEIs from the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) (Pugh, 2010) – an agency that works to promote equality and diversity for staff and students in HEIs across the UK – regarding trans staff and students, which sets out to help HEIs meet their legal responsibilities, ensure policies and procedures meet the needs of trans people, and provide support to trans staff and students; and relating to relevant recommendations made to HEIs by Stonewall (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018c), NUS (Acciari, 2014) and TransEdu Scotland (Mckendry and Lawrence, 2017. The categories are summarised in Figure 6:

Figure 6 Policy information related to the main recommendations made in reports from ECU, Stonewall, NUS and TransEdu

The analysis also looked at how closely HEIs had followed the policy statement template on trans equality provided in the ECU guidance (see Appendix F.)
3.5 Ethical considerations

Axiology refers to the ethical issues that need to be considered when planning research (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017), and, as discussed in section 3.2.1, the axiology of the transformative paradigm is the advancement of human rights, enhancement of social justice, and respect for cultural norms in terms of interaction within and across communities (Mertens, 2007). As such, ethical considerations formed a major part of and were important to my study, given the marginalised population and potentially sensitive topics.

As my research involved the collection of information from students, I applied to the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and Open University Student Research Project Panel for authorisation, in compliance with the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011), which involved complying with an explicit protocol defining how consent to participate was sought, gained and recorded, how data were collected, stored and accessed, and how participants were informed of their rights (Open University, 2014). Requirements were met and permission to commence data collection was granted. HREC approval is included as Appendix G.

The trans population has been subject to ethically and methodologically flawed research practices in the past (Vincent, 2018b) and it was important for me, as a researcher, to be able to answer the question of ‘why is this study being done’ and ensure that my answers to this not only met prescribed ethical guidelines, but would also reassure participants. I sought familiarisation with the ethical considerations discussed in existing academic literature reviewed in Chapter 2, relating to trans research in the UK, but found this to be sparse with no more than a mention of
having HEI ethics committee approval (Formby, 2015; Formby, 2017); (Storrie and Rohleder, 2018).

### 3.5.1 Confidentiality and anonymity

To protect participants' interests, it was important that principles of confidentiality and anonymity were upheld with regards to not identifying participants in the research, and keeping data securely (BERA, 2011). A number of key ethical considerations were identified during the process of seeking ethical approval from the Open University HREC. The main issue surrounded the confidential nature of survey and interview responses, and ensuring that there should be a method of keeping survey responses anonymous and untraceable in cases where the participant has also volunteered to take part in subsequent interviews. This was managed through meeting the Open University Data Protection Compliance requirements, which included using a survey collection tool that complied with UK data protection laws and allowed for submissions to be made without collecting email or IP addresses, and re-direction via a separate link for those students wishing to register interest in participating in the interviews. The Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form were part of the survey, which could not be entered unless consent was given, and are included in Appendix H.

Participants were told that their responses would be confidential and that no information linking them to the study would be kept. They were advised that names would not be used in the thesis and there was no way of identifying a participant through a number or other classification method. Participants were informed of who would see the research results.
3.5.1.1 Interviews

With regards to the one-to-one interviews, to uphold confidentiality and anonymity it was important to choose a safe environment for meetings to take place; one that did not advertise what was happening and provided the student with a safe place to be able to talk freely. As discussed in section 3.4.2, aside from circumventing the geographical issues of face-to-face in-person meetings, Skype interviews also provided this safe place – the participant would not be required to go to an otherwise unfamiliar location (Krouwel et al., 2019) and would feel more relaxed being interviewed in a familiar environment (Irani, 2019). The Consent Form and Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix H) were emailed to the participants in advance of the interview. Only on receipt of the completed Consent Form was the interview date/time set. The interviews were recorded with participant consent; confidentiality and anonymity were respected.

3.5.1.2 Online surveys

The surveys used in my study could be seen as intrusive, both into the privacy of the participant and into their time. Vincent (2018b) suggested a careful study of language is important when considering all research, but that particular attention should be paid to this when researching within the trans community. An explanation of my use of the umbrella term ‘trans’ was included at the start of the survey, as described in section 3.4.3.2. The use of questions such as “What pronoun do you use” in preference to “What are your preferred pronouns” in the survey showed an understanding of pronoun awareness and respect discussed in Chapter 2, as did the inclusion of what Vincent (2018b) terms ‘neopronouns’ such as ze/zir and an option to not provide an answer in the multiple-choice list in this question.
In addition, consideration was made as to how the participants may feel after completing the survey, as there was a possibility that this could exacerbate feelings of exclusion or dysphoria, or increase frustration, and the Participant Information Sheet included links to various support groups.

Before taking part, participants were told what the study was for and what it aimed to achieve so that they could make an informed decision on whether to participate. As there were no issues with regards to the participants knowing the aims of the study (i.e. this would not influence their responses), they could be given useful information to help them make this decision and any questions they had could be answered, so they could be fully informed without me having to withhold information about the nature of the research. This transparency about the aims of the research and how it might benefit the trans student community helped to reduce inequality due to my own privilege (Vincent, 2018b), as discussed in section 3.3.1. It was important to avoid leading questions (Webb, 2017) or to make assumptions regarding positive or negative experiences, so respondents felt free to offer answers from their own perspectives and experiences. The procedures to be used were fully explained.

3.5.1.3 Right to withdraw

Participants had the right to withdraw from the survey at any time by closing the window, whereby responses already placed would not be collected. They also had the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question. They were advised that once they had submitted the survey responses, it would no longer be possible to remove their data from the study, as the survey responses are anonymised, so could not be tracked back to any participant. They had the right to withdraw during the one-to-one interview by terminating the Skype connection at any time, and any recording made to this point would be deleted. During the interview, they also had the right to
omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that was asked. They were advised that they also had the right to request their information be destroyed immediately should they choose to withdraw, and the right to ask for their data to be removed after participation in the study up until such time as all data had been anonymised and aggregated for analysis.

Ethical considerations were ongoing throughout the research process, in particular with regards to sensitivity and interaction with interview participants.

3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an account of the theoretical framework and research methodology underpinning the study, the research methods used and details of how the data were collected and analysed. The chapter has discussed and justified the transformative paradigm underpinning the qualitative methodology and has discussed the research methods in relation to the research questions: the methods used – online survey, interviews and document analysis – and how the methods used were informed by a pilot study. The chapter has discussed the thematic analysis processes used to interpret the data, and ethical considerations considered.
Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the online survey, interviews and examination of HEI policies. In section 4.2, the findings of the survey and interviews are presented together in a way that mirrors the main themes that arose from the literature review as these were the themes that had underpinned the research, and identifies the particular experiences that were reported by participants within each theme. The discussion in Chapter 5 will review these in respect of the research questions for this study and in light of specific themes that emerged from the data collected. Section 4.3 looks at the HEI policies examined for this study in respect of the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) guidance document (Pugh, 2010) and with reference to recommendations made by Stonewall (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018c), NUS (Acciari, 2014) and TransEdu Scotland (Mckendry and Lawrence, 2017).

4.2 Surveys and interviews

In the online survey, all questions were optional, so not all respondents indicated the HEI they attended or their course of study, but of those who did, the results revealed participants from 60 different HEIs across the UK – two from Northern Ireland, three from Wales, five from Scotland and the remainder from across England, as identified in red on the map in Figure 7. There was representation across the curriculum covering 83

Figure 7 Map showing the areas of the UK with HEIs represented in the survey
discrete courses, with 64 students studying within humanities, 38 studying health sciences and social sciences, and 51 representing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects. One student refused the questions about the HEI and course with a comment that they feared it would too easily identify them.

Students were asked to confirm gender identity (Figure 8) and pronouns (Figure 9):

![Figure 8 Gender identity of survey participants](image)

There are no robust data currently on the numbers of trans/non-binary people in the UK (Government Equalities Office, 2018b) so it is difficult to tell whether this is representative or whether there was an over- or under-representation of any one group. However, it was clear that there more male (66) and non-binary (61) participants, than female (30).

Of those choosing 'other' for gender identity, responses were:

- Genderqueer male
- None/neutral
- Man with a trans history
- Genderqueer (two participants)
- Woman
- Agender
- Questioning
Similarly to the gender identities reported, when reporting pronouns there were more participants identifying as he/him (75) or they/them (42) than she/her (33). Of the 12 participants choosing ‘other’ for pronouns, all responded that they used both he/him and they/them pronouns.

Other demographic information was collected regarding sexual orientation/preference, ethnic group, religion/faith/belief, and disability, and this is provided in Appendix I. Although not a direct focus of the research questions for my study, disability is discussed further in Chapter 5, as there were a high number of participants (71) who reported experiencing mental health difficulties.

The seven interview participants were from seven different HEIs, from across England, with four studying health sciences/social sciences and three studying humanities. Participants were not asked to disclose their gender, but in introduction were given the option to share pronouns; of the seven participants, four exclusively used he/him pronouns, one exclusively used they/them pronouns and the other two participants used either he/him or they/them. Four participants were undergraduate students and three were postgraduate. No participants using she/her pronouns came forward for interviews and, as such, data collected may be more representative of
trans men/non-binary experiences, and this is a feature of the study that will be discussed in Chapter 6.

This chapter will now look at the survey and interview responses in reference to the main themes identified in the literature review and will identify specific topics within these themes that were highlighted by the experiences of participants.

4.2.1 Harassment, bullying and transphobia

The data collected from this study did not report such high rates of bullying, harassment and transphobia as had been suggested in studies such as that for the NUS which had stated that one in three trans HE students reported having experienced bullying and/or harassment on campus (Acciari, 2014), but did concur with the findings of Mckendry and Lawrence (2017), who described high numbers of students being misgendered. In the context of this study, it was clear that being outed without consent and misgendering were the main issues experienced, and that most students were unaware of how/where to report incidents. This section will look at the types of incidents reported and the impact of correct/incorrect pronoun use and inclusive language.

4.2.1.1 Bullying and transphobia, and how to report it

Although some of the previous research identified higher incidences of bullying and transphobia, survey results in this study did not show such large numbers, with 27 survey participants (16.5%) having experienced transphobic violence, bullying or harassment on campus, although 71 (43%) reported being aware of others having experienced this. There could be reasons for this which are not clear from the survey or interview data, for example maybe trans acceptance has increased, or it could be
due to a difference in the definition of bullying/transphobia, as this was not clearly
defined in the survey question.

Where participants reported having experienced harassment, bullying and/or
transphobia, survey responses also provided a breakdown of the type of
experiences, as shown in Figure 10:

Figure 10 Have you experienced any of the following at university yourself, because of your
trans identity?

Being outing without consent and purposeful misgendering were the highest reported
incidents (51 and 45 participants reporting these, respectively). One participant
reported having experienced a physical attack.

The five ‘other’ responses included general transphobic comments made in class
being unchallenged; transphobic teaching; people refusing to use non-binary
pronouns “because it’s linguistically challenging”; incorrect pronouns being used by
someone who “doesn’t ‘agree’ with trans people”; and a participant being told that
their gender identity was the result of not being allowed to do “male things” as a
child, and that transitioning is “dangerous and likely a mental illness”. This shows
that at least some misgendering is quite deliberate and used to harm, rather than just
being a genuine mistake. However, of those who experienced these difficulties, the majority either did not report the incident, or did not know how or where to report such actions.

The interview responses were similar, with one out of the seven participants reporting having experienced bullying/transphobia at university themselves. They described how a flatmate had started calling them “it” but that although security was involved, “not much really was done about it, which really annoyed me, but he did apologise, so what more can you ask for?” The final part of the sentence – ‘what more can you ask for?’ seems to imply that the participant did not really expect for this to be taken seriously by the university or for anything to be done to stop this happening again.

Other interview participants reported having witnessed or being aware of others experiencing difficulties, with a common theme to the above, that there was a lack of confidence in how well the HEI would deal with the issue. Several interview participants said they were aware of systems in place to report bullying, such as posters around campus, but none were sure of quite how to go about this, although some said they would be more comfortable informing their lecturers or student support staff in the first instance rather than using a formal reporting procedure.

Even those who were in the position of receiving complaints did not always know how to signpost students to report incidents. One interview participant, who was president of their HEI’s student LGBT+ society, was not aware of the processes in place despite receiving emails from students asking what they should do, and commented that:
“If there is a process, which I’m sure there must be, it’s not like advertised to students… We just like run around, like, talk to everyone that we know until someone like, tells us what we can do about it, and then help the student with it.” (Participant 4).

This demonstrates the lack of information being shared with those groups likely to be the first port of call for many students, and will be discussed in Chapter 6 as something that should be addressed through effective policy and procedures.

Although not specifically about experiencing bullying or harassment, there was some mention during the interviews of the atmosphere at the time with regards to academics and trans-exclusionary radical feminism (TERF), as described earlier in section 1.4:

“It’s just kind of becoming more obvious in the media that like, in wider academia across like a few different universities, there’s been some issues, with people wanting to pursue studies that maybe trans people wouldn’t have been so happy with having pursued… [but] in the media as opposed to something that directly affects my experiences of university.” (Participant 5).

Another participant was aware of this at their university, but noted that it had not come to a head as the HEI was not giving a platform to either side:

“Recent sort of batch of attention of tension between, um, some feminists and some trans activists, and that was all bubbling up… We didn’t quite have the kind of argy-bargy that some universities have, but partly because they weren’t offering platforms to either, either camp… But I was very aware of that.” (Participant 7).
In light of the trans-exclusionary radical feminism noted by some of the interview participants and the arguments around gendered spaces and hostility towards trans people, and trans women in particular, discussed in Chapter 1, survey results were investigated to find out whether trans women participants were more likely to have experienced transphobia, bullying or harassment than trans men. Due to the difference in numbers in trans men (66) and trans women (30) participating in the survey, percentages rather than number are used to give an overview of this, as shown in Figure 1 below. Overall, more trans women than trans men reported purposeful misgendering and name-calling/verbal abuse, although in both cases the higher percentage was non-binary participants. The survey results showed that more trans men reported difficulties with having been outed without consent, purposeful dead-naming and being subject to rumours/gossip.

![Figure 11 Experiences of bullying/transphobia by gender identity](image)

There were three mentions of trans-exclusionary radical feminism in the free-text responses in the survey, with two showing negative opinions of how their HEIs were handling this:
“The university is going to host a conference full of terfs (sic) and hasn’t listened to the officer’s asking them not to do it, so idk how effective it really is.”

“TERF, Anti trans stickers were posted in a number of the bathrooms and in a bus stop on campus.”

The other was more positive, indicating that their HEI was listening to student concerns:

“A ‘terf’ (sic) lecturer had been invited to talk at our university and as soon as the LGBTQ+ (sic) society wrote to the university asking them not to let her talk, they cancelled it. In fact it took less than 2 hours for them to do so. It was a surprising but pleasing response.”

In the context of this study, it is clear that although there were no reports of physical violence towards trans students in the interviews, and only one student out of 164 survey participants reported having experienced a physical attack, there were examples of other incidences of bullying and harassment, but that there is a lack of information for students to help them feel confident in reporting such incidents. This may lead to incidents not being reported, and issues potentially escalating.

4.2.1.2 The impact of correct and incorrect use of names, pronouns and inclusive language

Most of the students interviewed mentioned the negative impact of wrong name and pronoun use. Some of this clearly resulted from ineffective administrative processes, which will be described in section 4.2.4, but the impact is clear:
“It was a bit startling to see my, you know, given name printed on the card and it was a bit of a slap in the face really… All of these constant reminders are just really unpleasant and hurtful.” (Participant 2).

Some students also faced misnaming or misgendering in person resulting in the trans person feeling invalidated:

“They don’t check in with me about my pronouns… They don’t, um, react to my facial expressions when they call me ‘lady’ or ‘girl’… They just don’t notice; they don’t hear it.” (Participant 2).

Even when accidental, this perpetuates cisnormativity and enforces the stigma that cisnormative expectations associate with being transgender, and this can have a negative impact when it is in front of others:

“I’ve had a lecturer that’s misgendered me and it was very awkward because it was in front of the class and I got a bit red and felt a bit uncomfortable but at the end she’s pulled me over and says, ‘I am really sorry’ and apologised.” (Participant 3).

The survey also offered students the opportunity to give examples of instances where the university had been particularly positive in supporting trans students, and some of these responses included statements about the use of the correct names/pronouns, such as lecturers asking students which pronouns they should use:

“Lecturers have asked which pronouns I would prefer when giving information about me.”
“Academic staff on my course have always been quick to take up preferred names and pronouns as soon as they are aware that they have changed, even in part-time staff.”

This study identified the positive impact that using a trans student’s correct name and pronouns can have, and also the negative impact that misnaming, misgendering and other microaggressions can have, and this will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

4.2.2 Representation in the curriculum

Representation in the curriculum was a much larger part of the study than had been expected, and something that had not been widely covered in the literature investigated. Most survey participants reported feeling unrepresented, and all interview participants described experiences of poor, negative or lacking representation. Particular difficulties were raised with regards to a lack of representation in health science/healthcare courses, and although this resonated with what Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019) had to say about LGBT+ social work students in the US, as discussed in Chapter 2, UK academic research has not yet addressed this issue with particular reference to trans students.

4.2.2.1 Inadequate representation in humanities subjects

The survey results showed that although the majority (146) felt that trans representation in the curriculum was important or somewhat important, most (91) also did not feel at all represented in the curriculum. It was acknowledged by some participants that representation is ‘easier’ in some subjects than in others, as had also been discussed in the findings of research for the NUS (Acciari, 2014) which had suggested that LGBT+ representation in humanities subjects was higher than in
STEM subjects. However, interview participants in this study highlighted that even in subjects such as English and music there was a problem with trans inclusion in the curriculum. One participant studying English literature described how, in a module about gender and sexuality where it should have been reasonably easy to find and use good trans representation either in storylines or as authors, this was not only lacking but a particularly bad representation:

“The gender side of it was a bit more problematic for me… If you are cis you probably look at it and find it really interesting, but when you’re trans, you’re reading it and it’s, it’s really bad… I read it and I was like, this is awful, why am, why are they making me read this?” (Participant 1).

The participant then described how this made them feel and the impact it had on the rest of their academic journey:

“I felt so uncomfortable with it… I’m just some first year who isn’t out to my class except for the other trans people and I’m just there, like, I, I don’t want to say anything… I don’t wanna tell my tutor that she’s assigned a bad book… So, I just decided from that class to sort of sit in there in silence listening to people debating whether or not this character is a woman because he has a vagina. But, you know, it was not, not a comfortable experience.” (Participant 1).

This is an example of the power relations in HE, where the student did not feel they could take issue with the book their tutor had assigned on the basis that it was derogatory towards trans people and made trans students feel uncomfortable.

Some interview participants also talked about the silencing/erasure of trans people. One, a music student, commented:
“There are trans composers who, some of whom are still alive, some of whom were working in the 20th century. And we didn't learn about any of them… Western classical music is founded on a system of racism and sexism and homophobia and transphobia and ableism.” (Participant 6).

The music student example and the English literature student example mentioned previously, highlight areas where trans representation really should be quite easy to incorporate into the curriculum, and underlines the power imbalance of learning within a privileged cisnormative environment. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

4.2.2.2 Lack of representation in health sciences and health care subjects

All the interview participants commented on the importance of positive representation in the curriculum, with some participants describing its specific relevance in health sciences subjects, where students are likely to come across trans clients and/or parents of trans children when on placement, as well as in their working role after graduating. One participant was studying social work, and commented:

“There's no trans representation so far. I know that they're trying to, um, decolonise the curriculum now, that they're currently in the process of, you know, changing parts of it, but I think currently, they're mostly focusing on race and ethnicity. I'm hoping that queerness will enter soon… I'm fairly sure that every single person in my cohort will at some point have to deal with trans people… using like, the correct pronouns is, and like, a known as name, is quite important.” (Participant 2).
Another interview participant who was both working and studying in NHS healthcare, felt that trans representation in the curriculum was essential in providing students with the information and knowledge they need and the confidence to ask when unsure:

“It needs to be demystified and debunked. And I think the heat needs to be taken out of it… It’s about having a vocabulary for it, about feeling okay not knowing and feeling okay to be able to sort of say ‘… I’m not that familiar with working with trans people, can you help me out here? You know, what pronouns do you like to use? How do you like to refer to things?’… It’s not one size fits all. Language that I might feel comfortable with might not be suitable for somebody else.” (Participant 7).

The lack of inclusion of trans identities in the curriculum for these students are examples of the assumptions of cisnormativity and the privileging of cisgender knowledge in teaching, even where research describes the difficulties trans people experience accessing healthcare and how trans-inclusive teaching in these subjects would help to improve this, and this will be discussed in Chapter 5.

There were two reports of positive representation in the interviews, one of which was from a student within a health sciences subject who noted:

“We have had a couple of lectures about um, communication and people’s identities… It was really about respecting everyone’s identity and it mentioned, like, people that had um, different genders and sexualities, and it was, it was like, a good representation.” (Participant 3).
Another was a very interesting report given by a student studying linguistics, who described how they had a LGBT-focused module where they studied transmasculine voices and how the pitch of the voice can affect perception of gender.

Making the curriculum more representative is a major task for HEIs, but one that many are currently undertaking with regards to inclusivity of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) groups and experiences. Including all underrepresented groups in this would improve curriculum provision for all students, and this will be discussed further in the following chapters.

**4.2.3 Inclusion/exclusion**

The data from this study identified areas where trans students felt well-supported as well as areas where they did not. This section looks at the reported levels of support from peers and the student union and societies, and from staff, in particular university support services.

**4.2.3.1 Support from the LGBT+ Society, student union and peers**

A key part of university life for many students is being able to take part in activities, sports and social events through student societies, and this can play an important role in students’ personal development and integration (Gallagher and Gilmore, 2013). Stonewall’s 2019 report *Delivering LGBT-Inclusive Higher Education* recommended that HEIs support LGBT+ student groups, societies and officers who are “an invaluable source of support for LGBT students” (Stonewall, 2019, p. 4). They suggested support should be provided by the university to LGBT+ student groups by way of resources and university spaces, and by ensuring society members are represented and are able to participate in relevant university forums and committees.
Although most of the survey participants had been made welcome and felt well-supported by LGBT+ student societies, the interview discussions around LGBT+ societies and student union LGBT+ representation identified a lack of trans-specific representation, although some reported that this was changing over time with more trans representation now than there had been at the start of their academic career. There were also perceived challenges with LGBT+ societies being run by “cis white gays” (Participant 5) and that they were not representative or fully supportive of trans members.

However, survey responses confirmed in general a good level of support from LGBT+ societies, and the majority (71) confirmed that their student unions did have a dedicated trans officer. In a free-text question about whether they felt having a dedicated trans officer was of benefit, the majority felt this was extremely beneficial for “more representation of trans people and trans issues to the wider community”, “to have our voices heard” and “to bring trans perspectives to the fore and support individual students”. Some were less enthusiastic about the role, with particular comments on how this could in fact be exclusive or divisive: “The group is so inclusive it would only segregate trans issues to a different place and not promote equality” and “They have an LGBT+ officer and I’m happy for that to remain this way. Not a fan of splitting up the community.”

One interview participant said that because they came from Brighton, an East Sussex city known for its support of LGBT+ people (Browne and Lim, 2010) and Stonewall’s 2019 Children and Young People Services Champion award winner (Brighton & Hove City Council, 2019), finding an HEI with an active LGBT+ society positively influenced their choice of university.
It can be seen from this study that trans students value inclusion not only in the curriculum, but in university social life and that good representation in student union and LGBT+ societies can improve the university experience.

The support of peers was also identified as an important aspect of the interview participants’ feeling of inclusion and acceptance in their HEI environments. However, Figure 12 shows that the survey responses indicated that students felt their non-trans peers could be more knowledgeable about trans issues.

![Figure 12: Do you feel that your peers are knowledgeable enough about trans issues?](image)

Although most interview participants were encouraged by peer support, in many cases this was through being able to develop support networks with other trans students, rather than from non-trans peers. The participant who had experienced the uncomfortable English literature class described in section 4.2.2, remarked on how important this had been in helping them to deal with this incident:

“It helped that I was sitting in that class with another friend who is also trans, so we could just talk about it together, and be like ‘this is the worst’. But you know if, if they hadn’t been there and I was the only trans person in that class, I would have had a horrible time.” (Participant 1).

The same participant was also surprised at how many other trans people there were in their classes, as they were not expecting there to be so many. This could be indicative of a mismatch between the numbers reported through UCAS and HESA as
discussed in Chapter 1, and the actual number of trans students in the HE environment.

This level of support felt by having peers who are able to identify with trans students’ issues or provide support as trans allies, further stresses the importance of trans representation and the encouragement of trans participation in student union and LGBT+ Society events and activities.

**4.2.3.2 Staff support and university support services**

The survey responses showed a similarly low level of perceived staff knowledge about trans issues. However, almost half of the survey participants were aware of their university having someone they could turn to, with some describing dedicated support being available through student services, and one noting that there was a specific trans support group for students.

However, another stated:

> “I have had to take the initiative for introducing many of the measures to improve things for trans students, as cis members of staff did not even know there were problems that needed fixing.”

Interview responses on the subject of supportive staff were varied, but particularly positive with regards to the support provided by academic and support staff when trying to navigate the administrative processes for changes of name on the university records, and unchallenged use of names and pronouns discussed later in this chapter. One particular comment related to the visibility of staff allies, something that can be so easily instigated by HEIs.

> “I love that many of the lecturers wear these lanyards with the rainbow pattern on them, which signals to the students that they are LGBTQ+ allies and can
be approached... I like that I have someone I can actually turn to very visibly... It makes me feel very welcome.” (Participant 2).

There were negative remarks with regards to a lack of understanding from university counselling services, and this can be a problem when supporting trans students who may be facing challenges with transphobia, harassment or exclusion, where they turn to counselling services for support but find that in fact this can make things worse, and this will be discussed further in Chapter 5. BACP, which is the UK accrediting body for counselling and psychotherapy practitioners and organisations, stated that as a profession they are only just beginning to understand the needs of trans students and that “without fully understanding their experiences, college counselling centre clinicians may struggle with how to best support students who identify outside a gender binary” (Swanbrow Becker, 2019).

One interview participant described negative experiences they had experienced themselves, and experiences other students had brought to them in their capacity within the student union:

“We’d have a lot of like, students who come to us and be like, ‘I went to a counsellor, and this counsellor just blamed everything on me being gay, or just blamed everything on me being trans’. Erm, and were just like, ‘clearly all your trauma, trauma comes from this’... I go to a counsellor, but I can tell you that being trans is like, the least of my problems... I’ve also had the situation where, um, they found out I’m trans, and then they like, wanted me to teach them about the whole process of like transitioning and all this stuff that can then go away and help like other trans students, and it’s like we’re supposed
Trans individuals are already at higher risk of mental health difficulties, self-harm and suicide (Thorne et al., 2018); they may be finding their feelings confusing, distressing or frightening; they may have faced discrimination, violence or exclusion, or may have kept their identity hidden for years. In the survey, 98 out of the 164 participants declared a disability, with 71 describing mental health conditions and 33 reporting autistic spectrum conditions. Although autistic spectrum disorder is not a mental health difficulty, there is very often an overlap with autistic people vulnerable to mental health difficulties, often as a result of social isolation and social anxiety (Maitland et al., 2021), and, as such, many autistic students may also access HEI counselling and/or mental health services. Autism and heightened autistic traits are also over-represented in trans populations compared to cisgender populations (Murphy et al., 2020). It is evidently clear from the findings that, in many cases, HEI mental health support and counselling services are ineffective in supporting the needs of these students.

4.2.4 Institutional facilities and administration

The data collected from this study indicated that trans students generally face difficulties in relation to changing their name and/or gender on university data systems and ID cards, often as a result of a lack of processes in place, which is an example of the problems that can occur due to the formal and bureaucratic procedures set up with cisnormative and binary gender assumptions. Students also reported challenges with gendered toilet facilities and with gender-neutral facilities often being a re-designation of disabled toilets for shared use. Although the findings resonate with earlier research, the majority of academic literature reviewed on this
subject was from the USA (e.g. Seelman, 2014 and Goldberg and Kuvalanka, 2018) so the data from this survey are important in highlighting these issues in UK HEIs, and corroborating data from non-academic surveys in the UK (e.g. research for Stonewall by Bachmann and Gooch, 2018a, and by Acciari, 2014 for the NUS). Participants also reported a disconnect between policy and practice.

4.2.4.1 Difficulties with name and gender changes

When discussing the processes of changing their name and/or gender on university records, two interview participants described having alerted the university to this in advance of starting their degree course. One participant described the initial process as quite straightforward:

“I got in touch… over email with the university beforehand, to let them know I’m trans, this is my preferred name, my pronouns, can you make sure that any staff I’m gonna be in touch with are aware of this, and they’re like, yeah, that’s fine, no problem.” (Participant 1).

However, this participant went on to explain that despite this early notice, and acknowledgement from the university that this would be actioned, this did not happen, leading to difficulties once classes began where the register in class used the participant’s birth name rather than the name they were known as, resulting in ‘outing’ them to staff and peers within the first few days of being at university. This participant had to then email all their teaching staff to advise them of the error, but said that once this was done, the teaching staff immediately changed the register so that this would not happen again. However, even then it was not fixed immediately through the university’s systems and the same thing happened at the start of semester two. This is an example of the HEI not having a clear process for changing
student details so that all relevant staff are informed. The same participant also described the difficulties this delay in updating their details correctly caused when arranging an appointment with university mental health support services:

“The information hadn’t been passed on like I was expecting it to… I’d just without thinking signed off an email with the correct name. And they replied to me, like, sorry, I don’t know who I’m speaking to… [I had] a moment of I don’t know how I am meant to address myself to them in the emails now because I, I didn’t know who knew what anymore.” (Participant 1).

This is an example of how disjointed administrative processes can impact on trans students, where the student assumes that changes have been made, but are then placed in uncomfortable situations when they find this is not the case.

In the survey, 72 out of the 164 participants had requested a change of name to be made on their university record. It is not known whether the 92 who did not request a change of name had applied in their birth name or had not needed/wanted to request this change, and this is an element of the survey that could be improved if conducted again and will be discussed in Chapter 6. Of the 72 who did request this change, as shown in Figure 13, only 37 felt that this information had fully filtered down to relevant academics. This highlights that the experiences described by Participant 1 in the interviews were not unique to their experience.

![Figure 13](image1.png)

*Figure 13 Students who had requested a name change identified whether they felt this had filtered down to relevant academics, e.g. seminar leaders*
Only 50 survey participants had requested a change to the gender marker on their university record. Again, it is not known whether the remaining 114 participants had applied in their presenting gender, or had just not requested this change, and this shortcoming in results is discussed in Chapter 6 as something that could be explored further in future research.

There was the opportunity on the survey to expand on how easy it had been to record a change of gender, and, of 49 responses, 28 reported this as being an easy process, with 12 having experienced some difficulties and nine having come across barriers to this. The comments from those who faced barriers with this described universities being reluctant to make the changes, and systems requiring a great deal of work on their part to make the change. One participant was told they were not able to change their details without a Gender Recognition Certificate, which is categorically incorrect and goes against the Equality Act 2010 (Women and Equalities Committee, 2015); two others faced specific difficulties related to identifying as non-binary, as there was no gender option available for them on the computer systems – both reported having to choose between a binary marker or ‘unknown’.

Of those who experienced some difficulties, most replicated the challenges of interview Participant 1, in that although information was changed in one place this did not filter down to all university systems, resulting in them being deadnamed (i.e., their birth name being used) in some circumstances, with one describing the process as “easy but not effective”. Some also acknowledged that the process was easy, but only once they had found out how to request the change – information that was not made readily available. This is an area of suggested administrative change that will be discussed in Chapter 6.
However, over half of the survey participants had found the process easy and their comments made it clear how straightforward a process can be where the HEI is willing to make it so. In many of these cases it was resolved after a simple email and in a later free-text section of the survey asking about positive experiences at university, one participant commented that changes to ID cards at their HEI were free where a name change is required, and that ‘Mx’ – a recognised title that does not indicate gender – was a standard option for students.

Two interview participants said they had registered in their presenting gender, which meant that some of these administrative hurdles faced by other students were not an issue. Other interview participants, however, reported more difficulties, with three explaining that a legal name change (deed poll) was required by the HEI before they could change their name on the university systems and ID cards. Although the participants understood the legal requirement for this for the formal university record for the name under which they would graduate, they all questioned why this was required for the ID cards and registers, as these are not legal documents. Two participants described how difficult and frustrating this had been:

“I hadn’t changed my name legally because of, like, family situations, and that can be a bit difficult because… all the online stuff, they wanted me to change my name legally to get all that changed.” (Participant 5).

“They don’t even have to change the enrolment stuff. They don’t even have to do that because I understand the legal means, I understand those. But just, you know, on the student ID and in the, in the sheets that go out to the courses that would be so helpful… I just want others to be able to experience that too without having to legally change their name first.” (Participant 2).
The first of these excerpts also highlights difficulties this can cause trans students with regards to having to choose between being outed to peers or outing themselves to their family, which might be a difficult choice for some trans young people whose families are not supportive of this, and many trans individuals are hesitant to disclose their identity to their families for fear of rejection (Lefevor et al., 2019). Another interview participant explained how, despite support from their lecturer, the university was still insisting on a legal name change before any systems could be amended.

Several of the interview participants felt that appropriate and effective systems were not in place to support trans students with regards to changing name and/or gender on university records. One summed up well some of the additional difficulties that this can cause when processes are not in place:

“They got me a new email… because my old email has my old name in it, and then I didn’t get like, added to my course lists, I didn’t get my exam results because it was sent to like, the old email in the system which should have been deleted…. When I logged onto my uni account, it would just still say like, ‘Hello, my old name’. And to get that changed their solution was to delete me as a student and add me as like, a new student, which obviously came with like, many other issues. Just inventing a new student.” (Participant 4).

This is good example of the problems that a lack of procedure for name and gender changes can cause. The survey results showed that of the survey participants who had requested a name change, 36 had been given the opportunity to change their email address if it included their name or initials and 17 had not. Eighteen did not need to request this as their email address did not include their name or initials.
The lack of effective processes was not just frustrating for students, but had emotional/mental health impacts. This was movingly described by one interview participant:

“One of the biggest problems for me in my experience was that I was constantly reminded of the name I didn’t choose. Um, I don’t even care all that much about the pronoun stuff, to be honest, I care way more about the name because if they call me by my old name, I just feel 21 years of frustration and anxiety building up in me… That’s just all of these constant reminders are just really unpleasant and hurtful.” (Participant 2).

The participant quotes in this section provide a powerful sense of the weariness of having to face all of these issues, constantly being beaten down by what may be considered by the HEIs to be seemingly small things. Trans students are vulnerable to mental health difficulties, and the reasons for this will be discussed further in Chapter 5, but it is clear here how a simple change to administrative processes could be supportive of trans students and would go some way towards reducing the negative impact on their mental health.

4.2.4.2 The argument for gender-neutral facilities

A key trans rights media debate at the time of this research, as identified in section 1.3.3, was about whether trans people should use the facilities of their biological sex or of their gender identity. On campus, under the Equality Act 2010 it is the duty of the HEI to ensure trans students feel safe to use the facilities of their choice, and this should include trans and especially non-binary/gender-non-conforming students, having the option of using gender-neutral facilities.
All interview participants mentioned a lack of gender-neutral toilets as being an issue, and two explained their discomfort with having ‘disabled’ toilets allocated by the HEI as the gender-neutral option:

“I always feel a bit wrong using them because if, if someone who needs to use a disabled toilet comes along and is waiting ‘cos I’m there instead.” (Participant 1).

“The gender-neutral toilets are also the disabled toilets, which is interesting because I’m able-bodied and so I don’t always feel comfortable using toilets that are specifically for disabled people.” (Participant 6).

One of the free-text survey responses also touched on sharing disability-accessible spaces and how this sets up marginalised groups in opposition to each other, with the participant describing how someone had stuck a sign on the door saying ‘for disabilities only’ despite it being designated by the HEI as a gender-neutral facility. The participant reported this but was still waiting for the university to put a formal sign on to identify it for universal use; they went on to comment, “I wish I didn’t have to share a facility intended for the needs of another minority as it feels unfair to them too.”

Survey results indicated that most HEIs had some gender-neutral facilities, as shown in Figure 14, although this did not identify whether these were specific gender-neutral facilities, or shared use of disability-accessible facilities.
Although all interview participants had talked about toilets, one also described experiences related to changing rooms. The comparison between the women’s and men’s facilities in this example are stark:

“Up until a certain point I was using the women’s changing rooms um, cos I was still, like, pre-everything and stuff like that, um, and I’ve noticed, kind of in the women’s changing rooms in the gym there’s like a cubicle, er, where you can go to change if you want to like, have your own space. There’s also, like, trans awareness posters that say like, ‘Oh, if you think someone shouldn’t be here, shut up, leave them alone, it doesn't matter’… I switched to the male changing rooms and it’s a completely different story. Um, the only cubicle in there is the one toilet cubicle, um, and there’s no trans awareness posters. Um, but, I mean, it was fine because there was also a general sense of like men not wanting to look at each other in the changing rooms, in case someone thinks they’re gay, um, so I didn’t have any problems, but it's, it was just a very, it just wasn’t, there wasn’t as much, there was anything in there in the same way that there was in the women’s.” (Participant 5).
This provides an interesting insight into the different gendered expectations and how cisnormativity appears to be different for men and women, which will be discussed further in Section 5.2.

4.2.4.3 A disconnect between policy and practice

HEIs are required by the Public Sector Equality Duty (a sub-section of the Equality Act, 2010), to endeavour to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity, and, as such, HEIs should have a policy for supporting trans students. Some have a specific trans student policy, others have this written into a more generic diversity/equality policy. One of the main aims of this study is to identify institutional policy and procedure changes that would address areas of concern identified by trans students in HE, and this is discussed in Chapter 6.

Participants in this study talked about a disconnect between policy and practice, with policy recommendations often not being backed up by change. Four of the interview participants were unsure whether there was a trans-specific policy at their university, and two noted that a policy was there but was not being implemented, and only one describing trans students having had input into rewriting the policy. One participant queried the motive behind having a trans student policy:

“The fact that I’d come to this university partly because of the things they’d said they would be doing and therefore it’s in their trans policy, and then it made it feel like, oh, ok, you’re saying you’re going to do these things just so, so you sound good basically rather than they didn’t seem to actually worry about following through with it. Made it feel like they, they put this policy in place because they have to rather than because they cared.” (Participant 1).
Another interview participant questioned how useful policies are without further action from the university:

“Attitudes don’t change just because institutions get policies and procedures.”

(Participant 7).

These extracts show the need for HEIs to not only have a trans student policy, but to make sure everyone is aware of the policy and that it is clear in setting out why the policy is there and what its aims are, and this will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Some of the free-text responses from the survey were positive regarding policy, with some participants noting that the university and student union and/or LGBT+ Society were working together with the HEI to implement better policies, and one noting that action was being taken by the university to amend all policies to be less gender-specific. Interview participants discussed whether being trans had influenced their choice of university, in that they had made their choice based on an understanding that their chosen HEI would be a welcoming and inclusive environment:

“When I was looking for universities, I actually looked into what they listed in their transgender policy… and that affected what university I wanted to go to.”

(Participant 1).

It is clear that if potential trans students are investigating trans student policies when making their choice of HEI to attend, then these should be publicly accessible. It was surprising then when conducting research into HEI policies for the document analysis, that of 169 HEI websites viewed, 96 had no trans policies accessible to the public.
4.3 HEI policies

This section analyses the content of a selection of HEI trans student policies in respect of the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) guidance document (Pugh, 2010) which will be explained in section 4.3.1, and with reference to recommendations made by Stonewall (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018c), NUS (Acciari, 2014) and TransEdu Scotland (Mckendry and Lawrence, 2017) in section 4.3.2. Further discussion of the findings is made in Chapter 5.

Of the 169 HEI websites searched, 96 had no trans policy/guidance easily accessible to the public online (as of February 2020) using the search methods described in Chapter 3.

For the purpose of this study, eight policies were chosen to give a good geographical spread across the UK with one in Scotland, one in Northern Ireland, one in Wales, and five from HEIs spread across England. These policies were downloaded and saved so that when analysed, it could be certain that these were the policies available at the time the participants completed the survey. Policies were chosen from HEIs from which survey responses had been obtained.

The HEI policies were analysed and Table 6 below identifies how many survey participants had reported attending each of these HEIs. The policies are given policy numbers for reference in this study and so as not to identify specific HEIs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Last updated</th>
<th>Number of survey participants at this HEI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>April 2017</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>July 2019</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A more detailed breakdown of the policy demographics is included in Appendix I.

### 4.3.1 In respect of the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) guidance document

Analysis of eight HEI policies was undertaken using chapter sub-headings from the ECU guidance document (Pugh, 2010) as a starting point:

- Promoting trans equality within a higher education institution.
  - Ensuring awareness of gender identity issues.
  - Practical issues: from accommodation to sports.
  - Bullying, harassment and discrimination against trans people.
  - Monitoring trans staff and students.

- Responsibilities when supporting a person who is transitioning.
  - Preparing and planning for a staff member’s or student’s transition.
  - Supporting changes in gender presentation.

The ECU guidance was updated in 2010, stating that, at the time of the original 2008 guidance, it was considered that it would be rare for an HEI to have a trans staff member or student. It was updated in line with "re-evaluated figures" which showed that HEIs were likely to have trans staff members and/or students, and also in response to the Equality Act 2010 inclusion of gender reassignment as a protected characteristic. The guidance was provided to help HEIs meet their legal
responsibilities, as well as to ensure policies, procedures and support processes better met the needs of trans staff and students. Of the eight policies investigated for this study, three had done the bare minimum of copying the template ‘suggested policy statement’, with no further information added and without including an action plan based on templates provided in the ECU guidance. One had used the template, but had expanded somewhat and included action plans, and four had used the template for guidance but had written more comprehensive stand-alone documents.

The adherence to the template for each policy is shown in Table 7:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy number</th>
<th>ECU Template</th>
<th>More than template</th>
<th>Definitions list</th>
<th>Action Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Minimum with some additions</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Exceeded</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Exceeded</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Exceeded</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Exceeded</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 Levels of adherence to and/or exceeding ECU template guidance

This variation across policies from just a small number of HEIs indicates that many HEIs may be writing these policies purely because of the legal requirement, rather than as a reflection of institutional commitment to diversity and a promise of embedding diversity in practice, and, as such, policies can distract from or cover up continuing inequalities within the HEI. One survey respondent described it as “a face so the uni can put it on their stonewall index” and an interview participant felt that “they put this policy in place because they have to rather than because they cared.”
One example of policies 1-4 and one of policies 5-8 are included in Appendix J (redacted).

4.3.1.1 Ensuring awareness of gender identity issues

Five of the eight policies made some level of comment on ensuring the awareness of gender identity issues. Three of the policies included the statement from the ECU template about ensuring pictures, images and publicity material would reflect the diversity of staff and students. Only one mentioned the benefit of providing role models to staff and students. The use of gender-neutral language in the development of HR and other university policies was included by one HEI. However, only Policy 8 went into greater detail of providing useful guidelines:

- **Use the name and pronoun that the person asks you to. If you are not sure what the right pronoun is, then simply ask. If you make a mistake with pronouns, correct yourself and move on. Do not make a big deal out of it.**

- **Respect people’s privacy. Do not ask what their ‘real’ or ‘birth’ name is. Trans people may be sensitive about revealing information about their past, especially if they think it might affect how they are perceived in the present.**

- **Similarly, respect their privacy. Do not tell others about a person’s trans status. If documents have to be kept that have the person’s old name and gender on them, keep them confidential.**

- **Respect people’s boundaries. If you feel it is appropriate to ask a personal question, first ask if it is ok to do so. Personal questions include anything to do with one’s sex life, anatomy and relationship status – past, present or future.**

- **Listen to the person, and ask them how they want to be regarded and**
This policy also explained the transition process, making it clear that this was an overview of a typical transition but that each individual’s situation would vary, and also provided guidelines to appropriate language.

When looking at the survey results from the 41 students who had attended the HEIs from which the policies had been selected, 20 reported experiencing instances of deadnaming, misgendering and/or being outing without consent. There was no breakdown as to whether this was from staff or other students, but does point to a potential inconsistency between policy and practice, as the guidelines described above regarding appropriate language and correct use of name and pronouns should be in place for students and staff to adhere to.

4.3.1.2 Practical issues: from accommodation to sports

Issues to do with accommodation were mentioned in four of the policies, with three of these just being a statement that any accommodation issues would be handled sensitively by the accommodation office, and Policy 7 providing more information in respect of allowing students to leave single-sex accommodation if appropriate. Policy 6 had an entire section on sporting facilities, committing to ensuring facilities were available for everyone and to supporting trans people in making use of the facilities. The policy committed to:

- Provide a mixture of changing and showering facilities, including accessible gender-neutral private cubicles and inclusive facilities.
- Ensure our staff are informed and aware of transgender issues and the needs of transgender service users.
- Deal with queries from transgender users and transgender issues in a sensitive way.
• Not tolerate transphobic behaviour or abuse by service users.

The same policy also advised that the university sports centre would provide gender-neutral changing facilities, and would ensure that staff and the sports centre had received the relevant training in order to be able to answer questions from service users, including other users of changing facilities with concerns.

Policy 8 provided a great deal of information for students on accessing the Careers Service and their commitment to supporting students to find “LGBT+ friendly employers and jobs” and support with work placements, including help with finding out whether the organisation is LGBT-friendly. This policy also had a section on supporting students who would be undertaking a study year abroad, including supporting them with investigating local laws, culture and environment and discussing safety issues relating to some countries, support with how to change passport information, and signposting to the government website and other LGBT-specific organisations with information for trans students travelling abroad.

All of the policies had a statement confirming that they would provide “appropriate facilities” for trans students. Five of these made no further comment aside from this; the other three expanded on the statement to include, for example:

Policy 4: “Trans staff, students and visitors must be able to use the bathrooms/changing rooms that they are most comfortable using without fear of harassment”

Policy 6: “The University provides single sex, inclusive and gender neutral toilet and changing facilities”.

Policy 8: “Trans students are free to use any gendered changing facility or toilet of their choice on campus, however there are gender-neutral facilities if these are preferred.”
Of the 41 students who had attended the HEIs from which the policies had been selected, 33 said their HEI had at least some gender-neutral facilities. Table 8 shows the breakdown of survey responses regarding gender-neutral facilities by HEIs for which policies were examined:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Number of survey respondents</th>
<th>Does the university have gender-neutral or trans-inclusive facilities (e.g. toilets, changing rooms?) (Number of survey responses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 Gender neutral facilities reported by survey participants at the HEIs where policies were investigated

This small sample shows no match between the amount of information on the policy and the perceived availability of gender-neutral facilities reported by survey participants.

4.3.1.3 Bullying, harassment and discrimination against trans people

All eight policies included information about bullying, harassment and discrimination, with all based around the ECU policy statement template suggestions, with statements that such behaviour would “not be tolerated” and would “be dealt with under the appropriate procedure” and that students would not be denied access to courses or denied fair and equal treatment because of their gender identity.
However, when looking at the survey results from the 41 students who had attended the HEIs from which the policies had been selected, 25 had experienced incidents of bullying, harassment or transphobia on campus, and of those, only two had reported the incidents, with five noting that they did not know how to report this. This is an example of HEI policies not being translated into practice, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.3.1.4 Monitoring trans (staff and) students

Only four policies mentioned monitoring trans staff and students. Policy 1 used the standard ECU template wording that they would “include gender identity in internal attitudinal surveys, and when monitoring complaints of harassment”; Policy 4 stated that the HEI would “consider gender identity when monitoring complaints of harassment”; Policy 5 noted that “there is no legal requirement to monitor transgender staff and students” but that they “monitor staff and students on their gender by asking them to state if they are male or female… a separate question asks staff to state whether their gender identity is the same as was assigned at birth”. This section has not been analysed further as it did not relate to the findings from the student interviews/survey, or to the research questions for this study.

4.3.1.5 Preparing and planning for a (staff member’s or) student’s transition

For this, information relating to student transition was drawn from the policies. Five policies included this information and all of these gave a good deal of information about how this would be managed, including checklists and action plans as recommended in the ECU guidance. Two of the policies went beyond the guidance to provide easy step by step plans for supporting students and developing an action plan, with Policy 7 also setting out clear guidance on responsibilities as the ‘primary contact’ for a student who is transitioning.
4.3.1.6 Supporting changes in gender presentation

All eight policies included statements on supporting changes in gender presentation, including supporting students when undergoing medical procedures, and respecting individual rights of students to be treated as the gender they specify.

The analysis also looked at how closely HEIs had followed the policy statement template on trans equality provided in the ECU guidance. It was clear that all the policies analysed had used the ECU template as the basis of their policy. Three had merely copied the relevant sections of the policy statement template. One had expanded in some areas including appendices relating to action plans, using the templates from the appendices in the ECU guidance (Pugh, 2010). Three policies had clearly used the template for guidance but had written a more substantive policy including far more information and guidance than was included on the template. Five of the policies also included a list of definitions to help readers understand terminology relating to trans people.

What this section shows is that although all the policies examined had followed the ECU guidance to some extent, only half of those had implemented processes in relation to the action plans recommended in the guidance.

4.3.2 In respect of recommendations made by Stonewall, NUS and TransEdu Scotland

Further analysis was conducted to identify how far HEIs have gone in relation to meeting the following relevant recommendations made to HEIs by Stonewall (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018c), NUS (Acciari, 2014) and TransEdu Scotland (Mckendry and Lawrence, 2017), some of which overlap:
Table 9 The main recommendations made in reports from Stonewall, NUS and TransEdu Scotland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations:</th>
<th>Stonewall</th>
<th>NUS</th>
<th>TransEdu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, bullying and harassment</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established point of contact to report abuse</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance/training for staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation of LGBT perspectives within course content</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of gender-neutral toilets and facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate changes of name and gender on student records</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only two policies had explicitly mentioned having a ‘Zero-tolerance approach’ to discrimination, bullying and harassment. Only two policies provided an ‘established point of contact’ where students could report harassment, discrimination or bullying.

All eight policies included guidance and training for staff, with three of these stating that trans issues are included in equality training, and two that specific trans awareness training is provided. Six policies included signposting to online guidance or to the HEIs Equality, Diversity and Inclusion pages. All eight policies also included information about gender-neutral toilets and/or other facilities. All but one of the policies included information regarding the facilitation of changes of name and gender on student records. Representation of LGBT+ perspectives within course content, was mentioned in four of the policies. However, as will be discussed in the next chapter, there is quite a disparity between what the policies state and the experience of the participants in this research study. The policy statements around
representation in the curriculum were somewhat vague and all were an interpretation of the ECU policy statement template, “The curriculum will be checked to ensure that it does not rely on or reinforce stereotypical assumptions about trans people, and that it does not contain transphobic material” (Pugh, 2010). Only Policy 3 included an additional statement which appeared to highlight the responsibility of the course leader, “All teaching staff should make every effort to ensure that their delivery of the curriculum is inclusive of trans identities and trans students.” It was interesting that those HEIs that had chosen to write their policy very closely based on the ECU policy statement template had included this, whereas those who had moved away from the template had not included reference to the curriculum at all.

4.4 Chapter summary

Regarding institutional facilities and administration, the survey and interviews revealed that although all HEIs need evidence of a legal name change for formal records such as examination certificates, they seemed to differ in their approach to what is required and the straightforwardness of processes to change names on ID cards, registers and data systems, and whether non-binary gender markers and/or titles are available. HEIs also differed in their provision of gender-neutral facilities, with some providing specific gender-neutral restrooms and others relying on shared use of disabled facilities.

There was less of a divide around harassment, bullying and transphobia, with most students having experienced or been aware of these difficulties but few students knowing how to report them. The interviews revealed that even where HEIs do have reporting systems for this, there is a lack of information made available to the
students for them to know what these systems are and how to access them, and a lack of trust that the issues would be dealt with appropriately.

Representation in the curriculum seemed to be lacking across most of the HEIs and across the various subjects being studied by the participants, with diversity in teaching focusing more on inclusion of women in, for example, STEM subjects, reasonable adjustments for disabled students, and on race with the ‘decolonising the curriculum’ agenda which encourages teaching provision to be more representative of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) groups and attempts to break down institutional racism. However, in an interview on the Advance HE blog (Hack, 2020), Dr Caroline Garaway, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at University College London argued that decolonisation should also recognise the disproportionate prominence of “straight white hetero upper-class men” and that it should therefore extend beyond race to include class, caste, race, gender, ability and sexuality.

Regarding inclusion/exclusion, the interviews and surveys revealed that HEIs and student unions varied in how much trans students felt included or excluded, but most agreed that the support of peers and staff was good overall and had a positive impact on their engagement at university.

When looked at in relation to a selection of HEI policies, it is quite clear that the policies are not always responding to the needs of the students, and where they are, what is in the policy is not necessarily representative of the student experience. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, examining the findings in light of the research questions posed for this study and in relation to the existing literature.
Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of this study with regard to the research questions and in relation to the existing literature. The research questions asked:

- What are the experiences of trans students in HE in respect of support services, institutional administration, peers, academics and curriculum, social experience and facilities?
- How well are HEIs supporting trans students, including the development and implementation of trans student policy?

The findings of this study showed that there is a need for HEIs to adhere to the policies they have in place, where often it appears that they are implemented as a requirement for a certain policy rather than being made for the reason of supporting the students the policy is designed to support (Ahmed, 2012). It is this apparent lack of adherence to policy – what Ahmed describes as “non-performativ[e]” (p. 117) – when it comes to trans students in HE that prompted this research project and was one of the reasons why the research looks not only at the experiences of students, but also at HEI policies and how well they are supporting trans students.

Applying a lens of cisnormativity, as described in Chapter 3, this chapter will argue that there is a disconnect between the experiences of trans students in HE and the HEI policies that should be supporting these students. Section 5.2 examines how assumptions of cisnormativity in HE are revealed in the findings of the survey and interviews. Section 5.3 exposes how feelings of segregation and otherness were reflected in the data, and section 5.4 uncovers the lack of representation for trans
students in the curriculum, with section 5.5 taking a look at how trans inclusion is specifically important for students studying health science subjects. Section 5.6 discusses the difficulties with mental health support services disclosed by survey and interview participants. Section 5.7 looks at HEI trans student policies with regards to cisnormativity in policy writing gleaned from the policies investigated in this study, and investigates the disconnect between policy and practice that was mentioned by survey and interview participants.

5.2 Assumptions of cisnormativity

Despite the lack of trans-specific research, parallels drawn in Chapter 2 with other marginalised groups in HE, for example Bunce et al. (2019) looking at the experiences of BME students in HE, and Chaudhury (2020) investigating women’s representation in business, seem to imply that the privileging of cisnormative ideologies in HE which normalise binary and unmoveable gender would result in oppressive systems that can have a negative bearing for trans students.

As described in Chapter 3, a cisnormative lens was applied to examine the marginalisation of trans students in HE, to recognise how and where cisnormative practice occurs, and to identify how these practices can be challenged. The transformative approach to this study sought to identify the imbalance of power for trans students who are learning within a privileged and mainly cisnormative environment, and to transform the lives of this marginalised group by influencing policy change to reduce inequality.

The findings from the survey and interviews discussed in the previous chapter, identified many examples of trans students experiencing institutional forms of discrimination. This is clearly shown through poor administrative processes, lack of
suitable facilities, inaction over harassment and transphobic incidents, absence and erasure of trans identities in the curriculum, and LGBT+ societies having to support students where HEI policy is lacking or not being implemented.

Frequently, it was poor administrative processes that resulted in the deadnaming and misgendering of students, and, even where administrative processes were less arduous, many HEIs failed in ensuring the changes filtered down to the academic and support staff, which resulted in continued deadnaming and misgendering of students. One interview participant, having advised the HEI of their correct name, reported the embarrassment of having signed off an email in their chosen name, only to receive a reply from a member of the HE support services staff saying “I don’t know who I’m speaking to.” Siegel (2019) suggested that the difficulties faced by trans students in making the relevant changes to their record, the resistance from HEIs to make this an easy process, and failings in university IT systems to be able to show these changes, can result in “digital misgendering” with students being ‘outed’ online. This is a clear example of where cisnormativity – how society, in this case the HE environment, is orientated around the assumption that a person’s gender matches the biological sex they were assigned at birth, and that this gender is static and unchanging, so there is no conception that a gender marker or name might need to be amended.

An example from my own professional practice showed how this became a particular issue during 2020 when, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, HEIs across the UK closed and transferred to online methods for teaching. At the institution where I work, teaching began to be provided via Microsoft Teams, and lecturers had noticed that names were showing as initials and surname and requested this be changed to show student first names. Although a reasonable request by teaching staff who are
used to addressing these students by their first names, the change was not handled
correctly by the IT team, with an inadequate Equality Impact Analysis undertaken
prior to making the change. The result meant that instead of Teams pulling the
‘preferred’ names from the university database systems, it pulled across the
‘registered’ (legal) name, effectively outing trans students (and staff) overnight.
Those trans students for whom large lecture halls had given a sense of anonymity,
where they could be known by peers as their chosen name without risk of being
outed, suddenly found themselves in online forums and workshops showing their
‘registered’ name. One student I spoke to said they cried when they saw what had
happened. This could have been avoided had the HEI acknowledged potential
issues and had better policies and procedures that identified methods of avoiding
them, and this may have reduced the likelihood of “acts of unintentional transphobia”
such as those mentioned above (Siegel, 2019, p. 4). Nine months later, the case
management system used within Student Services was updated to work with a new
HEI-wide student database, and it pulled the student names across from the
‘registered’ name and not the ‘preferred’ name. This shows that even when errors
have occurred previously, learning from those mistakes is not always taking place.

Misnaming and misgendering has been identified as symptomatic of a lack of
awareness about gender identity (Formby, 2017). Many of the problems highlighted
by participants in this study could be resolved with effective training of staff and
changes in administrative processes, to ensure trans students are not put in a
position of being misnamed or misgendered through administrative inaccuracies or
ignorance.

Simple but effective administrative processes can have a huge impact on the
wellbeing of trans students. Statements from interview and survey participants in my
study showed that in many cases in HEIs in the UK, such systems are not in place, and although information may be changed in one place, this is not filtering down to other aspects of university life.

Parks and Straka (2018) suggested that information on student data systems can have a positive or negative effect on students’ feelings of belonging, and suggested that the use of the correct names and pronouns is an “ethical responsibility inherent in every communicative act” (p. 8). The impact on trans students’ mental health was clear from some of the participant responses, whether the negative impact of being “constantly reminded of the name I didn’t choose… [resulting in] frustration and anxiety building up in me” or the more positive “The first time I held a preferred name ID, student ID in my hand, I cried, tears of joy.” Russell et al. (2018) suggested that using a transgender young person’s chosen name was shown to reduce mental health risks including depression, suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviour. An interview participant in my study reported how validated they felt when a lecturer helped them in a fight against the HEI who were insisting on a deed poll to change their name on registers and on their ID card.

Non-binary students were particularly challenged by many HEIs not having the option of a non-binary gender marker, making students in some cases choose between an inaccurate binary option, or ‘unknown’. This is an example of institutional microaggression informed by binary normativity, and of Foucault’s (1991) idea of disciplinary power, where upholding the gender binary and forcing students to choose between ‘male’ and ‘female’ gender markers, denies the existence of those falling outside of this binary. Having to negotiate cisnormative assumptions of gender binary can lead to increased negative mental health outcomes (Pulice-Farrow et al., 2019).
The excerpt from Participant 5 at the end of section 4.2.4.2, which described the different experiences they had when using the women’s and the men’s changing rooms, seemed to imply that there are different gendered expectations and that cisnormativity is applied differently to men than to women. They described how in the women’s changing rooms there were notices advising people not to take offence to anyone using the changing room that did not appear to them, to be of the ‘correct’ gender; there was also a separate cubicle for any woman who might feel uncomfortable changing in front of others. Neither of these were in the men’s changing room. Part of the reason for the poster in the women’s changing room is because of the current climate of fear around the ‘invasion’ of trans women into women’s spaces because they are considered ‘masculine’ and a ‘threat’ (White and Jenkins, 2017), as described in section 1.3. This was not considered necessary in the men’s changing room, where a trans man, having been born female, is not seen as a threat to other men in the same way (White and Jenkins, 2017).

5.3 Feelings of segregation and otherness

Feelings of segregation can be understood as a direct result of what critical theory identifies as how reality is influenced by power relations in society leading to inequality and oppression and viewing segregation through the concept of cisnormativity identified that a lack of gender-neutral toilet facilities is a problem for many trans students, who may feel uncomfortable both when using the toilet of their affirmed gender, if for example they have not commenced physical transition or are not confident enough to use this toilet, but also when using the toilet of their assigned sex, due to the gender dysphoria this causes. Having gender-neutral facilities can make it easier and less embarrassing, as well as reducing the risk of
trans students being ‘outed’. For non-binary students, a lack of gender-neutral facilities is even more challenging, as they are forced to choose a binary option, or, as reported by one participant, to not use the facilities at all until they are back in their own accommodation, which can have a knock-on negative effect on physical as well as mental health. Using cisnormativity as a theoretical lens allowed an examination of how the construction of gender binaries governs power. Foucault (2007) suggested that disciplinary power operates through the regulation of bodies and the division of space, so the division of toilet facilities into binary gendered spaces regulates trans students and could result in what he terms “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1991 p 135), where trans people are put in a position of having to comply by adjusting their bodies to match the environment for reasons of safety and to avoid “gender policing” (Bender-Baird, 2015 p 983).

This resonates with Slater et al’s discussion of segregation by gender. They suggested that separating ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ for PE and the use of binary gendered toilets starts at a young age in school, and teaches children that there are two genders that are complete opposites. In a similar way to the differences between the men’s and women’s changing rooms were highlighted by one of the interview participants in my study, noted above, Slater et al. considered the differences between the shared urinals in the men’s toilet in comparison to the separate stall cubicles in the women’s toilet, and how in this way children learn “fear, shame and embarrassment” about their bodies (Slater et al., 2016, p. 954). They also discussed the difficulties faced by trans people as they move from using one gendered toilet to the other, with regards to understanding the “gendered etiquette” in these facilities and having to “re-learn the toilet rules” when changing which toilet they use (p. 957). This is a result of what Doan (2010) referred to as “gendered expectations [that] are
an artefact of the patriarchal dichotomization of gender and have profound and painful consequences for many individuals” (p. 635).

Several participants also mentioned that where HEIs do have gender-neutral toilets, these are often just an ‘all welcome’ sign on the disabled toilet, and they explained how uncomfortable this made them, worrying that they could be stopping a disabled student from using the facilities. This was clear in participant responses in my study, as described in Chapter 4. There is little academic literature on this in terms of different marginalised groups being forced to ‘compete’ spatially. Slater and Jones (2018), in a research project looking at accessible toilet space, suggested that ‘all-gender’ toilets should be provided alongside gendered facilities but that this should not be through the re-labelling of an accessible toilet, and their 2020 article noted that as accessible toilets were the only option for some disabled people, trans participants “were often aware that their need for an all-gender space may compete with the needs of those with physical impairments, whose use of the space was portrayed as more legitimate” (Jones and Slater, 2020, p. 844). Research on trans students and intersectionality is discussed in Chapter 6 as a potential future research topic.

Although the Equality Act 2010 sets a legal requirement for public bodies, including HEIs, to make reasonable adjustments for people with any one of the protected characteristics, at the time of this study there is significant debate about the rights of trans people to use the facility of their choice, as discussed earlier in Chapter 1. The UK Government launched an open consultation in October 2020, to consider “the needs of all those with protected characteristics… based on the mix of the population and customer demand” and stated that “The merits of any best practice guidance on the provision of a gender-neutral toilet, as part of a wider balanced mix of gender-
specific male and female toilets – where space allows – will be considered, alongside the interaction with the necessary provision of access to disabled toilets” (Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, 2020).

5.4 Ignoring or disregarding trans experience in the curriculum

As well as the negative impact of poor administrative processes and facilities, as described above, leading to feelings of segregation and otherness, and the discrimination and transphobia experienced as a result of cisnormative assumptions with the resulting difficulties of misgendering and deadnaming, trans students also do not see themselves represented in the curriculum.

In respect of my study, critical theory in education was employed to question how the HE system could offer the best education to trans students by understanding the different perspectives of students who are at a disadvantage as a result of inequality in the HE environment. Chapter 3 suggested that cisnormativity in the processes of education, such as curriculum construction and presentation, can result in the erasure and silencing of trans experiences, and the further marginalisation of trans students. As indicated in Chapter 4, most participants reported poor or lacking representation of trans people in the curriculum, and in some cases, silencing or erasure of the trans voice. Creating an inclusive curriculum is high on the agenda for many HEIs in the UK as they strive to improve attainment for minority and underrepresented groups. Page (2016) noted that LGBT+ students are “at greater personal and academic risk” (p. 117) than non-LGBT+ peers. The inclusion of trans experiences and gender identity in the curriculum can help to “cut through
cisnormative silence” and reduce the “dominant and normative cisnormative organisation of power/knowledge” (McBride and Neary, 2021 p 1103).

Representation in the curriculum can help students to feel welcome, empowered and validated. Page (2016) described the impact of a teacher who integrated LGBT+ experiences into teaching and how this helped a student to feel comfortable enough to speak to that teacher for help navigating the negative policies the school had in place for using legal names. This led to a change in administrative processes, allowing the use of chosen names.

Often though, when HEIs consider the inclusive curriculum, LGBT+, including trans identities, can be left out, with the focus being more on the Widening Participation strategy which aims to improve access to and progress through HE for “students from disadvantaged backgrounds, low income households, care-leavers, mature students, disabled students and students from some ethnic groups” (UK Parliament. House of Commons, 2018). HEIs are measured on Widening Participation and The Office for Students (2020b) allocates premium funding to HEIs to support access and success for students from underrepresented groups – which includes students from areas of the country with low levels of HE participation, those with lower entry qualifications, and mature students (£150 million); part-time students (£66 million), and students who receive Disabled Students’ Allowances (£40 million). LGBT+ students are not included in Widening Participation statistics or funding strategies.

The NUS survey (Acciari, 2014) found that 51% of trans HE students surveyed had seriously considered dropping out of their course. With HEIs keen on addressing issues around the retention of minority students, more could be done to ensure trans students feel supported and safe, and that they know incidents would be dealt with effectively, and this would help to reduce the drop-out rate, but with no financial
incentive to address the need of this student group, HEIs may be less inclined to consider this.

5.5 Experience of trans students studying professional health science and social care curricula

The transformative paradigm asserts that power relations within society construct and influence reality and knowledge (Mertens, 2019). The privileging of cisgender knowledge in respect of teaching students in professional health science subjects impacts not only on what students learn, but also on what knowledge they will take with them into professional healthcare careers. Trans people often have a hard time accessing healthcare, regularly experiencing stigma, discrimination and marginalisation, and being faced with healthcare professionals who are not adequately prepared to meet their healthcare needs (De Vries et al., 2020). Negative healthcare experiences can also include subtle microaggressions and cisnormative processes, and these can make trans patients feel invalidated and unwelcome (De Vries et al., 2020).

Therefore of particular concern in this study were the students reporting poor or lacking representation in professional health science and social care subjects, including nursing and social work. These students may work with transgender clients/patients when on placement and in their working role after completing their degree, so the inclusion of trans identities in the curriculum is essential, and yet appeared to be mostly absent, according to the survey and interview participants. Three of the seven interview participants were studying in this area (social work, paramedic science and health sciences). One participant gave their experiences from all sides – as a health sciences student, as a practitioner and as a trans patient,
and explained that practitioners “need to feel confident with their language… how they should talk to people, what ward people should go on” but that this teaching is lacking, as is effective training of teaching staff, particularly those who have been in the profession for a long time. They said practitioners need to “feel okay not knowing” and feel confident to ask; to explain if they are not familiar with treating trans people, to ask what pronouns to use; to ask if there is anything they need to know. The participant described practitioners “treading on eggshells” around trans people, in fear of saying or doing the wrong thing. On the other hand, they explained that as a person who transitioned some years ago, the reason they might see a doctor now is most likely nothing to do with being trans, and that practitioners need to learn “when it is a thing and where you should pay attention to it, and where is might be causing underlying problems or there might be a need to ask very particular questions, and when that’s inappropriate” (Participant 7).

Similarly, the social work student was concerned that every person on their cohort would at some point have to deal with trans people, and having been shown little respect by their own lecturers and classmates with regards to the refusal to use their correct gender and pronouns, they felt it was very important that this should be included more actively in the curriculum. This was interesting in relation to research by Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019) which looked at the experiences of LGBT+ social work students in the USA and found a mixture of marginalisation and harmful discourse, including enforcing cisgender normativity, and issues with the language being used including misgendering students and clients.

It was only the paramedic science student who reported more positive inclusion, describing having had lectures on communication and respecting everyone’s
identities. This student noted how proud they felt when this was taught and how nice it was to hear and see positive reactions from classmates.

5.6 HEI mental health support services

Without acknowledging that assumptions of cisnormativity exist, trans students may face inequalities in accessing and benefitting from HEI support services. Institutional cisnormativity as described in Chapter 3 and discussed above, is often embedded in the structure, culture and processes of HE, including “traditions, facilities, administrative practices, classroom habits, curriculum content and everyday interactions” (Frohard-Dourlent, 2016). This has a negative effect on trans students, often resulting in them experiencing higher rates of marginalisation and harassment, which impacts upon mental health and mental wellbeing.

One of the interview participants mentioned difficulties with accessing counselling services at university due to staff not understanding their needs, and said that despite the LGBT+ society running training sessions, including one on sexual orientation and one on gender identity, they knew of students reporting difficulties where counsellors blamed all their problems and trauma on being gay or being trans, when that was not the issue at all, and even that in accessing the counselling service themself, found they were being asked about transitioning and how they (the counsellor) can help trans students, rather than receiving the support they were attending for. Given the high number of students with mental health difficulties in HE currently and the pressure on HEIs to provide effective mental health support, more could be done to train mental health advisers and counsellors to understand trans students’ specific needs. A report by the Office for Students (2019) noted that the needs of students with mental health conditions in comparison to the general
population, need to be taken into account. For example, they may be living away from home for the first time; they may be juggling study and work in order to meet the financial needs of university study, and of particular interest in this case, the report identified how intersectionality with other factors such as ethnicity and sexuality could impact on outcomes and support for students.

The survey included demographic questions including one on disability. Figure 15 shows that 71 participants reported mental health difficulties and 33 reported autistic spectrum conditions.

![Bar chart showing number of survey participants indicating disability](chart.png)

**Figure 15 Number of survey participants indicating disability**

Trans students are often at higher risk of mental health difficulties due to a number of factors, including having experienced social exclusion, discrimination and violence, or having kept their identity hidden. Previous research in the USA (Swanbrow Becker et al., 2017) had identified that trans students were far more likely than LGB and cisgender peers to report a history of trauma, a history of suicidal ideation and a history suicide attempts, as shown in Figure 16 below:
Smithies and Byrom (2018), discussing the results of their survey of LGBT+ HE students and staff in the UK, which included responses from 103 trans students, reported that 93% of respondents agreed that young LGBTQ+ people have higher rates of poor mental health, self-harm and suicide than their non-LGBTQ+ peers, but that most would seek support from friends in preference to mental health professionals. A high proportion (79%) of students they surveyed, agreed there was a need for LGBTQ+ specific support at university.

For those students with autistic spectrum conditions, poor mental health can be an even greater risk, and findings from a questionnaire study by Murphy et al. (2020) suggested that depression and anxiety symptoms in autistic-trans individuals was higher than in those who were trans but not autistic, or cis and autistic. As noted in Chapter 4, there is an over-representation of people with autistic traits in trans populations compared to cisgender populations (Murphy et al., 2020).
With waiting times for first appointment referrals to Gender Identity Clinics across the UK high – 37-60 weeks in England, 24-30 weeks in Wales, 31-36 weeks in Scotland, 47 weeks in Northern Ireland (Gender Construction Kit, 2021) – access to specialist support is limited, meaning trans students may need to receive support elsewhere, so it is particularly problematic if those services available to HE students are not able to provide suitable support to trans students.

Reducing the impact of cisnormativity, is likely to have a positive effect on students’ mental health and educational achievement (McGlashan and Fitzpatrick, 2018). The lack of knowledge within HEI support services with regards to trans students’ mental health indicates a widespread cisnormative approach to student support that needs to be addressed in order to ensure this student group is able to receive effective assistance when needed.

5.7 Trans student policy

The aim of critical theory is to not only understand situations, but to change them (Fischer and Tepe, 2011), and as such this research has identified how cisnormativity needs to be addressed by HEIs. Chapter 3 introduced cisnormativity as a concept through which to better understand the “privileging of a non-trans norm” (Pyne, 2011 p 129), and understanding the impact of institutional cisnormativity will help to change the situation for trans students in HE. Reframing policies to work beyond the minimum requirements to conceptualise trans inclusivity as integral to the HEIs’ mission, and ensuring that commitments are “performative” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 116) – that they will do what they say and are more than a tick-box exercise – can help to reduce disparities in power and domination.
5.7.1 Institutional cisnormativity in policy writing

Where Ahmed (2012, p33) talked about “institutional whiteness” – the normalisation of whiteness and “structural white supremacy” (Joseph-Salisbury, 2019, p3) – my study identifies ‘institutional cisnormativity’ in HE policies and how this marginalises and oppresses trans students. None of the policies analysed in this study stated that trans staff or students had been consulted when writing the policy. From my own experience in the HEI where I work, it is only a recent (2020) practice for staff networks (e.g. Staff LGBT+ Network, Women’s Network, Disability Staff Network and BAME Staff Network) to be consulted as part of an Equality Impact Assessment when new policies are being written and about changes to policy wordings. In addition, Table 10 shows that only two of the policies investigated in my study had been written or reviewed within the past year (policies were accessed in February 2020), with some showing planned review dates that had passed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Date produced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transgender Equality Policy Statement for students and staff</td>
<td>Written jointly with HR, Trade Unions, Student Support Services and the Director of Equality</td>
<td>April 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans Equality Policy Statement</td>
<td>Equality, Diversity &amp; Inclusion Team</td>
<td>July 2019 to be reviewed annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender and gender identity equality policy: developing an inclusive approach</td>
<td>Equality, Diversity &amp; Inclusion</td>
<td>May 2017 to be reviewed May 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans Inclusion Policy Statement</td>
<td>HR and EDI team</td>
<td>Undated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the survey respondents, most (96 out of 164 students) indicated that they did not know whether their HEI had a dedicated trans student policy. Two noted that their HEIs were working with the student union and LGBT+ Society to create new trans policies. One interview participant described how policies and student information is only available on the intranet “behind a log-in wall” and how the trans information page was clearly outdated in the language used: “it was using like, transsexual, transvestite… hermaphrodite as well… just completely the wrong language” and how the LGBT+ Society had worked with the university to get the information updated and changed. These are examples of how potentially LGBT+ societies and student union officers can push for change when HEIs are not forthcoming with updating policies, and through cooperation can have positive input into improving policies and procedures.
5.7.2 Policy versus practice

Several participants talked about a disconnect between policy and practice, with policy recommendations often not being backed up by change. They also commented on other HEI policies not accounting for trans people, for example in use of gender binaries or inconsideration of trans needs. This indicates an example of the cisnormativity/gender binarism embedded in the system for many HEIs.

The first line on the ECU policy statement template, stated “[Institution name] recognises that there can be differences between physical sex and gender identity/expression” (Pugh, 2010, p. 40), yet this sentence was left out of six of the eight policies investigated. Given the debates around sex and gender and the trans-exclusive radical feminist/gender critical feminist view that biological sex and gender identity are inseparable, as discussed in section 1.3, and the potential impact on HE given the call from a small group of academics to revoke membership of the Stonewall Diversity Champions programme over worries about losing the academic right to contest the notion of gender identity discussed in section 1.4, this is concerning. HEIs may be reluctant to fully commit to the recommended policies for supporting trans students, potentially because of sympathy for trans-exclusionary radical/gender critical feminist views, or fear of antagonising staff who hold these views. An example of such a backlash occurred at the HEI where I work, when the Student Services Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer sent out an email to the Deputy Directors of Divisions with regards to a new diversity training module on which all students would be automatically enrolled. A response was received from a small number of teaching staff that they were not prepared to promote the module to students because they did not agree with presenting as incontestable fact what they viewed as questions open to legitimate debate, and that the module in effect was
telling students that there is only one acceptable way to think about these questions. One staff member referred as an example to the pronoun advice (where the HEI had suggested staff members declare their pronouns on email signatures). What made the situation worse was that the email thread was unfolding following the sharing of the original email to all staff in an academic division without thought for the harmful impact of this on trans or non-binary colleagues within that division.

Participants of both the survey and interviews had identified challenges with administrative processes, in particular the processes required to change names and gender markers on university records. Most found this a demanding task, either because the information on how to make these changes was not clear or not easy to find, or because of the complex administrative hoops they were required to jump through, and in some cases, because documentation such as deed poll or Gender Recognition Certificates were being requested. Policies 1-4, which were those that had based their policy on the minimum requirements of the ECU policy statement template, stated only that any requests to change name and gender records would be handled promptly, with no information on how to go about this or what would be required. Policies 5-8, which were those that included an action plan, had this as part of the action plan as being something the trans student could do with the support of a dedicated member of staff. However, none of the research participants mentioned having had an action plan or a dedicated staff member to help them through these processes. This is an example of having policies and procedures in place that are not necessarily used, and represents that disconnect between policy and practice identified by some participants.

As well as statements on gender neutral facilities, as described in section 4.3.1, one policy also included a statement on how the university would manage any concerns
raised by users of these facilities regarding the presence of an individual in a single sex facility. This HEI’s policy also had a section on the university’s sports facilities and access to sport, with a commitment to providing sports and leisure facilities for everyone and supporting trans users through the provision of a mixture of gender-neutral, private and inclusive changing and showering facilities, and training for staff to be aware of trans service user needs. This section also included details of how managers and staff would deal with situations if approached by other users with concerns. In comparison, another of the policies examined was less accommodating, stating that a trans person should have “access to ‘men-only’ and ‘women-only’ areas according to their gender identity, with access to gender-neutral toilet facilities “wherever this can be reasonably accommodated”. This policy also had a section on single-sex accommodation and how it would ensure the correct form of accommodation was allocated, with flexibility for those transitioning once already allocated accommodation. Regarding toilet facilities, one policy gave links to the university website to view maps of where gender-neutral toilets could be located. This policy also included a statement that although some of these were also disabled facilities, “trans students are not restricted to using disabled toilets, nor is it the intention to imply that identifying as trans is a disability.” Another policy included information about campus sporting facilities, with users “free to use any gendered changing or toilet facility of their choice” and also noting that gender-neutral facilities were also available. However, as all interview participants and many of the survey responses mentioned a lack of gender-neutral toilets as being an issue, and some participants also described discomfort with having to share disability-accessible facilities, this is another example of where policy does not appear to be translating into practice. Some non-binary participants also described the unnecessary anxiety
they face when there are no gender-neutral options available. Having gender-neutral facilities is an easy step for HEIs to make towards inclusivity and can go some way towards reducing negative impacts of the Foucauldian regulation of bodies in university spaces, discussed in Chapter 3. Accommodation was not discussed as part of the survey or interviews, although this is included in the policy statements and ECU guidance.

Regarding harassment, bullying and transphobia, the main issues raised by survey participants were the lack of information on how to report incidents, and a lack of trust in the university procedures that such incidents would be dealt with or even believed. The ECU policy statement template includes, under this category, that the HEI would not discriminate on grounds of gender identity; that transphobic abuse, harassment or bullying would not be tolerated; that students would not be denied access to courses/progression to other courses because of their gender identity; and that transphobic propaganda (written materials, graffiti, music or speeches) would not be tolerated. All eight policies included the first two regarding discrimination and transphobic abuse/harassment/bullying. However, only five policies included the statement regarding students not being denied access to courses/course progression, and only four policies included the statement about transphobic propaganda. As this last point includes speeches under ‘transphobic propaganda’, this is an area of concern in light of current debates about free speech and academic freedom described in section 1.4.

As well as the administrative processes, improvements to reporting processes are key to supporting trans students. Many of the participants who had either experienced harassment, bullying or transphobia, or who knew other students who had, were either unaware of how to report this, or were not confident in the
processes for reporting or that they would be taken seriously. One participant, who was president of the LGBT+ Society at their university, explained that they were not even fully aware of the correct reporting processes. This lack of information being shared with those groups that directly support students, and are often the first port of call in such circumstances, is something that can be addressed through improved policy and procedures.

Many of the participants discussed the lack of trans representation in the curriculum, and how this diminishes feelings of inclusion. As mentioned previously, creating an inclusive curriculum is high on the agenda for many HEIs in the UK as they strive to improve attainment for minority and underrepresented groups. However, trans inclusion appears to be far from included in this. This was noticeable by its absence in the policy statements. The ECU guidance includes the following: “The curriculum will be checked to ensure that it does not rely on or reinforce stereotypical assumptions about trans people, and that it does not contain transphobic material… Curriculum provision is not based on gender stereotypical assumptions or imagery.” Variations on these statements were included in policies 1-4, which were the four policies that had used the ECU template with little change. However, there was no mention of curriculum in policies 5-8, which was surprising given how much more detail these policies had gone into in other areas. It could be argued that, as previously mentioned, HEIs may be reluctant to commit to this for fear of antagonising staff who hold trans-exclusionary radical/gender critical feminist views. This is a substantial area for improvement, and will be discussed in Chapter 6.

The other main area discussed by participants was support from their HEIs. Some participants had reported positive experiences, with academic and support staff helping them to achieve name changes on the HEI systems, and many stories of
staff being understanding and accommodating of students’ names and pronouns. However, there were other more negative and invalidating experiences, ranging from being purposefully deadnamed and misgendered by teaching staff, through “transphobia by ignorance” (survey response), to the lack of understanding from counselling services, as described in section 5.6. Policies 1, 2 and 4 used the bare minimum from the ECU template, confirming that trans students would “receive support to meet their needs” if undergoing surgical or medical procedures. For policy 3, this was one area it had expanded on, including recognising “the potential psychological impacts of gender identity affirmation” and ensuring “access to support for the wellbeing and mental health of trans students and staff”. Policies 5-8 included extensive action plans; policy 5 made no mention of the provision of mental health support or counselling, but policies 6-8 did include information on how to access these services. However, with the concerns raised over the ability of counselling and mental health services to provide appropriate support for trans students, this is another area that should be considered for improvement, and will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

The eight policies were investigated alongside a selection of survey responses from some of the participants who attended these HEIs, the results of which can be seen in Tables 11 and 12. Two survey respondents were picked at random for each of the eight HEIs whose policies had been included in this study, and responses arranged according to some of the main themes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy No</th>
<th>Name change requested?</th>
<th>Information filtered down?</th>
<th>Gender Neutral toilets?</th>
<th>Trans policy in place?</th>
<th>Level of admin staff knowledge</th>
<th>Level of academic staff knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>No/a</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Partially</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Selection of survey information sorted by policy in respect of institutional facilities and administration.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy No</th>
<th>Bullying, harassment, transphobia experienced?</th>
<th>Was this reported?</th>
<th>Was this dealt with?</th>
<th>Curriculum representation?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Misgendering</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Included &amp; respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Misgendering,outed without consent, anti-trans stickers, heckling at trans conference</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ignored/not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Outed without consent, deadnaming</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Ignored/not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Outed without consent, deadnaming, transphobic comments in class not challenged</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Wouldn't know how</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Ignored/not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Outed without consent, misgendering</td>
<td>Wouldn't know how</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Misgendering, rumours/gossip</td>
<td>Wouldn't know how</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Ignored/not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Misgendering</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Included &amp; respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rumours/gossip</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Ignored/not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Deadnaming, cyber bullying</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cyber bullying</td>
<td>Wouldn't know how</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Included &amp; respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Ignored/not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Outed without consent</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Included &amp; respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Ignored/not mentioned</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12 Selection of survey information sorted by policy in respect of harassment/bullying/transphobia and representation in the curriculum.

There is no real relationship between the action/inaction of those HEIs with basic policies in place (policies 1-4), and those with more thorough policies (policies 5-8), and for some, different experiences were reported by students within the same HEI.
Although this is only a small sample, the disparity suggests that, despite having policies in place, these policies are either not being implemented at all, or are not being adhered to uniformly.

5.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has identified how the institutional systems of power identified by Frohard-Dourlent (2016) embed cisnormativity into everyday processes and interactions, and these assumptions of cisnormativity were highlighted by the responses of interview and survey participants and how feelings of inclusion and exclusion, lack of representation in the curriculum, and lack of support for mental health difficulties were key issues revealed by the data.

Analysis of a selection of HEI policies corroborated the participants’ concerns about a disconnect between what is said in the policies and what actually happens. With HEIs keen to improve attainment and retention for underrepresented groups, they need to widen their focus to not just include those areas in which they are measured, or for which they obtain additional funding, but to include all underrepresented and minority groups. The next chapter suggests recommendations for how this might be implemented and the benefits to the HEIs of being fully inclusive, rather than ‘ticking boxes’.
Chapter 6 Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

Critical theory in education, used in the context of this study, questions HE systems, policies and practices and considers how HEIs can offer the best education and educational experience to all students by understanding the different perspectives of trans students who are at a disadvantage as a result of inequality in society, and subsequently in the HEI environment. This chapter aims to draw conclusions from the research findings. Section 6.2 examines how this study has answered the research questions and the aims and objectives set out at the start. Section 6.3 provides a discussion of the contribution of the findings to knowledge in the field. Section 6.4 focuses on the implication of the findings for professional practice and policy in HE environments. Section 6.5 reflects on the research process and gives examples of how it has already had an impact on professional practice. Section 6.6 considers any limitations to the current study, and potential for future research. The final section offers a conclusion summarising the thesis.

6.2 Answering the research questions

The main aims of this study were to identify any obstacles encountered by trans students in HE in the UK, and identify policy and procedure changes for HEIs to address any areas of concern.

The questions driving my research were:
• What are the experiences of trans students in HE in respect of support services, institutional administration, peers, academics and curriculum, social experience and facilities?

• How well are HEIs supporting trans students, including the development and implementation of trans student policy?

The findings of this study echoed some of the claims made by earlier literature with regards to a need for HEIs to improve the experiences of trans students. For example, it identified harassment of trans students in HE (Marzetti, 2018) (Storrie and Rohleder, 2018); the impact of poor administrative processes on trans students in HE (Seelman, 2014) (Goldberg and Kuvalanka, 2018) (Parks and Straka, 2018); and problems with trans-exclusive facilities in HE (Marzetti, 2018) (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018c).

This study also identified significant gaps in the previous literature, such as the need for:

• UK-specific research that provides data from multiple HEIs across the UK.

• Research that is trans student-specific rather than part of research into LGBT+ students or part of research into trans individuals in wider society.

• Research into the lack of trans representation in the curriculum, in particular with regards to students completing professional health care subjects.

• Research into trans student experiences alongside an investigation of the appropriateness of HEI trans student policies to address issues.

• Consideration of the impact of cisnormativity in HE.
• The apparent disconnect between policy and practice in HEIs in the UK. This study has explored these areas and aimed to fill these gaps. Through surveys and interviews with trans students in HE across the UK, this study has identified obstacles encountered by these students, and how these lead to feelings of segregation and otherness; it has examined the lack of representation and the silencing of the trans voice in the curriculum, and the particular impact this has when teaching professional health science subjects; it has also looked at how the power of cisnormativity influences across student life, from administration and facilities, to the provision of suitable mental health services. Through examination of HEI policies in light of recommendations from the Equality Challenge Unit (Pugh, 2010) and guidance from non-governmental organisations (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018c) (Acciari, 2014) (McKendry and Lawrence, 2017), this study has identified where policy does not reflect practice, and has recommended policy and procedure changes for HEIs to address any areas of concern, with an aim of improving the experiences and the study environment for trans students in HE in the UK.

6.3 Contribution of the findings to knowledge in the field

This study was built on existing research, offering an insight into the lived experiences of trans students in HE in the UK as a distinct group, which is an area that is currently under-researched. It built on the main themes identified in the literature – harassment, bullying and transphobia; inclusion/exclusion; representation in the curriculum; and institutional facilities and administration – and identified the obstacles encountered by trans students, and discussed policy and procedure measures that could address areas of concern. The research provided insights into
the detrimental effect of poor or lacking policy and procedures, as well as the positive effect when supportive practices are in place.

The findings show that issues identified in previous research in the USA (e.g. Seelman, 2014; Goldberg and Kuvalanka, 2018) indicating how improvements to administrative processes and facilities can make campuses more inclusive for trans students, are also salient and relevant in the UK, and show that these simple and seemingly small changes can make a significant difference to the HE experience of trans students. The findings also support previous research regarding the impact of misgendering at one UK HEI (Hopkins et al. 2018) and identify how this is happening in HEIs across the UK and how this relates to power relations when this is being enacted by or unchallenged by HE staff. The argument that “institutional cisheteronormativity” shapes the experiences of trans students (Marzetti, 2018, p. 702) is also supported by the findings of this study, especially in respect of the cismormative assumptions in both policy and practice. The findings also support previous research (e.g. Formby, 2017) with respect to the lack of trans representation in the curriculum, and identify where USA research on the potential dangers of the lack of teaching around trans experiences in professional health sciences subjects (e.g. Atteberry-Ash et al., 2019) are pertinent to trans students in UK professional health science degrees. The findings also identify additional difficulties with regards to support services for trans students in HE, specifically regarding the provision of mental health support and counselling, which had been recognised in previous research in the USA (e.g. Goldberg et al., 2019).

Many of the previous studies on trans students have taken place in single UK HEIs or outside of the UK. The unique contribution of this thesis is in bridging key gaps in research by providing UK-specific research into the lived experiences of trans HE
students across the UK, and the thesis demonstrates the importance of this investigation at a time when the numbers of people identifying as trans are increasing, their experiences and ‘existence’ (Fiani and Han, 2018) are being debated, and they are still facing transphobia in various settings. To date, no study has provided an investigation into the experiences of trans students across the HE environment in the UK and an examination of how these experiences are being met through policy and procedure.

The findings of this study reveal the impact of institutional cisnormativity across the HE environment. In Chapter 3, I discussed how critical theory in education aims to understand the experiences and perspectives of marginalised and oppressed student groups, and to contest the disparities arising as a result of unbalanced power relations, and my study has identified how these power relations impact on the experiences of trans students. Section 6.4 will examine the implications for professional practice and policy with an aim to reducing the power imbalance and reducing inequality.

6.4 Implications for professional practice and policy in HE

6.4.1 Improving administration and facilities

Difficulties relating to institutional facilities and administration was mentioned by the majority of participants in this study, and is arguably the easiest aspect for HEIs to address as it relates to physical and administrative changes that can be made and that are visible. Poor administrative processes can lead to a multitude of difficulties for trans HE students. This can include ID cards being printed in the wrong name; student data records and registers showing their birth name; and university email addresses and IT systems including a student’s legal registered name, which may be
different to the name they are known as. This can lead to lecturers potentially outing trans students by using incorrect names and pronouns if the computer systems relied on do not reflect the student’s correct gender identity. These are symptoms of the power imbalance within a privileged cisnormative society, discussed in Chapter 3, where assumptions of cisnormativity inform the development of IT and reporting systems. The negative impact of these processes could be avoided by the implementation of systems and procedures to ensure that, for example, students have the option to have a different name shown on data systems, ID cards and registers, and importantly, that they are aware of this option and how to request it; by enabling email addresses to be changed where names or initials are used in these (or, considering an email system that does not use names); and by ensuring that this could be done without the need for a formal name change, which should only be required to update the official data systems used for registration and graduation processes. Adding a gender identity field would address both the HEIs’ legal requirement to record a student’s sex/gender whilst enabling students the freedom to have how they identify acknowledged and validated. However, as well as having these systems in place, teaching and administration staff need to check these systems regularly, not relying on the information available at the start of the term on the assumption that this will not change. This is important in protecting students’ power of expression (Swanbrow Becker, 2019) and not doing so emphasises how cisnormativity assumes unchanging identity.

Procedures should be consistent with clear processes for trans students to change their name and pronouns easily. Some participants in this study acknowledged that the process was easy, but only once they had found out how to request the change – information that was not made readily available.
Poor administrative processes can be easily rectified and at a reasonable financial cost to the HEI. In many cases, a proper understanding of the law and how this is applied to administrative processes, such as changes to name and/or gender identifiers, would go a long way to support many trans students who are currently fighting against systems which require formal deed poll documentation, or in one case in the study, a Gender Recognition Certificate, to change how personal details are displayed on the university data systems. There is no legal reason why non-formal information such as data systems and student ID cards cannot be changed with self-identification, and many HEIs, as shown in the findings, are changing these details without question; it is only the formal registration and reporting systems, such as required for institutional reporting and graduation, that should require legal documentation when requesting a change of name/gender.

Problems arising from different parts of the institution not properly liaising with others clearly needs to be addressed with better processes and procedures. Some of the participant responses highlighted how, if systems had been changed when the participant first advised name and/or gender changes, difficulties which resulted in a great deal of anxiety, could have been avoided.

The provision of gender-neutral toilets is important for all trans students as it allows those whose appearance may not match the gender they identify as a safe environment, and those who identify outside of the gender binary a space that they can use without adding to gender dysphoria by having to choose a binary option that does not correspond to their identity. Many HEIs take the ‘easy option’ of designating disabled facilities as the gender-neutral option. Whilst providing a choice for trans students, this is also potentially diminishing choice for another marginalised group for whom access to these facilities is essential. What is needed are dedicated facilities,
and this is something that should certainly be considered when planning new-build or refurbishment projects. One interview participant (pronouns they/them) described how supportive this can be:

“For once I didn’t feel out of place… [previously] I always had to make a decision and I really hated that, you know, I had to either go to the women’s restroom and feel wrong, or go to the men’s restroom and feel even more wrong because, you know, I can’t pee standing… It really comes down to these very detailed personal experiences… I do appreciate the gender-neutral restroom.” (Participant 2).

This extract clearly shows the added and unnecessary anxiety faced by non-binary students in particular, when there are no gender-neutral options available. Critical theory has been used in this study to question the normalisation of binary and unmovable gender and how this results in oppressive social systems; gender-neutral facilities empower non-binary students as well as providing an alternative to binary trans students who may still experience potential harassment or suspicion from others when using facilities that align to their gender identity.

6.4.2 Mental health support, harassment reporting and inclusion

For trans students, adjusting to university life can be hard and this can be exacerbated by a lack of understanding of their identities. Swanbrow Becker et al. (2017) suggested that ingrained cisnormativity can make the campus climate “hostile” and exclusive, as the needs of trans students are not being met. Trans students are at a higher risk of mental health difficulties (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018a) with a lack of suitable gender-neutral facilities and poor administration adding to the stresses that this student group faces. Yet participants of this study reported feeling unsupported by HEIs with regards to mental health and counselling support.
The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) acknowledged that, despite the higher rate of mental health concerns among trans students, there is a lack of understanding and experience among counsellors in supporting this student group (Swanbrow Becker, 2019) and suggested that, in addition to the stressors experienced by all HE students, trans students have additional complications to deal with, including lack of social support (including rejection by family, religion and friends); managing an outward appearance that may not correspond with their identity; and added financial difficulties, especially if they have no family support. Counselling and mental health services are essential to support trans students, but those providing the support must have an understanding of the difficulties they may be experiencing. Participants in this study had reported a mistrust of counselling services, having been told that their problems were because they were trans, or having spent sessions answering the counsellor’s questions about being trans rather than receiving support. Trust therefore needs to be built. Counsellors and mental health practitioners need to understand that although trans students may be at a higher risk of mental health difficulties, the reason for requesting support may not always stem from this, and, in these cases, being trans is not relevant to the conversation. However, where it is relevant, the staff supporting these students need to understand their needs and the additional stressors that they experience. Swanbrow Becker (2019) suggested that transgender students “come to the therapy room with a history of discrimination, rejection, and abuse” and that practitioners should use “trauma-informed care”. They also suggested that trans students may require more counselling sessions over longer periods of time, so where HEIs implement a blanket number of sessions for students, this could be reviewed. Counsellors can help trans students to feel listened to and validated, but
the university environment also needs to change in order for them to thrive on campus.

Participants also reported feeling unsupported with regards to reporting harassment/bullying/transphobic incidents, or a lack of confidence in how well the HEI would deal with the issue if reported. It was discussed in Chapter 1 how the move away from home made by many students attending HE provides them with an opportunity to explore questions they may have about their assigned gender (Beemyn, 2003), and that being able to experiment with how they feel in a safe environment is key. The identification in this study of trans students experiencing comments/harassment from staff suggests that although the behaviour of students may not always be directly under the control of the HEIs, especially in social spaces, staff behaviour is a key issue that needs to be addressed, and there is an apparent need for some HEIs to address policy/practice in order to ensure appropriate staff behaviour.

Many HEIs are now developing online reporting systems, but students need to be aware of these processes, and evidence from this study showed that this is not the case. Several interview participants said they were aware of systems in place to report bullying due to posters around campus, but none were sure of how to go about reporting incidents. There needs to be better communication on how such incidents can be reported, as well as confidence that incidents will be dealt with appropriately, and this includes ensuring that those who trans students might turn to, such as student union officers, LGBT+ student societies and networks, personal tutors and student support workers, are aware of reporting processes. This will support not only trans students, but other marginalised groups who are at higher risk of experiencing such incidents.
Helping trans students to feel included and visible can help them to feel more comfortable in accessing support. Hafford-Letchfield et al. (2018) suggested that “institutions need to make room for students from different gender identities and communicate a sense of welcome” (p. 11). Some adjustments are easy: a page on the website dedicated to trans support, listing and linking to trans support within and external to the university and including information on how to report incidents, can be useful and can transfer power to those students in enabling them to report incidents independently. If linked to from other student support pages, this becomes easier to locate. Visible support for trans students by way of signs indicating that an office or location is a ‘safe space’, and as mentioned by one interview participant, staff wearing rainbow lanyards to identify that they are allies to the LGBT+ community can help trans students to feel welcome, included and validated. Support for trans-specific awareness days such as Trans Day of Visibility (31st March) and Trans Awareness Month (November) as well as LGBT+ awareness events such as Pride Month (June) is also helpful to create a trans-inclusive environment on campus, but these need to be given full HEI backing and not just left to the student unions and LGBT+ network groups to arrange. Other adjustments may need to be made at policy level, and this is discussed in section 6.4.5.

6.4.3 Creating an inclusive curriculum

The theoretical framework employed in this study guided an investigation into the experiences of trans HE students in the UK and the power imbalance of learning within a privileged cisnormative society. The Higher Education Academy (Morgan and Houghton, 2011) produced a guide to support the HE sector in creating an inclusive curriculum, both generically and in subject-specific ways, and the introductory section described what was then the “new equality legislation” of the
Equality Act 2010 as being a key driving force for embedding inclusive practice into curriculum design. However, the guide included no specific guidance relating to the inclusion of trans students, focusing far more on the inclusion of students with disabilities, intensifying what could be seen as the privileging of one marginalised group over another.

To create an inclusive HE curriculum will require effort on behalf of those involved in curriculum design to critically examine cisnormativity within the curriculum, and on behalf of the institutions to address resistance to anti-oppressive change in teaching practices, particularly in light of the academic freedom arguments discussed in Chapter 1. It will also require working collaboratively with trans students about decisions being made around inclusive teaching, to ensure their needs are being met in an appropriate manner, and this will be discussed further in the next section.

Small gestures around language in the teaching environment can go a long way to making trans students feel validated, by using language that does not assume gender identity and by not taking pronouns for granted. Resistance to using transphobic texts, language, pedagogies and curricula should be constant and persistent. Removing the assumption that all students share common identities and the tendency to ignore differences, and instead working to learn about, acknowledge and affirm differences and tailor teaching to the specifics of the student population. Avoiding repetition of privileged knowledge and practices will help to reduce oppression; “What is oppressive is having to experience, again and again, the privileging of only certain ways of identifying, thinking, or relating to others” (Kumashiro, 2002). The cisnormative curriculum will normalise and privilege cisgender students whilst marginalising trans students.
All HE students are individuals who are already invested in their thoughts, beliefs, and desires. The inclusive curriculum therefore needs to address not only a lack of knowledge, but a resistance to knowledge, and in particular a resistance to any knowledge that disrupts what the students already know.

6.4.3.1 Specific considerations for professional health sciences curricula

Difficulties identified in the literature in Chapter 2 were also borne out by some of the data collected in this study, where participants reported experiences of invalidating mental health care and their trans identity being blamed for difficulties they may be having, and also students who felt they were expected to explain their identities before they were able to benefit from support services. But my study also reported that some of the participants who were studying professional health science subjects were not being provided with the ‘tools’ to help them work with and respect trans people they might encounter in the professional environment, whether on placement or once qualified. Three of the seven interview participants were studying such courses (social work, paramedic science and professional health science), and of these, two reported not having received any training related to supporting gender-diverse patients. From the survey, 13 participants were from professional health science courses (medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, paramedic science, pharmacy, social work and physiotherapy) and of these, two reported feeling represented in the curriculum, with eight reporting that trans issues, people and their achievements were either ignored/not mentioned, or referred to negatively. These are, of course, small numbers from which to make claims that there are gaps in the professional health sciences curricula, but because it has also been identified in other academic studies (for example, Atteberry-Ash et al. (2019), Click et al. (2020),
De Vries et al. (2020), Jurček et al. (2020)), it is something that would warrant further investigation.

Improving the curriculum in these areas will help to reduce the variation that exists in health and mental health care and improve the experiences of trans people. It is important that professional health sciences students learn about how to address and talk to trans people, the value of affirming language, and how to recognise and address prejudice and bias. Better knowledge of the specific barriers and experiences that trans patients will have when accessing health and social care services, as well as the understanding that being trans is not always the number one reason for accessing medical or mental health care are important in reducing the invalidation and invisibility that trans people frequently face. Due to a lack of gender-affirming healthcare teaching, health professionals are often not adequately prepared to provide appropriate support to trans patients (De Vries et al., 2020). In a societal climate where trans people experience hostility and vulnerability, practitioners who are supportive, non-discriminatory and culturally competent are more important than ever.

Many of the professional health sciences courses in the UK are bound by accreditation policies, and although they highlight diversity, they are not always inclusive of trans identities specifically, so inclusion of this teaching, if not a requirement for the professional body, needs to be implemented by the HEI. For example, the standards of education and training guidance for courses regulated by the Health & Care Professionals Council includes equality and diversity information with regards to the admissions process for students entering the course, and ensuring methods are in place for students who feel they have been discriminated
against, but nothing about including diversity training in the curriculum itself (Health and Care Professions Council, 2017).

A good place for HEIs to start, is with organisations such as 16point6 who are working with the Trans NHS Staff Network to make nursing and medical school teaching fully inclusive of trans and non-binary people (16point6, no date), and TransActual, who have developed guides for GPs, GP surgery staff, and for trans people when visiting their doctor, which have been written in consultation with GPs and trans patients (TransActual, no date). The book *Transgender Health: A practitioners guide to binary and non-binary trans patient care* (Vincent, 2018a) provides a resource for students, educators and practitioners and explains not only the support for trans patients with regards to gender transition, but also how to support trans patients in any care or medical situation, whether the patient’s trans status is relevant or not, respecting that they are first and foremost people. A study for Stonewall (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018a) of over 5,000 LGBT people across England, Scotland and Wales, of which 18% identified as trans or questioning their gender identity, reported that a third of trans respondents to the survey had experienced unequal treatment from healthcare staff because of their gender identity, half had experienced inappropriate curiosity from healthcare staff, and a quarter had been outed without their consent by healthcare staff in front of other staff or patients. Ensuring the curricula, standards and training for medical and nursing schools includes teaching and ongoing training that covers transphobic language and discrimination, trans health inequalities and trans-inclusive care will help to reduce this.
**6.4.4 Acknowledging and questioning institutional cisnormativity**

HEIs are not designed for or by trans people and assume cisnormativity in their structure. There should be a focus on helping students from all backgrounds feel that they belong and this can help to improve academic performance (Sotardi *et al.*, 2021). This can be addressed by the practices of the HEI, but to do this, HEIs need to acknowledge that these challenges exist. The imposition of oppressive practices and inequitable outcomes as a result of what Marzetti (2018, p. 702) described “institutional cisheteronormativity”, where university education is positioned around a presumption of cisgender, heterosexual identities, can make HE more exclusionary for trans (and LGB) students. HEIs need to acknowledge the privilege of a majority cisgender environment with, in most cases, entirely cisgender decision and policy makers at the higher levels of leadership, and avoid approaches to equality and diversity in which “certain identities trump others in terms of what counts as diversity” (Calafell, 2020).

Problems with cisnormativity were highlighted in the study: accidental misgendering perpetuating cisnormativity; administrative processes based on cisnormative assumptions of gender identity; binary normativity in the choice of titles and gender markers; and gendered toilet facilities. These problems result in feelings of invalidation and exclusion for trans students and the creation of an atmosphere of inequality.

Looking at HEI policies, it was noted that where the authors of the policy were provided (in five out of the eight policies examined), there was no mention of input from trans students, with these having been written by Equality Diversity & Inclusion teams, HR or Student Services. Participants talked about a disconnect between policy and practice, not only in trans student policies, but also in that other HEI
policies are not inclusive of trans people, for example in use of gender binaries and exclusive language.

An awareness of power relations was vital for the transformative approach taken in my research and this needs to be considered when creating policies, not just for trans people but for all marginalised groups. Including trans students in the creation of trans student policies should be paramount and is the focus of the ‘nothing about us without us’ argument first applied within the disability rights movement, that no policy should be decided without full and direct participation of members of the groups affected by the policy (Charlton, 1998). Decisions about how much time and space are dedicated to certain groups are shaped by “judgments about what knowledge is, whose knowledge and experiences are valuable or necessary, and what role particular knowledge plays in maintaining or changing a status quo” (Davy et al., 2015, p. 144). As an example from my own professional practice, at the HEI where I work, on the recommendation of the LGBT+ Staff Network two sets of trans awareness training sessions had been secured – a shorter ‘basics’ training for all staff and a more in-depth ‘introduction to’ training for executive leadership members. The latter was scheduled for February 2021, but was rescheduled first due to challenging racism training that took priority, and then to make space for mental health and resilience training. In this particular case, the challenging racism training may have taken priority due to the reactive approach being taken by HEIs in the UK to external pressure on tackling racism in light of the Black Lives Matter movement which, although founded in 2013 following the acquittal of the murder of African-American teen Trayvon Martin, gained international attention during the protests in 2020 following the murder of African-American George Floyd by a Minnesota police officer (Hockin-Boyers and Clifford-Astbury, 2021). However, although not
suggesting that HEIs are inherently more committed to tackling racism than transphobia, these may be examples of an unconscious bias by cisnormative decision-makers determining the value of learning about one under-represented or oppressed group over another, alongside the fact that marginalised groups are vying for resources – both financial and time.

As discussed in Chapter 1, HEIs have a responsibility for freedom of speech, but also need to commit to their responsibility of providing freedom from discrimination. Both responsibilities and values should have equal weight within university regulations. Whilst there is a need to protect the ability of academic staff and students to express ideas that some members of the university community may find offensive, unwise or immoral, and to protect the academic staff from abuse, there must be a distinction between opinions that may be considered offensive and those that incite hate. It is the proper role of universities to protect students and members of staff and ensure that they are able to feel safe in their place of study/work. There were several examples in Chapter 4 of the impact of transphobic speech on students and how upsetting this can be, as well as an example in Chapter 5 of trans-exclusionary radical/gender critical views being shared by email amongst staff with little consideration for the impact of this rhetoric on trans staff included in the mailing list. There needs to be provision for staff members and students who may experience distress as a result of views expressed on the basis of academic freedom. There is a difference between freedom of speech and freedom from consequences when speech is hateful (Ginsberg, 2021).

6.4.5 What makes a good policy?

It is the responsibility of the HEI, through policy and procedure, to ensure staff and students are adequately educated on trans identities, to avoid this being left to the
students to have to explain their identities to others, as has been noted in both academic and non-academic research discussed, and in the results of this study. Both the TransEdu and the Stonewall (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018c) reports recommended there should be a policy to support trans students.

Visibility and the trans voice are key elements in not only producing a trans student policy, but also ensuring that all HEI policies are trans-inclusive and challenge cisnormative thinking and processes (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2018). However, although it is important to include trans students in policy decisions, it is just as important to ensure that trans students are not being overwhelmed with questions and requests that may trigger feelings relating to validity. With trans students often being an unseen minority within the student population, involving trans students in the development of policy and practice can be challenging. Some students may be more willing than others to provide this input, but it is also important to make sure that these more ‘vocal’ students do not become the HEI’s ‘go-to’ people – although they may have an interest in activism or advocating change, they also have degrees to complete and their own mental health to look after. It is important therefore to also consider contact with groups such as LGBT+ societies and other relevant Student Union welfare groups and Officers, who are able to collate information from individual students without putting such a burden on them.

How and when this support is sought is also important; as noted by one of the interview participants in this study, a counselling session is not the place for being asked to explain trans identities, whereas a focus group to discuss how to improve policies could be welcomed.
There is guidance available for HEIs in producing trans student and trans staff policies. Guidance from the Equality Challenge Unit (Pugh, 2010) includes templates for policy statements, a checklist for supporting trans students/staff and template documentation to support students and staff in requesting changes to their gender, name and/or title and of notifying the HEI of their transition. Additional guidance from Lawrence and Mckendry (2019), based on the TransEdu Scotland research project (Mckendry and Lawrence, 2017), provides background information useful in developing a policy as well as describing the impact that the sense of institutional belonging that can be achieved by supporting trans students has on retention, which, as one of the performance indicators reported to HESA, is an important area for HEIs.

A policy needs to be visible. When conducting research into HEI policies for this study, of 169 HEI websites visited, 96 did not have a trans policy, or at least, not one that was publicly accessible. One of the recommendations in the TransEdu report (Mckendry and Lawrence, 2017) was that HEIs should have an easily found web page on trans and gender identity. Even of those where a policy was found, in many cases this was after much searching within Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Student Services or HEI policy sections, whereas typing the term ‘trans student policy’ in the HEIs main search function should have brought forward this information. Adding trans students to a general discrimination or equality, diversity and inclusion policy is not enough, as the findings from my research show clearly that this student group has specific support needs that need to be addressed.

To be effective, a policy needs to address all the needs of trans students. Two of the policies investigated in this study are included (redacted) in Appendix J, where there is a clear difference between the first, a two-page document that uses the minimum
guidance, and the second, a 37-page document that goes beyond the guidelines, including not only support for trans students on campus, with clear information on changing university records, managing identity change, accommodation and toilet and changing facilities on campus, but also specific information for Tier 4 students (international students who require a Tier 4 visa to remain in the UK for the period of their studies) and postgraduate research students, information on how to obtain an amended degree certificate for name changes after graduation, reporting procedures for bullying, discrimination and harassment, advice on study abroad and placements, and careers advice on LGBT+ friendly employers.

A good policy should not only inform but should also translate into practice. As an example from my own professional practice, I delivered a presentation on my research to a group of Specialist Mentors at the institution where I work. The audience was made up of 14 staff who provided specialist support to students with mental health difficulties and autism spectrum conditions, and the majority stated that they had supported trans or gender questioning students. None were aware of the HEI’s trans student policy or the processes in place for helping students request name changes. This example shows that even where there was a trans student policy, specialist frontline staff were not aware of it, so the students were not able to benefit from the policy and procedures set out to support them.

Although knowing that the HEI has trans inclusive policies has been shown to increase a sense of belonging for trans students (Goldberg et al., 2019), having a policy needs to be more than a tick box, in place because it is a legal requirement, or to meet membership of charter marks and equality schemes such as the Stonewall Diversity Champions programme (Stonewall, no date). Policy recommendations need to be backed up by change, and institutional cisnormativity needs to be
addressed. As stated in Chapter 4, one interview participant commented that “Attitudes don’t change just because institutions get policies and procedures.”

With the arguments around academic freedom discussed in Chapter 1, HEIs need to make a distinction between the concept of academic freedom and the duty of care they have towards students and colleagues, which includes respect for gender identity. This study identified differing stances, with reports of some HEIs agreeing to remove controversial speakers when this was brought to light by students, and others allowing these to go ahead arguing for freedom of expression in academia. It is important for HEIs to make their stance clear and visible so that trans students and staff can be sure about what their position is.

6.4.6 Raising awareness

Raising awareness amongst students and staff is a good place to start (Storrie and Rohleder, 2018), and I suggest that this is really what the ethos of diversity should mean to HEIs. For students, a compulsory diversity module was suggested by one of the interview participants, and this is something that could easily be squeezed into teaching so that all students, regardless of academic discipline, would be taught the value of respect and tolerance. However, despite the positives of this with regards to ensuring all students are being provided with information relating to treating others with dignity and respect, this can also be problematic. At the HEI where I work, a compulsory module for all registered students was launched in September 2020. The module was marketed as outlining the behaviours that are expected of students, and what students could expect from the university and student union, and “also digs deep into issues of racism, bias, sexual harassment and consent” as well as informing students of how to report incidents and access support services (University of Kent, 2020). On the surface, this appears to be a good idea. However, when
changes were made to the module in September 2021 to include “an expansion and review of the (Anti-) Racism, Xenophobia and White Privilege segment, new segments on Ableism, Sex and Ageism” (University of Kent, 2021) it was met with criticism from some staff who refused to promote this to their students, condemning it as generating a culture in which students are told that there is only one acceptable way to think. The email trail within one academic division soon morphed into a discussion about the use of pronouns and a debate about “superdiversity” going too far. The result, was a publication by The Daily Telegraph (Somerville, 2021) about the module which quoted a staff member stating that “Encouraging people in the academy to narrow their field of reading and narrow students’ reading seems to me to be simply philistine and irresponsible… Students are being instructed through this module that there is a correct way of thinking”, and another staff member stating “There’s a danger of promoting conformism on campuses under the guise of education that you indoctrinate people into woke dogma”. It is clear, then that there can be resistance to making such training compulsory.

Staff training is also important, but should not focus just on academics and student support services. Executive leadership should be encouraged to receive training so as to inform decisions on passing policies. In addition, all student-facing staff, from administration to hospitality, housekeeping and security should have the opportunity to receive the training, as it is often those staff with whom students build up a trusting relationship. However, as I am aware from my own professional practice, when training around equality/diversity issues is offered it is very often the same people who always attend – those who are interested in learning more – whereas it is those harder to reach staff, those less inclined to attend non-mandatory training and less interested in improving their knowledge of equality and diversity issues, that are
more likely to need the training. HEIs should consider compulsory training. At my own HEI, the trans and LGBTQI+ online training modules were made compulsory for all new staff as part of the induction programme, but not for the thousands of existing staff, even though when the GDPR regulations were brought in (perhaps because the HEI can be held liable for individuals’ actions) the online training for this was rolled out as compulsory for all staff. However, as with the student module, compulsory training of any kind has its challengers and making equality training compulsory for all staff could be met with similar backlash.

However, training opportunities are not effective if staff do not know the policy/procedures in place for their students, and training and raising awareness are not, on their own, enough to combat institutional cisnormativity, and, as discussed in section 6.4.4, it is there that change really needs to happen.

6.4.7 Summary of recommendations

The following suggestions are made based on the outcome of this research, as ways in which HEIs can reduce institutional cisnormativity and improve the HE environment for trans students, and in some cases, students from other marginalised groups.

Administration

- Improve IT systems so that trans students have the option of providing an alternative first name if different to their legal/registered name, and so that this information is used on all university data systems where the legal name is not a requirement.
- Ensure any changed information is updated in all systems.
• Allow ID cards to be updated with changes of name and new photographs, free of charge, where requested because of changes in gender identity.
• Make it clear to students how and where to request these changes.
• Make it clear to staff that student data records need to be checked regularly, not just at the start of the term/year and that assumptions should not be made that name and gender would be unchanging.
• Reduce cisnormativity in administrative processes – only request gender and titles where necessary and always include non-binary/gender non-conforming choices where these are required.

Facilities
• Provide gender-neutral toilets. Do not rely solely on shared use of disabled facilities.
• Make the provision of gender-neutral toilets part of the planning for all new-build and refurbishment projects.
• Provide gender-neutral changing rooms.

Support and wellbeing
• Improve mental health, counselling and medical centre support for trans students by providing sufficient professional training to mental health advisers, counsellors and other practitioners, so that they can better understand and cater for the specific needs of trans students.
• Implement an online system for confidentially reporting harassment, bullying, transphobia.
• Make it clear to students how and where to report incidents, and that such incidents will be dealt with appropriately. Ensure all those supporting students are aware of the systems in place and can signpost students appropriately.

• Have a freedom of speech policy making a clear distinction between opinions that may be considered offensive and those that incite hate.

Inclusivity and a welcoming environment

• Have a page on the university website dedicated to trans support.

• Provide the option of rainbow lanyards for staff. The rainbow lanyard should be representative of a safe space to all students within the LGBT+ community.

• Support trans-specific awareness days at an institutional level, rather than leaving this to the student union, societies and network groups.

• Have a dedicated person to support trans students.

• Provide financial support to LGBT+ Societies and Networks so that they can better support trans students.

Curriculum and teaching

• Examine and reduce cisnormativity in the curriculum.

• Acknowledge and affirm differences.

• Address both lack of and resistance to knowledge.

• Address resistance to anti-oppressive change in teaching practices.

• Do not assume gender identity or pronouns.

• Include teaching about trans experiences in all professional health sciences subjects to provide all students on these courses with the tools to work with and respect trans people.
• Work collaboratively with trans students around what inclusive teaching should look like.

Awareness

• Endeavour to educate all staff on trans issues.
• Make sure all staff are aware of the trans student policy and procedures for support trans students.
• Introduce a diversity module for all students.
• If staff feel comfortable doing so, identify pronouns in email signatures, with a link to a website explaining why this is important (for example, https://www.mypronouns.org/).

Policy

• Have a clear trans student policy that includes all the recommendations in the latest guidance for HEIs from the Equality Challenge Unit.
• Have processes in place for supporting trans students during transition.
• Include: administration, toilets, accommodation, changing facilities, sports, specific information for Tier 4 students, information for postgraduate research students, changes to degree certificates, harassment reporting processes, information about placements and study abroad, careers information, information about supporting medical transition.
• Ensure the trans student policy is visible, both within and external to the university.
• Remove the disconnect between policy and practice by ensuring all staff and students are aware of the policy.
- Avoid using gender binaries and exclusive language in all HEI policies and ensure an impact assessment is undertaken for all new and amended policies.

**6.4.8 Section summary**

This section has summarised the implications of this study with regards to professional practice. It has identified how even simple improvements to administration and facilities can result in a more inclusive environment where trans students feel validated and supported. It has discussed deficiencies in supporting trans students' mental health and suggested how needs can be better met. It has considered how a trans-inclusive curriculum can help to address the power imbalance for trans students learning within a privileged cisnormative society, and has identified specific teaching improvements that are needed for students in professional health sciences subjects where training for the workplace needs to include an understanding of how to work with and support trans patients. It has looked at the issue of institutional cisnormativity and suggested that HEIs need to acknowledge and question this in order to address issues of disadvantage, inequality and oppression. Finally it has acknowledged how policy and practice can help to support trans students in the journey through higher education and beyond. By adjusting policies, processes, systems and culture, HEIs can create a “truly trans-affirming campus” (Swanbrow Becker, 2019).

One survey participant poignantly remarked, in answer to the free-text question asking for instances where the university has been particularly positive in supporting trans students, “Only in so far as it has been treated as no issue whatsoever, and that is, I think, the most important thing.” This should be the response that all HEIs aim for.
6.5 Reflections on personal and professional learning

Carrying out this study has had an impact on both my professional practice and on me personally.

In professional practice, through presenting my research at conferences and events over the last three years, I have come to see just how lacking knowledge is around supporting trans students in HE. I am now better prepared to support trans students at my own institution and have already had several opportunities to explain how procedures can be changed, and have become a ‘go-to’ person for trans-related enquiries within the HEI where I work.

Working with trans students and the impact their experiences had on me cannot be unlearned. I have a greater appreciation of the difficulties trans people face in their day to day existence, as well as in HE. At a particularly challenging time for trans people in the UK, keeping up to date with government changes and media coverage has been eye-opening and I have seen how tiring and distressing dealing with this on a daily basis is for trans people.

6.5.1 Dissemination

I have been fortunate to have already had the opportunity to present my work at conferences and webinars across the UK. Findings from the pilot study were presented at the Researching the Rainbow 2019 conference at the University of Kent and at the 50 Years After Stonewall 2019 conference at the University of Edinburgh, and a poster presentation about developing a trans-inclusive curriculum was included in the University of Kent Learning and Teaching Conference in 2019. Since completing the main study, I was privileged to be part of a panel discussion about safe and affirming spaces for trans and non-binary people at the Pride in Education
2021 conference (online) and also presented my research findings at the British Psychological Society’s Psychology of Sexualities Section Annual Conference (2021, online). I have also presented on supporting trans students with mental health difficulties and/or autism to a group of Specialist Mentors and to assessors, administrators and managers from a DSA (Disabled Students’ Allowance) Study Needs Assessment Centre.

I hope my study will lead to significant change for trans students in HE, making at least part of their life journey less challenging. With the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the changes to the ways of working that this brought, in particular the increase in remote online training and webinars in place of in-person conferences, plans for further dissemination of the findings of this study include running online webinars with HEIs across the UK. Although I do plan to present at in-person conferences where possible, this remote option will give me a far greater reach than I could possibly achieve otherwise. Visible senior level buy-in is essential for policy change, but understanding is essential for implementation of change, so these webinars will be promoted to all levels of HEI staff, from Executive Group leaders to senior managers, academic staff, administrators, support services and staff in areas such as security, estates and hospitality.

6.6 Limitations of study and possible future research

In this section I identify limitations of my study and make recommendations for possible future research.

There were certain limits to the study that were not identified until the data were being analysed. For example, the survey question about trans-inclusive facilities did not distinguish between toilets and other facilities such as changing rooms, which,
after hearing the changing room experiences of one of the interview participants, I realised would have been useful data to collect. The question about harassment, bullying and transphobia did not explain sufficiently what that meant in the context of the question, which may have resulted in different responses.

The wording of some of the survey questions was also, in hindsight with the knowledge that I have gained throughout of time of completing this study, not as inclusive as it could have been. Although I did include trans students in the design of the survey, language is evolving quickly and some terminology that I used in the pilot which I then used again in the main study, had become outdated. In particular, I refer to the use of ‘male’ and ‘female’ in the question ‘Which best describes your gender identity’. One participant responded to this question with “Male/female are categories that especially now are rather fraught and often used against trans people. I shall say I am a woman. Kind of surprise actually by the choice of identifiers in this question. Gives me pause to consider whether I wish to consider answering questions.” It was only after this that I realised that ‘man’ and ‘woman’ would have been more accurate descriptions of gender identity, and also that ‘genderqueer’ would have been a good additional option, and I did feel quite troubled that I may have inadvertently caused upset to the very group I was trying to help.

Questions asked around whether participants had requested changes to HEI data systems and ID cards regarding name and/or gender did not identify whether those who had not requested this had applied to the HEI in their birth name or had not wanted/needed to request a change. As the question of how easy it was to make such a change was only asked to those participants who had, asking a question of why to those who had not, might have helped to identify additional barriers around name/gender identity changes, such as availability of information about processes.
Some of the demographic questions collected in the survey were not used in the analysis – for example: sexual orientation, ethnic group and religious belief. More use could have been made of these in relation to intersectionality, but I considered this to be outside of the remit of answering the specific research questions for this study. On reflection, the questions should not have been asked if they were not relevant to this study. In addition, it may have been useful to write some of the survey questions in a way that answers could be used to find out whether, for example, non-binary students experienced things differently to binary trans students, or whether there was any connection between mental health difficulties and transphobia. However, such data analysis would be more suited to a quantitative approach.

The respondent group for this study is unique and underrepresented in research. In order to gain further understanding and to enable a body of work to be established, future research could explore additional areas, such as:

- Intersectionality – the demographic information collected from the survey showed that 121 out of 164 participants identified as ‘white British’ with only 11 participants identifying in non-white categories. It is clear that it was a majority white participant sample, as were the samples in the majority of existing literature, so more research into intersectionality would help to identify any additional areas of inequality. With 98 out of 164 survey participants declaring a disability, research into the experiences of disabled trans students would also help to ensure the specific needs of these students are being met, particularly given the high number of trans students in the survey reporting mental health difficulties (n=71) and autistic spectrum disorders (n=33), in
light of the reported lack of suitable mental health support for trans students in HE.

- Gender identity – the survey and interview data were not representative of all gender identities. The majority of survey participants were men (65) or non-binary (61) with only 30 participants being women. In the interviews, I did not ask for gender identity, but did introduce myself with my pronouns, and all interview participants followed suit with this. Four of the seven participants used exclusively he/him pronouns, one used exclusively they/them, and two used either he/him or they/them, so there were no women represented in the interview data. There are no robust data currently for the trans/non-binary population in the UK. However, the 2021 census included for the first time, voluntary questions on gender identity and sexual orientation, and these data will be useful in understanding the size and make-up of the LGBT+ population against which further studies can be mapped.

- Non-binary experience – although 61 participants in the survey identified as non-binary, and some non-binary participants in both the survey and interviews discussed particular issues with gendered spaces such as toilet facilities, this information was not used in a way as to distinguish whether there were other specific barriers experienced by non-binary students, or areas where non-binary participants had different experiences. This would be beneficial research in ensuring the needs of non-binary and gender non-conforming students are being met.

- The level of trans inclusion/representation in professional health science courses such as medicine, social work and nursing – although a lack of teaching around trans identities was reported by some participants, further
research investigating this as an independent area of study would provide far greater insight into this subject that my study was able to.

- Other HEI policies – although my study only analysed trans student policies, it became clear from discussions with participants and from speaking with colleagues and peers about my research, that an analysis of gendered language use in all HEI policies would be useful research to investigate the use of cisnormative language in policy writing. An example from my own professional practice was the suggested wording for the EDI Policy around discrimination because of pregnancy and maternity to include the statement “It is discrimination to treat a woman (including a female student of any age) less favourably because she is or has been pregnant, has given birth in the last 26 weeks or is breastfeeding a baby who is 26 weeks or younger. It is direct sex discrimination to treat a woman (including a female student of any age) less favourably because she is breastfeeding a child who is more than 26 weeks old.” As trans men and non-binary people have the capability of being pregnant the use of ‘women’, ‘female’ and ‘she’ throughout the statement was discriminatory in its wording.

Some additional questions could be added to clarify certain responses. For example, it is not known whether the 92 survey participants who did not request a change of name had applied in their birth name or had not needed/wanted to request this change, or whether the 114 survey participants who had not requested a change to the gender marker on their university record had applied in their presenting gender, or had just not requested this change. In addition, although survey results indicated that most HEIs had some gender-neutral facilities, this did not ascertain whether these were specific gender-neutral facilities, or shared use of disability-accessible
facilities, which would have been useful information to inform a discussion around the positioning of marginalised group in opposition to each other.

6.7 Final summary

In this thesis I have explored the experiences of trans students in Higher Education in the UK and have examined how/whether Higher Education Institution policies have met the needs of this student group.

The study identified some of the difficulties trans students face, including feelings of segregation and otherness, poor mental health support and the silencing of the trans voice in the curriculum. Investigation into a selection of HE trans student policies revealed assumptions of cisnormativity in the provision of facilities and services, as well as in curriculum development and in the writing of policy itself. The role of the HEI in improving the experience of trans students and the link with improved attainment and retention for this minority group was discussed, along with the need to acknowledge and question institutional cisnormativity in a bid to improve the trans student experience.

In conclusion, the research has provided insight into the lived experiences of trans students in HE in the UK and has identified ways in which HEIs can improve, and through investigating a subject that is currently under-researched in the UK, it has made an original contribution to research that can inform policy development and practice in HEIs in the UK and further afield. This study has aimed not just to make the experiences of trans students bearable, but to ensure they receive the same exciting and amazing experience that all HE students deserve. To do this, HEIs need to be ready for trans students, providing an affirming experience that is founded on understanding. Equality and Diversity needs to become more than a job title or a
tick-box exercise and needs to be embedded into the whole HE experience for all students. I will end with a quote from one of the interview participants:

“Diversity doesn’t only talk about transness, er diversity talks about everything from, you know, culture, age, er income, all these factors that make people different, or that make people’s outside circumstances different… University is there to, er, teach humans how to be humans… I think there should be, either during induction week or actually just one tiny, tiny module or something, where we learn about proper conduct with other human beings… if high school doesn’t do it then university really should. I mean, Christ, it’s really time now, isn’t it?” (Participant 2).
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Appendices

Appendix A: Call for participants and contact emails

Call for participants

Email 1 – 26 Nov 2019 – BCC to SU Officers, LGBT+ Socs, Staff Networks, Student Services, University EDI team + others (748 emails sent over 163 HEIs)

Subject line: Research survey for transgender students

Good morning,

I am a Doctoral research student at The Open University investigating the experience of transgender students in Higher Education.

Could I please ask you to share this email and the survey link below with students at your institution? If you are also able to share via social media that would be really helpful. Survey responses are anonymous.

Survey link: https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/research-survey-2019-20

Thank you in advance,

Lynne Regan

Doctoral Researcher

The Open University
Tweet 1 – 5 Dec 2019

Tweet

Lynne Regan

Survey for trans students in UK universities [link to survey].
I am a doctoral researcher looking at the experiences of trans students in UK higher education. Please help share this link to make sure trans student voices are heard.

Tweet 2 – 30 Jan 2020

Tweet

Lynne Regan

Are you a trans student in Higher Education in the UK? Would you like to take part in research aiming to improve policy and practice for trans students within Higher Education? Please contact Lynne at lynne.regan@open.ac.uk to register interest or for more details.
Hi,

Could I please ask you to share this email with students at your institution?

I am a Doctoral research student at The Open University and my research is investigating the experiences of transgender students in Higher Education.

I am looking for trans student participants to take part in 1-1 interviews via Skype, to talk about their experiences as a trans student at university. The interview takes around half an hour.

**Students who would like to take part in the 1-1 interviews via Skype, please email me at lynne.regan@open.ac.uk**

I had previously contacted you in November with a link to my online survey; this survey is still open until the end of February, so if anyone has not taken part and would like to, the link is: [https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/research-survey-2019-20](https://openuniversity.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/research-survey-2019-20)

Thank you in advance,

Lynne Regan  **Pronouns:** She/Her

Doctoral Researcher

The Open University
Emails to participants about interviews

Email 1 – first contact

Hi xxxx,

Thank you so much for making contact.

I will be arranging the 1-1 interviews to take place in January. These will be via Skype.

I have attached the participant information sheet for you to have a look over in the meantime. I will contact you again in the New Year to arrange a suitable date and time, and will send you the consent form at that point.

I look forward to speaking with you in January. If you have any questions in the meantime please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards,

Lynne
Hi xxxx,

Happy New Year!

Further to our email correspondence in November, I would like to arrange a date and time for the Skype interview. The following are a selection of days/times that are good for me. Please let me know if any of these are suitable; if not, please let me know your best availability and I will do my best to accommodate you.

Monday 20th January any time between 6pm-8pm
Tuesday 21st January 12pm or 1pm, or any time between 6pm-8pm
Wednesday 22nd January 12pm or 1pm, or any time between 6pm-8pm
Saturday 25th January any time between 3pm and 8pm
Monday 27th January 1pm, or any time between 6pm-8pm
Tuesday 28th January 12pm or 1pm, or any time between 6pm-8pm
Thursday 30th January 12pm or 1pm, or any time between 6pm-8pm
Friday 31st January 12pm or 1pm, or any time between 6pm-8pm

I have attached the Participant Consent form; please return the completed form to me prior to our appointment.

I look forward to hearing from you soon,

Kind regards,

Lynne
Hi xxxx,

Thank you for sending the consent form.

Is [next Monday (27th) at 1pm] ok for you?

I have found the best way to connect is if you can use the link below to get to my Skype profile, and then send me a chat message, that will put you into my contacts so that I know I am contacting the right person!

I look forward to speaking to you then,

Kind regards,

Lynne
Hi xxxx,

Thank you for taking part in the Skype interview for my research.

Please find attached the transcription of our conversation. The document is password protected. I will send the password in a separate email. Please confirm that you are happy that this is an accurate representation of our discussion. If you can please confirm within 5 days; if I have not heard from you by then I will assume all is okay.

If there is anything else you would like to add, perhaps something that you thought of afterwards that you wanted to say, this is a good opportunity to let me know this too.

Please feel free to email me.

Kind regards,

Lynne

Lynne Regan Pronouns: She/Her

Doctoral Researcher

The Open University

Email 5 – transcription password

Hi xxxx

Password is xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
Appendix B: Survey questionnaire (blank)

Questionnaire

Investigating the Experiences of Transgender Students in Higher Education

The aim of this research is to investigate the experiences of trans students in Higher Education in relation to support services, institutional administration, peers, academics/curriculum, social experience and facilities, with a view to creating a better understanding of the needs of this student group.

The researcher uses the term trans as an inclusive term which incorporates a diverse range of gender experiences outside of majority social and cultural expectations, and encompasses transsexual and transgender people, genderqueer, gender fluid and non-binary people, and others who challenge gender norms.

Is your gender identity aligned with the sex you were assigned at birth?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Which best describes your gender identity?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Other
- Prefer not to say

If you selected Other, please specify:

[Blank space]
What pronouns do you use?

- She / Her / Hers / Herself
- He / Him / His / Himself
- They / Them / theirs / themselves
- Ze / Hir / Hir / Hirs / Zirs / Hirself / Hirself
- Other
- Prefer not to say

If you selected Other, please specify:
Have you requested a name change to be made to your university record?

- Yes
- No

If yes, do you feel this information filtered down to relevant academics, e.g. seminar leaders?

- Yes
- No
- Partially

If yes, were you given the opportunity to change your university email address/log-in, if this includes your name or initials?

- Yes
- No
- My email address does not include my name or initials

Have you requested a gender change to be made to your university record?

- Yes
- No

If so, how easy did you find this to do?
Does the university have gender-neutral or trans-inclusive facilities (e.g. toilets, changing rooms)?
- Yes
- No
- Some
- Unsure

Does your university have a dedicated student transgender policy?
- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Do you feel the university administrative staff you have had contact with are knowledgeable enough about trans issues?
- Yes
- No
- Some
- Not applicable

Do you feel the academic staff you have had contact with are knowledgeable enough about trans issues?
- Yes
- No
- Some
Are there any instances you can describe where the university has been particularly positive in supporting trans students?
Are you aware of transphobic violence, bullying or harassment on campus?

- Yes, experienced myself
- Yes, aware others have experienced this
- No

Have you ever experienced any of the following at university yourself, because of your trans identity?

- Being outed as trans without your consent
- Purposeful dead-naming
- Purposeful mis-pronouncing
- Name calling/verbal abuse
- Rumours/gossip
- Threats/intimidation
- Cyber bullying
- Damage to/theft of your property
- Physical attack
- Other

If you selected Other, please specify:

[Box for specifying]

If so, did you report this to anyone at the university?

- Yes
- No
- I would not know where/how to report this
If yes, do you feel the University dealt with the issue effectively?
- Yes
- No

Is there a LGBT+ student society at your university?
- Yes
- No
- Unaware

If yes, how well supported do you feel by the LGBT+ student society?
- Well supported
- Somewhat supported
- Not at all supported

Does the Student Union have a dedicated Trans Officer?
- Yes
- No
- Unaware

If yes, how do you feel this is/is not of benefit?
If no, do you think this would be of benefit and why?

Does the university have anyone you can turn to regarding trans-specific issues (e.g. trans group, dedicated staff member)?

- Yes
- No
- Unaware
Do you feel represented in the university curriculum?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat
- Unsure

Where represented, how are trans issues, people and their achievements handled on your course?

- Included and respected
- Ignored/not mentioned
- Referred to negatively
- Not sure

Do you feel trans representation in the university curriculum is important?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat
- Unsure

Do you feel represented in the social side of university life?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat
- Unsure
Do you feel welcome/comfortable to join university clubs/societies?

- Yes
- No
- Some
- Unsure

Do you feel that your peers are knowledgeable enough about trans issues?

- Yes
- No
- Some
The following demographic questions will be really useful in helping me to interpret the data from this survey more effectively.

What University/Higer Education Institution do you attend?

What is your academic course of study?

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation/preference?
- Heterosexual/Straight
- Gay
- Lesbian
- Bisexual/Bi
- Queer
- In another way
- Prefer not to say

Which of the following best describes your ethnic group?
- White - British
- White - Other
- Mixed - White and black Caribbean
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mixed - White and black African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed - White and Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed - Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British - Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British - Pakistani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British - Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British - Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or black British - Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or black British - African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or black British - Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other ethnic group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is your religion, faith or belief?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atheist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you consider yourself to have a specific learning disability, other disability, impairment or long-term health condition?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Prefer not to say

If yes, how would you describe this?

☐ Physical impairment/mobility difficulties
☐ Blind or partially sighted
☐ Deaf or hard of hearing
☐ Mental health difficulties
☐ Specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia)
☐ Autistic Spectrum Disorder
☐ An unseen disability or health condition (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, asthma, HIV)
☐ A disability not listed above
☐ Prefer not to say
Thank you for taking part

Thank you for taking part in this survey questionnaire. Your time is very much appreciated.

I am also looking for some participants to take part in a 1-1 interview via Skype. If you are interested in taking part, or in finding our more, please contact the researcher at lynne.regan@open.ac.uk.

There is no requirement to take part in the 1-1 interview.

Please make sure you select ‘FINISH’ below, otherwise your questionnaire responses will not be logged.
Thank you

Thank you for your interest. You may now close the browser.
Thank you

Thank you for your interest. You may now close the browser.
Appendix C: Interview topics/prompts

Exchange names and pronouns.

You’ve had a copy of the participant information sheet, but just a reminder that I will be recording the interview and once I have transcribed it, I will send you a copy so that you can check for accuracy. The recording will then be deleted and your email address will then be removed from my account. Your name will not be used and there will be nothing in my write up that will identify you.

The aim of this interview is to talk about your experiences as a university student, and I hope that my research will help to inform processes and improve policies for trans students at universities across the UK.

Prompts:

- In what way…
- To what extent did that…
- How did that affect your learning…?
- Why was that…
- How did that make you feel…?

Tell me about when you first arrived at university…

Prompts:

- Did being trans affect how you chose the university you attend?
- If you have chosen to come out to friends, how easy has this been?
Topic guides:

- Institutional facilities and administration

  Prompts:
  
  • Can you tell me how you have found the facilities such as toilets, changing rooms etc – at your university and if you have experienced any difficulties accessing inclusive facilities?
  
  • Have you had to change your name and or/gender on university records? What processes were in place for you to do this and how easy was it?

- Harassment bullying and transphobia

  Prompts:
  
  • Have you yourself experienced bullying or transphobia at university? What sort of things, if you don’t mind discussing this?
  
  • What level of transphobia, or bullying related to being trans, do you feel there is at your campus?
  
  • What about in clubs and bars, or when you are off campus?
  
  • Do you know if there are ways to report incidents? What does this entail? Did you find this useful? How confident are you that the university would deal with the issue?

- Inclusion/exclusion

  Prompts:
• Do you know if there is a trans student policy? If do, do you know what it covers? Do you know if trans students were involved in this, and if so, what input did they have?
• How well do you think the policy is being followed at your university?
• How supportive have you found the staff?
• What about academic/academic-related/support staff?
• Is there an LGBT Society at your university? Have you been involved in the society? How supportive did you find the society?
• Do you know if there is a Trans Officer in your student union team? Have you had any contact with them? How useful do you feel this is/would be?

- Representation in the curriculum

Prompts:

• How much are trans students represented in the curriculum?
• What do you study? How important is representation in your subject?
• Are you aware of any trans staff at your university? Are any of these academics? How important do you think it is for trans staff to be out at university?
• In which subjects do you think representation is more difficult?
• How important is trans representation for you in the curriculum?

Thank you. If this has been ok for you and you have any trans friends who might like to take part, would you mind passing my email address on to them and asking them to drop me a line?
Appendix D: Coding examples

Example of coding of an interview

What about across the whole curriculum? You know, other, other subjects, em, do you think, do you feel there are subjects that it’s a lot harder to get trans representation inbut is it still as important?

I’m fairly sure that there are courses in which it’s not that easy to include, for example, in technical courses or in mathematics or any of these things, I still think it is important to include them because University is there to, er, teach humans how to be humans. Not just, er not just teach them in one specific subject. So, I think there should be, either during induction week or actually just one tiny, tiny module or something, where we learn about proper conduct with other human beings, something like that, you know, any kind of thing because in my experience high school really fails that and um, well, if high school doesn’t do it then University really should. I mean, Christ, it’s really time now isn’t it? And I think it should be a module that teaches about diversity. And, um, you know, how to deal with people who are different and actually like this, because so, so often, people just don’t think about it and they just see ‘Oh, this person is different’ and then either not deal with them at all, or deal with them weirdly like, um, ‘I don’t know how to talk to you’, And that’s just sad and just creates barriers. And, um, I think such a class that talks about diversity should actually also include trans people, obviously. And I think it’s needed.

Yeah. Err, is there anything else you’d like to tell me about your experiences?

Ah, if I am just come back to the name thing of the ID thing, because one of the biggest problems for me, my experience was that I was constantly reminded of the name I didn’t choose. Um, I don’t even care all that much about the pronoun stuff, to be honest, I care way more about the same name because if they call me by my old name, I just feel 21 years of frustration and anxiety building up in me. And actually, recently, when I was doing, er, an ungraded exam, a verbal one, the person in front of me, er, the person coming before me, was talking about a case with that name that I used.

Example of coding of survey open question responses

My experience of uni has been different because I also studied a college course at this place. My teacher who knew me at college is also one of my teachers at university and he has been very respectful towards my decision to be stealth and has been helpful in not telling my other teachers but letting me come to him if I need help.

A tutor got my pronouns wrong, I told after after and she apologised and hasn’t got them wrong since

N/A

Academic staff on my course have always been quick to take up preferred names and pronouns as soon as they are aware that they have changed, even in part-time staff

Due to the nature of my University we have no such students. As its not needed.

One lecturer began the first seminar by requesting names and pronouns, and corrected another lecturer when they made a mistake

When I had a complaint about the uni being non-inclusive I sat down with a member of staff to talk about how they can help. Allowed me to easily change my name on some records
Example of coding of an HEI policy document

Accommodation
When a student applies for accommodation and advises that they are transitioning or intend to transition once at the University, it is advisable to formally agree the point at which they will begin to live day-to-day in their acquired gender. This will enable the correct form of accommodation to be allocated from the start. Students are encouraged to discuss their personal requirements in confidence and in person with relevant staff in accommodation services. The University will ensure as much flexibility and discretion as possible when dealing with student requests in relation to transgender.

For students who begin to transition when living in accommodation, contracts should be flexible to allow students to leave single-sex accommodation when they begin to live in their chosen gender. For further advice and support contact Accommodation Services.

Degree certificates
The university has undertaken to provide students who have transitioned whilst studying or after studying with replacement degree certificates in the acquired gender names or titles. This can be done through Student Administration.

Staff Only:
Pensions
Record changes for pensions differ slightly and members of staff who are in the University pension scheme will need to send their birth certificate to the Pensions department to ensure their gender is changed on pension records. Only people with a full
Appendix E: Code lists

Interviews codes list

BULLYING AND TRANSPHOBIA
bullying from another trans person
confident bullying would be investigated
experienced bullying-transphobia
finding out how to report bullying
lack of confidence of how well bullying will be dealt with
mention of TOTERP and current issues with academics in some universities
methods or reporting bullying in place
no methods of reporting bullying in place
not experienced bullying-transphobia
not witnessed bullying-transphobia
witnessed bullying-transphobia
NAMES, PRONOUNS AND LANGUAGE
accidental misgendering
correct name in class as priority
impact of wrong name-pronoun use
incorrect use of language
misgendering on purpose
use of name-initials in email address

INCLUSION & EQUITY
INFLUENCES OF UNIVERSITY CHOICE
being trans influentiel uni choice
being trans not influencing university choice
importance of LGBT-friendly uni
policy that affects decision for which uni
policy not important in decision for which uni
LGBT SOCIETY AND STUDENT UNION
dedicated trans-LGBT rep
LGBT society
LGBT society sessions for staff
not fitting in with LGBT society
positive contact with LGBT society
social events and alcohol
trans voice in LGBT society
PEERS
importance of allies
number of trans students
people are friendly
supportive friends
SELF
being able to be myself
being more than trans
coming out at uni
confidence to speak up
explaining non-binary
feelings
fitting in
lack of confidence to speak up
not everyone needs to know
open about being trans
personal responsibility
positive experience
postgraduate experience
supportive responses
type of course and trans students
STAFF SUPPORT
positive support from academic staff
rainbow lanyard
trans staff
UNIVERSITY SUPPORT
awareness
lack of support for trans students from the university
lack of understanding from counselling-support services
positive contact with student support services
Institutional facilities and administration
ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES
advised the university in advance
comparsion with other countries
confusing application-registration processes
delay in changing name on university records
expectation that processes and procedures are in place
improvement over time
information not filtering down to relevant staff
legal name change not required for change of ID card
legal name change required for ID card
no problem changing name on university records
questionnaire demographics section
registered as presenting gender
systems are not in place
FACILITIES
avoiding using toilets
dislike of using disabled toilets
gender neutral toilets and non-binary
issues using gender-specific changing rooms
lack of gender neutral toilets
negative experience of gender-specific changing rooms
negative response to gender neutral toilets
positive experience of gender neutral toilet
positive experience of gender-specific changing rooms
using gender-specific toilets
POLICY
input into policy rewrite
lack of confidence that trans students had a say in policy
no trans specific policy
policy does not change attitudes
policy for the wrong reasons
policy improves experience
policy not being implemented
unsure if there is a trans student policy
Representation in the curriculum
BAD-NEGATIVE-NO REPRESENTATION
bad trans representation in the curriculum
impact of bad trans representation in the curriculum
no trans representation in the curriculum
slowing-erosion of trans people
DIVERSITY IN THE CURRICULUM
difficulties of representation in the curriculum
diversity in the curriculum
lack of diversity in the curriculum
GOOD-POSITIVE REPRESENTATION
good representation in the curriculum
importance of positive representation in the curriculum
normalisation of trans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surveys code list</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harassment, bullying and transphobia</td>
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<tr>
<td>BULLYING AND TRANSPHOBIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mention of TERF and current issues with academics in some universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supportive responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transphobia by ignorance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transphobic comments not being challenged</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAMES, PRONOUNS AND LANGUAGE</td>
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<tr>
<td>accidental misgendering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact of wrong name-pronoun use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use of deadname</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion-accretion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBT SOCIETY AND STUDENT UNION</td>
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<tr>
<td>dedicated trans LGBTQ rep</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBT society</td>
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<tr>
<td>positive contact with LGBT society</td>
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<tr>
<td>support of student union</td>
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<tr>
<td>trans voice in LGBT society</td>
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<tr>
<td>SELF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feeling invalidated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feeling safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAFF SUPPORT</td>
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<tr>
<td>positive support from academic staff</td>
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UNIVERSITY SUPPORT
awareness
lack of support for trans students from the university
positive contact with student support services
positive experience
Institutional facilities and administration
ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES
advised the university in advance
delay in changing name on university records
legal name change not required for change of ID card
legal name change required for ID card
no problem changing name on university records
non-binary
systems are not in place
FACILITIES
negative response to gender neutral toilets
positive experience of gender neutral toilet
POLICY
difficult to find trans policy when applying
input into policy rewrite
policies not inclusive of trans people
policy for the wrong reasons

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<tr>
<th>Policies code list</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promoting trans equality within a HEI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying, harassment and discrimination against trans people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring awareness of gender identity issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring trans student staff and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical issues, from accommodation to sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilities when supporting a person who is transitioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing and planning for a staff member’s or student’s transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting changes in gender presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUS Stonewall and TransSci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established point of contact to report abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate changes of name and gender on student records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance and training for staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of gender neutral toilets and facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation of LGBT perspectives within course content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero tolerance approach to discrimination, bullying and harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating to participant findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying, harassment, transphobia, discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support</td>
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Appendix A: suggested policy statement on trans equality

This format is based on the Joint agreement on guidelines for transgender equality in employment in further education colleges (Association of Colleges et al, 2005).

[Institution name] recognises that there can be differences between physical sex and gender identity/expression. [Institution name] will at no time discriminate against people on the grounds of transvestism, transsexualism, intersex conditions or any process of gender reassignment, begun or complete. Where this policy refers to ‘trans people’, it has in mind people living with any of these identities. When it refers to ‘gender identity’, it covers both the fixed identity of people living in the gender of their birth and the more fluid identities of many trans people.

[Institution name] celebrates and values the diversity of its workforce, and believes that [Institution name] will benefit from employing trans people at all levels of responsibility, thus hoping to provide role models for students who identify as trans. [Institution name] will treat all employees and students with respect, and seek to provide a positive working and learning environment free from discrimination, harassment or victimisation.

[Institution name] undertakes the following.

= Students will not be denied access to courses, progression to other courses, or fair and equal treatment while on courses because of their gender identity.
= The curriculum will be checked to ensure that it does not rely on or reinforce stereotypical assumptions about trans people, and that it does not contain transphobic material.
= [Institution name] will respect the confidentiality of all trans staff and students and will not reveal information without the prior agreement of the individual.
= Staff will not be excluded from employment or promotion because of their gender identity.
= Transphobic abuse, harassment or bullying (name-calling/derogatory jokes, unacceptable or unwanted behaviour, intrusive questions) is a serious disciplinary offence and will be dealt with under the appropriate procedure [HEI to provide link to procedure/s].
Transphobic propaganda, in the form of written materials, graffiti, music or speeches, will not be tolerated. [Institution name] undertakes to remove any such propaganda whenever it appears on the premises.

[I]nstitution name] will provide a supportive environment for staff and students who wish their trans status to be known. However, it is the right of the individual to choose whether they wish to be open about their gender identity. To 'out' someone, whether staff or student, without their permission is a form of harassment and, possibly, a criminal offence. [Institution name] will include gender identity issues in equality training.

[I]nstitution name] welcomes, and will provide, appropriate facilities for trans student and staff groups.

Having consulted with trans staff and students and the trans community, [Institution name] will include gender identity in internal attitudinal surveys, and when monitoring complaints of harassment.

In providing accommodation for students, any concerns or issues raised by trans students will be handled by the accommodation office and will be treated fairly and in line with [Institution name]'s obligations under equality law.

Staff and students undergoing medical and surgical procedures related to gender reassignment will receive positive support from [Institution name] to meet their particular needs during this period.

[I]nstitution name] recognises that trans staff and students come from diverse backgrounds, and will strive to ensure they do not face discrimination on the grounds of their gender identity or in relation to other aspects of their identity, for example, their race, age, religion, disability or sexual orientation. In addition, assumptions will not be made about the sex of partners of trans staff or students.

[I]nstitution name] will ensure that its environment, in terms of its pictures, images, publicity materials and literature, reflects the diversity of its staff and students.

(Pugh, 2010)
Appendix G: HREC Approval

HREC/3281/Regan: HREC favourable opinion

Research-REC-Review <research-rec-review@open.ac.uk>

Wed 12/06/2019 10:44

To:

- Lynne.Regan <lynne.regan@open.ac.uk>
- Research-REC-Review <research-rec-review@open.ac.uk>

Cc:

- Naomi.Holford <naomi.holford@open.ac.uk>

Dear Lynne

This message confirms that the research protocol for the following research project, as submitted for ethics review, has been given a favourable opinion on behalf of The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee.

**Project title: Investigating the Experiences of Transgender Students in Higher Education**

(main study)

**HREC approval date: 10/06/2019**

As part of your favourable opinion, it is essential that you are aware of and comply with the following:

1. You are responsible for notifying the HREC immediately of any information received by you, or of which you become aware which would cast doubt on, or alter, information in your original application, in order to ensure your continued safety and the good conduct of the research.
2. It is essential that you contact the HREC with any proposed amendments to your research, for example - a change in location or participants. HREC agreement needs to be in place before any changes are implemented, except only in cases of emergency when the welfare of the participant or researcher is or may be affected.

3. Your HREC reference number has to be included in any publicity or correspondence related to your research, e.g. when seeking participants or advertising your research, so it is clear that it has been agreed by the HREC and adheres to OU ethics review processes.

4. Researchers should have discussed any project-related risks with their Line Manager and/or Supervisor, to ensure that all the relevant checks have been made and permissions are in place, prior to a project commencing, for example compliance with IT security and Data protection regulations.

5. Researchers need to have read and adhere to relevant OU policies and guidance, in particular the Ethics Principles for Research with Human Participants and the Code of Practice for Research - http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/

6. The Open University's research ethics review procedures are fully compliant with the majority of research council, professional organisations and grant awarding bodies research ethics guidelines. Where required, this message is evidence of OU HREC support and can be included in an external research ethics review application. The HREC should be sent a copy of any external applications, and their outcome, so we have a full ethics review record.

7. At the end of your project you are required to assess your research for ethics related issues and/or any major changes. Where these have occurred you will need to provide the Committee with a HREC final report to reflect how these were dealt with using the template on the research ethics website - http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/human-research/full-review-process (HREC Final Report form)
Sent on behalf of the Human Research Ethics Committee

Professor Louise Westmarland  Dr Duncan Banks  Dr Claire Hewson
Chair  Deputy Chair  Deputy Chair

Human Research Ethics Committee - Research, Enterprise and Scholarship (RES)
The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

Email: research-rec-review@open.ac.uk  Tel: 01908 654849
http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/human-research

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Please consider the environment before printing this email.
Appendix H: Participant information sheets and participant consent forms
Research questionnaire 2019/20

Participant Information

Investigating the Experiences of Transgender Students in Higher Education

Before commencing this survey, please read the Participant Information below.

WHO IS ORGANISING THE RESEARCH?

My name is Lynne Regan and I am a Doctoral researcher studying for a Doctorate in Education at the Open University. You can contact me directly at lynne.regan@open.ac.uk.

IS THERE ANYONE ELSE I CAN CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR IF THERE IS A PROBLEM?

If you are unhappy at any point in the study, if you require any further information, or if there is a problem, please contact Dr Naomi Holford (EdD Supervisor) at naomi.holford@open.ac.uk.

STUDY BACKGROUND

In this voluntary study, you are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

This research study is looking at the experiences of transgender students in higher education (HE) in relation to support services, institutional administration, peers, academics/curriculum, social experience and facilities, with a view to creating a better understanding of the needs of this student group.

Under the Equality Act (2010), universities along with other public sector organisations are required by the Public Sector Equality Duty to endeavour to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity, moving towards the prevention of discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
The main purpose of my research is to identify obstacles encountered by trans students in HE, and suggest institutional policy and procedure changes that could address areas of concern.

This research project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion, from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee - HREC reference number: HREC/3281/Regan

http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/

WHAT WILL PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be invited to complete a survey questionnaire, completed via a web browser, which will ask about your experiences as a transgender student in higher education. The questionnaire is anonymous and responses cannot be linked to you.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you can print or save this information sheet for future reference; you will also be asked to complete a consent form at the start of the questionnaire. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason (see ‘Your right to withdraw and withhold information’ below).

If you wish to, you will also have the opportunity to take part in an optional 1-1 interview, by Skype, where you will have the opportunity to expand on some of your answers. There is no requirement to take part in the 1-1 interview.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

The questionnaire should take no longer than 10-15 minutes.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO TAKING PART?

Although the risk is minimum, the topic of this study may cause you to feel some distress. If you feel distressed or upset at any point, you can withdraw from the study without giving a reason.

If you are feeling distressed or upset after the study, you can ask for help by contacting the following sources:

- Beaumont Society: national self-help body run by and for the transgender community  
  www.beaumontsociety.org.uk
- Pink Therapy: independent therapy organisation working with gender and sexual diversity clients pinktherapy.mobi/
• GIRES: Gender Identity and Research Education Society, support and information for trans people, their families and the professionals who care for them [www.gires.org.uk](http://www.gires.org.uk/)
• Switchboard: LGBT+ Helpline [https://switchboard.lgbt/](https://switchboard.lgbt/) 0300 330 0630 (10am-10pm every day); [chris@switchboard.lgbt](mailto:chris@switchboard.lgbt)
• Tranzwiki: For local support, a directory of groups campaigning for, supporting or assisting trans and gender non-confirming individuals across the UK [https://www.tranzwiki.net/](https://www.tranzwiki.net/)

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO TAKING PART?

Although there are no direct benefits to taking part, it is hoped that your participation will help to influence policy, both at your own institution and at higher education institutions across the country.

YOUR RIGHT TO WITHDRAW AND WITHHOLD INFORMATION:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

In line with the regulations outlined by the British Educational Research Association, you have the right to withdraw your participation from this study at any time and for any or no reason. If you wish to withdraw you can just close the window and your responses will not be collected. During the study, you also have the right to omit, refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you.

Once you have submitted your questionnaire responses, it will not be possible to remove your data as the survey responses are anonymised, so responses cannot be traced back to you.

YOUR RIGHT TO CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY:

The study will involve the collection of some personal information (e.g. gender identity) but this will not be identifiable to you. You are not required to give your name, contact details or any other identifiable information when completing the questionnaire.

If you wish to take part in the 1-1 interview, you will be invited to email the researcher. In this case, your name, contact details and any other identifiable information will be kept separately from the main study data, and will be stored confidentially, using an anonymous code. The data will be stored at a safe place on a secure server, protected by password and all personal information will be anonymised. A separate participant information sheet for the 1-1 interview will provide further details.

HOW DO I AGREE TO TAKE PART?
To opt in for the questionnaire, please select 'NEXT' which will take you to the consent form. Once you have completed this, it will take you to the online questionnaire. If you would prefer not to take part, or change your mind at any time during the questionnaire, please close this window and no information about your visit to this web page will be collected.

HOW WILL THE DATA I PROVIDE BE USED?

The questionnaire data will not be identifiable to you. This data will be stored on a secure server.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

If you have any questions, you can contact me directly at lynne.regan@open.ac.uk

Data Protection
The Open University is the Data Controller for the personal data that you provide.

The lawful reason for processing your data will be that conducting academic research is part of the Open University's public task.

No identifiable personal data is collected through this questionnaire.
Participant Consent Form

Informed Consent for questionnaire:

Investigating the Experiences of Transgender Students in Higher Education

Lynne Regan, Doctoral Research Student, Wellbeing and Education Studies

BRIEF SUMMARY OF PROJECT

In this voluntary study, you are being invited to take part in a research study looking at the experiences of transgender students in higher education in relation to support services, institutional administration, peers, academics/curriculum, social experience and facilities, with a view to creating a better understanding of the needs of this student group. I am a Doctoral researcher studying for a Doctorate in Education at the Open University and this project is part of my Thesis.

In order to participate in this study, I need to ensure that you understand the nature of the research, as outlined in the Participant Information Sheet.

1. Taking part in the study

- I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet dated 16.08.2018 outlining the nature of the study, or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time up until the questionnaire is submitted (at which time my responses become anonymous) without having to give a reason.
- I understand that taking part in the study involves completing a survey questionnaire, completed via a web browser.

2. Use of the information in the study

- I understand that information I provide will be used for research into the experiences of transgender students in higher education with a view to creating a better understanding of the needs of this student group.
- I understand that my data is anonymous and will be stored in a secure place protected by password. I understand that it will only be used by the researcher for the research purposes outlined in the Participant Information Sheet.
3. Future use and reuse of the information by others

- I give permission for the questionnaire responses that I provide to be deposited in a specialist data centre so it can be used for future research and learning. I understand that my questionnaire responses will remain anonymous and unable to be linked to me in any way.

This form is submitted electronically and by clicking below, you agree or decline to take part in this study.

This research project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion, from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee - HREC reference number: HREC/3281/Regan http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/

This form is submitted electronically and by selecting 'Yes' below, you agree to the above and agree to take part in this study.  ★ Required

- YES: I understand the above and wish to continue to the survey
- NO: I do not wish to take part in the survey
Interview Participant Information Sheet

Human Research Ethics Committee
Participant Information Sheet (1-1 Interview)

Research project title:
Investigating the Experiences of Transgender Students in Higher Education

WHO IS ORGANISING THE RESEARCH?

My name is Lynne Regan and I am a Doctoral researcher studying for a Doctorate in Education at the Open University. You can contact me directly at lynne.regan@open.ac.uk.

IS THERE ANYONE ELSE I CAN CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR IF THERE IS A PROBLEM?

If you are unhappy at any point in the study, if you require any further information, or if there is a problem, please contact Dr Naomi Holford (EdD Supervisor) at naomi.holford@open.ac.uk.

STUDY BACKGROUND

In this voluntary study, you are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully.

This research study is looking at the experiences of transgender students in higher education (HE) in relation to support services, institutional administration, peers, academics, social experience and facilities, with a view to creating a better understanding of the needs of this student group.

Under the Equality Act (2010), universities along with other public sector organisations are required by the Public Sector Equality Duty to endeavour to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity, moving towards the prevention of discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

The main purpose of my research is to identify obstacles encountered by trans students in HE, and suggest institutional policy and procedure changes that could address areas of concern.

This research project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion, from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee - HREC reference number: HREC/3281/Regan
http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/

WHAT WILL PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be invited to take part in a 1-1 Skype interview to talk about your experiences as a transgender student in higher education.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet and you will be asked to sign and return a consent form. If you decide to

LR 27.5.10
take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason (see ‘Your right to withdraw and withhold information’ below).

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

The 1-1 interview will take about 30-60 minutes.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO TAKING PART?

Although the risk is minimum, the topic of this study may cause you to feel some distress. If you feel distressed or upset at any point, you can withdraw from the study without giving a reason. If you are feeling distressed or upset after the study, you can ask for help by contacting the following sources:

- Beaumont Society: national self-help body run by and for the transgender community
  [www.beaumontsociety.org.uk](http://www.beaumontsociety.org.uk)
- Pink Therapy: independent therapy organisation working with gender and sexual diversity clients
  [pinktherapy.mobi](http://pinktherapy.mobi)
- GiRES: Gender Identity and Research Education Society, support and information for trans people, their families and the professionals who care for them [www.gires.org.uk](http://www.gires.org.uk/)
- Switchboard: LGBT+ Helpline [https://switchboard-lgbt.org](https://switchboard-lgbt.org) 0300 330 0030 (16am–18pm every day),
  chris@switchboard-lgbt
- Transwiki: For local support, a directory of groups campaigning for, supporting or assisting trans and gender non-confirming individuals across the UK [https://www.tranzwiki.net](https://www.tranzwiki.net)

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO TAKING PART?

Although there are no direct benefits to taking part, it is hoped that your participation will help to influence policy, both at your own institution and at higher education institutions across the country.

YOUR RIGHT TO WITHDRAW AND WITHHOLD INFORMATION:

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

In line with the regulations outlined by the British Educational Research Association, you have the right to withdraw your participation from this study at any time and for any or no reason. You may withdraw during the 1-1 interview by terminating the Skype connection. During the study, you also have the right to omit, refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you.

You have the right to ask for your data to be removed after your participation in the study by contacting the research at [lpm5@open.ac.uk](mailto:lpm5@open.ac.uk) up until the time whereby all data have been anonymised and aggregated for analysis. All identifiable data will then be withdrawn from the study. Anonymised data (e.g., from a completed questionnaire) may be retained (as I cannot trace this information back to you).

YOUR RIGHT TO CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY:

The study will involve the collection of some personal information (e.g., name and contact details) Any personal information given will be unidentifiable to an external party.

HOW DO I AGREE TO TAKE PART?

LR 27.5.19
You have been directed to a new web page, separate to the questionnaire you have already completed. This is to ensure the anonymity of the responses you have provided in the questionnaire, which will not be linked to you. If you wish to take part having read this Participant Information Sheet, please email the researcher at lynn.regan@open.ac.uk so that the Consent Form can be sent to you.

HOW WILL THE DATA I PROVIDE BE USED?

To register your interest in taking part in the 1-1 interview, you have provided your name and email address to the researcher. Your name, contact details and any other identifiable information will be kept separately from the main study data, and will be stored confidentially, using an anonymous code. The data will be stored on a secure server, protected by password. All email correspondence will be deleted by the researcher after reading/replying and your email address will not be saved.

All data will be stored on a secure server and will be password protected.

Confidentiality/anonymity will be ensured – no personally identifying information will be recorded in the study, quotes will be anonymised.

Signed consent forms will be stored on a secure server.

The interview will be recorded and an anonymised transcript will be produced. You will be sent the transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors. The actual recording will be destroyed once you have agreed the transcript. All records of your name and contact details and any other identifying information will be deleted once you have agreed the transcript and you will receive no further correspondence from the researcher.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

If you have any questions, you can contact me directly at lynn.regan@open.ac.uk

Data Protection

The Open University is the Data Controller for the personal data that you provide. The lawful reason for processing your data will be that conducting academic research is part of the Open University’s public task.

Your personal data will not be shared and will be deleted as outlined above.

You have a number of rights as a data subject:

- To request a copy of the personal data we have about you
- To rectify any personal data which is inaccurate or incomplete
- To restrict the processing of your data
- To receive a copy of your data in an easily transferrable format (if relevant)
- To erase your data
- To object to us processing your data

If you are concerned about the way we have processed your personal information, you can contact the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO). Please visit the ICO’s website for further details.

LR 27.5.19
Interview Participant Consent Form

Human Research Ethics Committee
Participant Consent Form

Informed Consent for 1-1 Skype Interviews:
Investigating the Experiences of Transgender Students in Higher Education

Lynne Regan, Doctoral Research Student, Wellbeing and Education Studies

BRIEF SUMMARY OF PROJECT

In this voluntary study, you are being invited to take part in a research study looking at the experiences of transgender students in higher education in relation to support services, institutional administration, peers, academics and curriculum, social experience, and facilities, with a view to creating a better understanding of the needs of this student group. I am a Doctoral researcher studying for a Doctorate in Education at the Open University and this project is part of my Thesis.

In order to participate in this study, I need to ensure that you understand the nature of the research, as outlined in the Participant Information Sheet.

Please click the appropriate responses below:

1. Taking part in the study

I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet dated 27.05.19 outlining the nature of the study, or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ Yes
☐ No

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can stop the interview at any time, or can withdraw from the study at any time up until the time whereby all data have been anonymised and aggregated for analysis, without having to give a reason.

☐ Yes
☐ No

I understand that taking part in the study involves taking part in a 1-1 Skype interview with the researcher.

☐ Yes
☐ No

2. Use of the information in the study

I understand that information I provide will be used for research into the experiences of students in higher education with a view to creating a better understanding of the needs of the student group.

☐ Yes
☐ No
I understand that the interview will be recorded and an anonymised transcript will be produced and that I will be sent the transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors.

☐ Yes
☐ No

I understand that the actual recording will be destroyed once I have agreed the transcript and that all records of my name and contact details will be destroyed once I have agreed the transcript.

☐ Yes
☐ No

3. Future use and reuse of the information by others

I understand that access to the anonymised transcript will be limited to Lynne Regan as research investigator and the supervisory team, and that no identifying information will appear on the transcript.

☐ Yes
☐ No

I understand that any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymised so that I cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify me is not revealed.

☐ Yes
☐ No

I understand that all or part of the content of the interview may be used:

- In academic papers, policy papers or news articles
- In media that we may produce such as spoken presentations.
- On other feedback events.
- In an archive of the project as noted above.

I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet outlining the nature of the study.

☐ Yes
☐ No

I have read and understood the information above.

☐ Yes
☐ No

I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

☐ Yes
☐ No

4. Signatures

I agree to take part in this interview.
Appendix I: Demographic information

Interview participants

Which best describes your gender identity?

- Male: 65 (39.6%)
- Female: 30 (18.3%)
- Non-binary: 61 (37.2%)
- Other: 8 (4.9%)
- Prefer not to say: 0

What pronouns do you use?

- She/Her/Hers/Herself: 33 (20.1%)
- He/Him/His/Himself: 74 (45.1%)
- They/Them/Theirs/Themselves: 42 (25.6%)
- Ze/Hir/Zir/Hirs/Zirs/His/Hisself: 1 (0.6%)
- Other: 12 (7.3%)
- Prefer not to say: 2 (1.2%)

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation/preference?

- Heterosexual/Straight: 9 (5.5%)
- Gay: 22 (13.5%)
- Lesbian: 12 (7.4%)
- Bisexual/Bi: 58 (35.6%)
- Queer: 65 (39.9%)
- In another way: 26 (16%)
- Prefer not to say: 1 (0.6%)

Which of the following best describes your ethnic group?
What is your religion, faith or belief?

- **None**: 88 (53.7%)
- **Atheist**: 36 (22%)
- **Buddhist**: 0
- **Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)**: 12 (7.3%)
- **Hindu**: 0
- **Jewish**: 3 (1.8%)
- **Muslim**: 1 (0.6%)
- **Sikh**: 0
- **Any other religion**: 16 (9.8%)
- **Prefer not to say**: 8 (4.9%)
Do you consider yourself to have a specific learning disability, other disability, impairment or long-term health condition?

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<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count (Percentage)</th>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>98 (60.1%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>56 (34.4%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>9 (5.5%)</td>
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If yes, how would you describe this?

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<th>Disability Type</th>
<th>Count (Percentage)</th>
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<td>Physical impairment/mobility difficulties</td>
<td>12 (12.2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blind or partially sighted</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deaf or hard of hearing</td>
<td>6 (6.1%)</td>
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<td>Mental health difficulties</td>
<td>71 (72.4%)</td>
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<td>Specific learning difficulties</td>
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<td>(e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia)</td>
<td>31 (31.6%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autistic Spectrum Disorder</td>
<td>33 (33.7%)</td>
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<td>An unseen disability or health condition</td>
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<tr>
<td>(e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, asthma, HIV)</td>
<td>16 (16.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A disability not listed above</td>
<td>9 (9.2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
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### Policy documents

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<th>Date Produced</th>
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<th>Number of students (Interview)</th>
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<td>Transgender Equality Policy Statement: for students and staff</td>
<td>Written jointly with HR, Trade Unions, Student Support Services and the Director of Equality</td>
<td>April 2017</td>
<td>2/5/2020</td>
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<td>Equality, Diversity &amp; Inclusion</td>
<td>July 2019 for review 2020</td>
<td>2/5/2020</td>
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<td>Transgender and gender identity equality policy: developing an inclusive approach</td>
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### Student responses at HEIs where policies were investigated

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Appendix J: Two of the policies investigated (redacted)

Transgender Equality Policy Statement for students and staff

[redacted] University will at no time discriminate against people on the grounds of their gender identity or gender expression.

Where this policy refers to "trans people", it has in mind a broad range of people whose gender identity is not expressed in ways that are typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. This includes those who have non-binary, non-gender or gender-fluid identities. Trans staff, students and visitors are treated fairly and in line with [redacted] University's obligations under equality law.

[redacted] University celebrates and values the diversity of its workforce and student body, and believes that [redacted] University will benefit from employing trans people at all levels of responsibility. This will assist in providing role models to staff, and to students. [redacted] University will treat all employees and students with respect and seek to provide a positive working and learning environment free from discrimination, harassment or victimisation.

[redacted] University undertakes the following:

• [redacted] University will respect the confidentiality of all trans staff and students, and will not reveal information without the prior agreement of the individual.

• [redacted] University will provide a supportive environment for staff and students who wish their trans status to be known. However it is the right of the individual to choose whether they wish to be open about their gender identity, trans status or trans history. To "out" someone, whether staff or student without their permission is a form of harassment and, in a number of contexts, may amount to a criminal offence.

• Staff will not be excluded from employment or promotion or be redeployed against their wishes because of their gender identity.

• Requests to change name and gender records will be handled promptly and staff and students will be made aware of any implications of the changes. This will be handled at the highest level of confidentiality within the necessary teams.

• [redacted] University will work towards all staff and students records having the use of gender neutral pronouns and titles.

• Staff and students attending consultations, and undergoing surgical and or medical procedures related to gender confirmation, will receive tailored support from [redacted] University to meet their particular needs during this period.

• Students will not be denied access to courses, progression to other courses, or fair and equal treatment while on courses because of their gender identity or because they propose to, or have transitioned. This includes aspects of their course both on campus and at other locations deemed a necessary part of their study.

• The curriculum shall not rely on or reinforce stereotypical assumptions about trans people, and any materials within relevant courses and modules will positively represent trans people and trans lives.

• In providing accommodation for students, any concerns or issues raised by trans students are handled by the accommodation office for University provided
accommodation, and by the responsible member of staff for off-site accommodation booked as a recognised part of a course (with the support of the Institute Equality Champion).

- Transphobic abuse, harassment or bullying (including, but not limited to name calling/derogatory remarks, unacceptable or unwanted behaviour, intrusive questions) are serious disciplinary offences and will be dealt with under the appropriate procedure.

https://www.ac.uk/en/hr/policy-and-procedure/disciplinary/
https://www.ac.uk/en/hr/policy-and-procedure/dignity/
https://www.ac.uk/en/regulations/student-info (Number 23)

- Transphobic propaganda, in the form of written materials, graffiti, music or speeches, will not be tolerated. University undertakes to remove any such propaganda whenever, wherever and in whatever format.

- University includes gender identity issues in equality training for all staff.
- University welcomes and will provide appropriate facilities for trans student and staff groups.

- University includes gender identity in internal attitudinal surveys, and when monitoring complaints of harassment. Consultation on policy changes and other aspects of university life will take place with the internal LGBT networks, and with relevant external networks.

- University will ensure that its environment, in terms of its pictures, images, publicity materials and literature, reflects the diversity of its staff and students.

April 2017
THE UNIVERSITY OF

Trans Student Policy and Support Procedures

Scope
This policy sets out the University’s commitment to the support of trans students. The policy describes the University’s commitment to trans students whilst the appendices (support procedures) give detailed advice and guidance to students who are either in transition (with or without surgery), intending to transition (with or without surgery) or who have transitioned (with or without surgery) and staff supporting students.

The appendices also cover practical issues university staff and students should know about in order to better support trans students who may, or may not be intending to transition, including students who identify as agender, bigender, pangender, transgender, genderfluid etc. Refer to Appendix 3 for the terminology guide.

Definition of trans
The term ‘trans’ is used throughout this document and is intended to be an inclusive term. It is not generally considered to be an offensive term and can be used to describe any student who:

- Is undergoing gender transition.
- Identifies as someone with a different gender from that which they were assigned at birth, but who may have decided not to undergo medical treatment. This could include how someone presents through dress.
- Identifies as non-binary which means their gender identity is not exclusively male or female, and could identify as both or neither or something else entirely.

Importantly, the EHRC technical guidance states that ‘under the [Equality] Act gender reassignment is a personal process rather than a medical process. Protection applies from the moment the person indicates their intention to start the reassignment process, even if they subsequently change their mind. The act does not require someone to undergo medical treatment in order to be protected’ (EHRC, 2012).

Commitment to trans students
The University of [ ] recognises that there can be a difference between an individual’s assigned gender at birth and their gender identity or gender expression and will at no time discriminate, bully, harass or victimise any student based on gender identity or gender expression.

The University recognises that the period of transition can be very complex and difficult for the student, and wishes to act in a supportive and sensitive way to ease any transition period.

The University is committed to offering practical support and guidance to students who are in the process of transitioning whilst at the University of [ ], are intending to transition whilst at the University of [ ] or who require additional support and guidance after transitioning.

The University of [ ] is committed to ensuring that all students study in a safe and supportive environment, underpinned by the [ ] Policy and the Student Charter. Students can be confident that [ ] staff will:

- ensure fair and equal treatment of trans students;
- respect their confidentiality and any information shared;

[ ] 2018 Student Services
[ ] 2017 Student Services
• have effective and efficient processes for managing transition;
• ensure agreed actions are guided by the wishes of the student;
• take action against any student or staff member who bullies, harasses or discriminates against a trans student via the [Policy, Complaints Procedure for Students and Regulations for Non-Academic Disciplines]

All trans students have the following rights:
• To choose whether or not to disclose their gender identity, and to whom they disclose it, and the circumstances where this may be disclosed;
• To request the University to update its documents, records and systems to reflect their affirmed gender, once they have decided to commence living full time in their affirmed gender;
• To discuss with their Primary Contact (see Appendix 1a) the level and type of study support during their transition that they feel is appropriate to them.
• Not to feel pressurised to complete any or all of the action plan where relevant.

All University staff have these responsibilities:
• To respect the dignity of all students;
• To challenge or report incident of discrimination, bullying or harassment relating to gender identity;
• To withhold information about an individual’s trans status from any other person unless given explicit permission by the individual;
• To comply with the law in relation to the protected characteristics of gender reassignment that is in force in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

This Policy is supported by the following support procedure and guidance documents and should be read in conjunction with them:

- Guidance for Students (Transition Support) Appendix 1a Page 4
- Guidance for Staff (Transition Support) Appendix 1a Page 5
- General Information for Staff Appendix 1b Page 9
- Primary Contact Guidance Appendix 1b Page 11
- General Advice and Guidance to support all trans students Appendix 2 Page 14
- Terminology Guide Appendix 3 Page 19
- Support and Advice Reference Guide Appendix 4 Page 25
- Action Plan for supporting a student during transition Appendix 5 Page 27
- Legal Framework Appendix 6 Page 35

In addition the University of [ ] operates the following Policies and Procedures which underpin and support the Trans Student Support Policy:

[Policy] outlines the University of [ ] commitment to creating an inclusive community and society where all people are treated with dignity, equality and respect. The policy clearly outlines definitions of bullying, harassment and discrimination and examples of behaviour, and outlines what sources of advice and support are available and what sanctions and actions take place in the event of a breach.
Complaints Procedure for Students

This policy outlines what a student should do if they feel dissatisfied with any aspect of their experience with the University, either via systems, structures and procedures, or with the behaviour of a member of University staff.

Regulations on non-academic student discipline

These regulations relate to any cases of alleged student misconduct, including the behaviour of guests of students, against another student. The regulations also cover student discipline in relation to any activities engaged in, or services and facilities enjoyed as a student of the University.
Appendix 1a – Guidance for Students (Transition Support)

Informing the University
Changing Records
International Students (Tier 4)
Postgraduate Research Students
Managing Identity Change
Ongoing Support
Awards Ceremonies

Both Appendix 1a – Guidance for Students and Appendix 1b – Guidance for Staff should be read in conjunction with each other.

The student may inform the University that they intend to transition and express their gender in a manner consistent with their gender identity. The student is under no obligation at any stage to inform or disclose their gender identity, or their intention to transition and support can still be accessed from the University without having to disclose. There is a range of support available (see Appendices 2 and 4).

Informing the University

For students who are intending to transition whilst at University, the transition process can be lengthy and highly invasive and the student can expect sensitivity, strict confidentiality and support from the University at all stages. The student may or may not disclose information regarding the process, but it should be noted that the more information the University has been provided with in regards to the student’s journey, the more the support offered can be tailored to the student’s individual needs.

In the first instance, students or applicants who are seeking to transition (with or without medical procedures) should seek support from a staff member within their Academic School that they feel comfortable with (such as their Academic Adviser or Student Support Officer). It is important that this person is someone who can support the student academically as this person will act as a Primary Contact for support and will work with the student to develop an action plan for their support over their academic career (see Appendix 5). Students should refer to the Staff Guidance: Primary Contact for more information on this process. The Student EDI Officer in Student Services can offer advice and guidance if required to both parties.

Students who identify as non-binary and/or students who are not intending to transition are under no obligation to declare any information regarding their personal status to the University; however in some cases they may require tailored academic or emotional / social support that is not related to a transitioning process and it may be useful to follow some of the guidance and support outlined within this policy and accompanying procedures.

Students are also strongly encouraged to speak to the Student Support and Wellbeing team for ongoing emotional and mental health support.
Changing Records
The University of [redacted] recognizes that a student who wishes to change their name will wish to do so at an early stage of the transition process, and that this change is reflected across all University documents, lists and registers.

- After a student informs the University of their chosen name, the Central Student Administration Office will be contacted immediately by either the student or the Primary Contact to update the 'name' field on [redacted] / 'Known As' field on [redacted]. This can be done without any supporting legal documentation, but will only affect changes in non-formal areas such as class registers, Independent Learning Plans (ILP's), field trip lists etc.
- A student can also trigger this action themselves by going direct to the Central Student Administration Office without having to inform their Academic School (although as the class register will change, it would be important that the academics taking that class are aware of who the name relates to in person).
- No legal documentation is required by the Central Student Administration Office to change the gender marker or title on [redacted]. Students can choose their gender marker to be 'male', 'female' or 'other'.
- A Deed Poll document is required to change the legal name on [redacted] which will trigger a change for all legal documents, such as academic records (including the link between a student ID number and legal name), examination papers and the graduation certificate.

A student should aim to make a statutory declaration or Deed Poll of their name change.

They can choose to obtain a letter from their doctor confirming their gender identity and that the change is intending to be permanent. This is not required by the University, but may be useful when approaching other organisations.

The Central Student Administration Office will inform the student that the changes have been completed.

The Central Student Administration Office have highly restricted network space where correspondence with trans students is kept to ensure confidentiality. If a student has studied on a different record at an earlier point then changes can also be made which will need to be agreed between the Central Student Administration Office and the student.

International Students (Tier 4)
If an international student requires a Tier 4 General Student Visa to remain in the UK during their period of study, UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) regulations must be taken into consideration. The University has a legal responsibility in relation to the sponsorship of international students under the points-based immigration system. Unfortunately UK Visas and Immigration offer no special Visa concessions to Tier 4 Visa holders who are transitioning. The University is not able to continue sponsoring students on a Tier 4 Visa if they take a period of leave or intermission of more than 60 days, regardless of the reason for taking an intermission.

The [redacted] and [redacted] are also able to provide Visa advice to a student whose partner is transitioning in the UK.
Medical Intermission of up to 60 days
Students wishing to take an intermission for transitioning reasons are asked to note that the University will only continue to sponsor their Tier 4 (General) Student Visa for a medical intermission of up to 60 days. However, if the intermission will result in the student being unable to complete their course within their current grant of leave then Tier 4 sponsorship will be withdrawn. After the end of the 60 day period students are expected to return to their full-time studies and continue as before.

Medical Intermission of more than 60 days
This affects students who wish to have an intermission for more than 60 days or extend their initial 60 day medical period.

Intermissions of more than 60 days mean students will not be engaged in studies for a significant period of time. In line with the Tier 4 Sponsor Guidance, as well as the University’s policy on intermissions for Tier 4 students, the University will report students to the Home Office where an intermission is more than 60 days and the student will be expected to leave the UK. A report made to the Home Office will result in a Home Office Curtilgement Letter being sent to a student which requires the student to leave the UK by a specific date.

An international student wishing to suspend their studies for more than 60 days (such as for medical reasons post-surgery) will need to leave the UK. Both the School and the student should seek advice from the [Union Advice Centre or] Unions Advice Service as early as possible during the transition process. This will enable colleagues to ensure that any arrangements agreed with the student comply with UKVI requirements. Early discussions are also important because a late or unexpected decision to fly home could be affected by health considerations.

It is recognised that students may be unable to return home depending on the stage of transition, medical issues or complications which may arise. We recommend that students speak to the Advice Centre at the earliest opportunity or seek specialist immigration advice if unable to leave the UK.

Please note that international students in the UK with a Tier 4 General Student Visa are not permitted to change to part-time study.

Postgraduate Research Students
In the case of a research degree student transitioning, the appropriate individual to contact will normally be their Academic Supervisor(s) and/or the School Director of Graduate Studies (Research). The Academic Supervisor(s) and Director of Graduate Studies will work together with the student to consider the impact of the transition and any resulting suspension of study. This will include a risk assessment. Postgraduate students who are paid by the University will have employment status and the University’s ‘Supporting Gender Reassignment in the Workplace’ regulations will apply.

The student may apply for a period of intermission for medical reasons.

Postgraduate Research students in receipt of externally funded scholarships should contact the Scholarships team (scholarships@[email protected]) to check the procedure for suspension. The student is responsible for checking the implications of a suspension of study with their scholarship awarding body or provider, via the Scholarships team at an early stage.
Managing Identity Change

The transition process is not instantaneous, so it may be necessary to regularly update photographic identification throughout this period; in some cases the student may also require hard copies of their former identity and it is advised that these are not destroyed. The following documents may require updating:

- **Student ID Card.** The student should contact the Central Student Administration Office in the first instance. Replacement cards normally cost £15 but this fee will be waived provided that the student notifies the Central Student Administration Office of the reason for the replacement card. This information will be treated in strictest confidence.
- **NUS Card**
- **Other ID Cards, including a Passport / Driving Licence, require a letter from the doctor to change a gender marker, and Deed Poll for a name change. It is recommended however that, due to the costs involved and the need for a photograph, that these are not completed until after a full transition has been achieved. This may have implications for international students and/or students who wish to study abroad in particular**
- **University email address**

Replace or alter the following documents if appropriate (note that many of these changes will be triggered automatically when the student record is updated on):

- Online records, e-portfolio, record of achievement, academic biographies
- UCAS forms
- All student records and databases, enrolment forms, finance records
- Programme and module lists
- Academic adviser records
- Job shop / employer records
- Student Support and Wellbeing records
- Independent Learning Plan
- Volunteering and mentoring records
- Certificates (for example council tax exemption, degree)
- Club and society membership records
- Finance and banking details for University fees
- Student Loans Company / Local Education Authority informed
- Scholarships / Grants records
- Benefits Office (seek advice from the Union Advice Centre)

Ongoing Support

The [Student Support and Wellbeing Service](#) is available to support students at any stage of transition whilst at [institution]. The service can also offer advice to any students regarding issues around transition.

A student who is under medical supervision who has time off their studies relating to their transition has the right to be treated in the same way as someone who is absent for reasons of sickness. Staff should also be aware that the possible side-effect of medication may adversely affect performance, and the student may need reduced hours for a temporary period when they return following surgery, particularly if there are physical elements to their course.
If the student requires time off, it is important to discuss what processes, support or adjustments are needed to ensure the student remains on their programme of study, or when they can return when they have recovered.

There are additional support services available to students; see Appendices 2 and 4 for more information.

**Awards Ceremonies (Congregations)**

A student must legally change their name via Deed Poll before a degree certificate can be issued in their name.

Students should note that only full, legal names can be announced at Degree Ceremonies (Congregations) and published in the programme. If the Central Student Administration Office have received the Deed Poll document in advance of a student’s Congregation’s Ceremony then this is the name that will be published in the programme and announced (subject to appropriate timings for publication deadlines).

A student can request that a degree certificate be re-issued in their name after they have graduated and should contact the Central Student Administration Office for this purpose. See Appendix 2 for information on replacement certificates.
Appendix 1b: Guidance for Staff (Transition Support)

General Staff Information
- The Transition Process  
- Appropriate Language  
- Gender Recognition Certificate

Primary Contact Guidance
- Primary Contact Guidance: Responsibilities  
- Primary Contact Guidance: Developing an Action Plan  
- Primary Contact Guidance: Intermission or Withdrawal  
- Primary Contact Guidance: Telling People

Both Appendix 1a – Guidance for Students and Appendix 1b – Guidance for Staff should be read in conjunction with each other.

General Staff Information
Despite increasing public awareness of trans issues, a student, or applicant, may be worried about how the University or fellow students will respond. Students who feel unsupported may:
- feel they cannot express their gender identity openly;
- feel they have to leave without completing their programme of study and make a fresh start somewhere else to coincide with their gender identity;
- experience higher levels of anxiety, emotional distress and have a higher risk of suicide attempts and self-harm;
- be more likely to be the victims of hate crime; both on and off campus.

Due to this, it is important that any staff member who is approached by a student for support familiarises themselves with this document. Support and training is available for any staff member who requires additional guidance and information. Contact the Student EDI Officer in Student Services for more information.

The Transition Process
This is an overview of a typical transition. Each individual’s situation will vary depending on a range of factors, including whether or not a person opts for medical procedures. Staff should also be aware that this may not be the experience of non-binary trans students.

- A student knows that their gender identity is not the same as their assigned gender at birth.
- The student seeks medical advice and is diagnosed with gender dysphoria. For many students, this process is likely to have been lengthy and challenging.
- The student may inform the University that they intend to transition and express their gender in a manner consistent with their gender identity. The student is under no obligation at any stage to inform or disclose their gender identity, or their intention to transition and support can still be accessed from the University without having to disclose. There is a range of support available (see Appendices 2 and 4).
• The individual may take out a Deed Poll to change their name. ‘Known As’ field will trigger changes for informal use only (such as class registers) and can be completed without a formal deed poll document via a request to the Central Student Administration Office. ‘Name’ field will trigger changes for informal use only (such as class registers) and can be completed without a formal Deed Poll document via a request to the Central Student Administration Office.
• A Deed Poll document is required for names changes to any legal documentation, such as a degree certificate.
• The transition process may include medical intervention such as hormone therapy or surgery.
• After two years of living according to their gender identity, whether or not this has included a surgical transition, the individual can apply for a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC).
• A GRC can be awarded and the individual can be issued with a new birth certificate.

At this stage the person is now legally recognised according to their gender identity. All documents and references that have not already been changed should now be changed.

In the early stages of transition, a student may not present their gender identity on a permanent basis as they may not feel able to do so (for example they may wish for the effects of hormone therapy to become established). It can take several years for an individual to transition fully to their affirmed gender and during this time the student may experience extensive physical and emotional changes.

Appropriate Language
The following are informal guidelines on how to interact with individuals who identify as trans and/or non-binary. A guide to terminology is included in Appendix 3.

• Treat people how they present.
• Use the name and pronoun that the person asks you to. Ask or don’t use pronouns if there is any uncertainty.
• If a mistake is made with pronouns or names, make a correction and move on. The important thing is not to make a big deal out of it.
• Respect people’s privacy.
• Do not ask what their ‘real’ or ‘birth’ name is. People can be sensitive about revealing information about their past, especially if they think that it may affect how they are perceived in the present.
• Do not tell other people about a person’s status unless permission has been granted and it has been agreed as part of the support action plan for the student.
• If documents have to be kept that have the previous identity on them, keep them confidential.
• Respect people’s boundaries. If it is felt that it is relevant and necessary to ask a personal question, first ask permission to do so. Personal questions include anything to do with an individual’s anatomy, sex life, relationship status, sexual orientation and medical status (such as if an individual is taking hormone supplements).
• Listen to the individual, and, if necessary, ask how they wish to be treated.

Gender Recognition Certificate
When a student or alumnus acquires a Gender Recognition Certificate they may contact the University and ask that their former name and gender is purged from old records. In almost all cases
this request is lawful and must be complied with so as to ensure the future privacy of their past identity.

All correspondence and old records must be kept on secure, restricted network space to preserve confidentiality. Most Schools and Departments will not hold paper records, but if they do exist these should be destroyed or passed to the student (at their request) and replaced with new covers.

**Primary Contact Guidance**
The Primary Contact is a trusted member of staff within the students' Academic School who will support the student and work with them to develop an Action Plan. It is important that this person is primarily someone who can support the student academically and, where relevant refer them to appropriate sources of emotional and social support.

**Primary Contact Guidance: Responsibilities**
A Primary Contact supporting a registered student has the following responsibilities:

- To discuss with the student, without pressure and with appropriate sensitivity, how their transition may affect their study;
- To reassure the student that the University will support them during their transition, and to explain the support options;
- To respect the wishes of the student, and agree and document (in the form of a confidential action plan – see Appendix 5) how the University will provide such support;
- To store sensitive information appropriately and in accordance with data protection regulations (there are tighter controls for sensitive personal data, including transgender status, than for other personal data);
- To implement the confidential Action Plan agreed with the student, including reviewing progress, until the transition has been completed or to a point agreed with the individual;
- To obtain explicit written permission from the student before discussing their gender transition with others, for example with the Academic Adviser or Senior Tutor, or with colleagues in the Central Student Administration Office who update [insert]
- To arrange for the update of University records at the request of, and with the explicit written permission of the student;
- To promote understanding of gender identity issues amongst other staff or students who have regular contact with the student concerned, with the students explicit written permission;
- To resolve any potential issues or conflict that could undermine support provided by the University to a transitioning student;
- To signpost the student to internal and external support services, particularly for emotional support (see Appendix 4).

A Primary Contact supporting a former student has the following responsibilities:

- To refer the former student to the Central Student Administration Office with their request to change University documents, records and systems;
- To explain to the former student that evidence of official name change (such as a Deed Poll certificate) is required in order to replace degree certificates. **Staff should not ask a student if they have a Gender Recognition Certificate as this is unlawful** (and no trans person will have one until after a transition has been completed in any case);
- In exceptional circumstances where the necessary changes cannot reasonably be made, to explain to the former student the reasonable alternative arrangements put in place, who will continue to have access to the information, and for what purpose;

![Signature]
2018 Student Services

![Signature]
2017 Student Services
To store sensitive information appropriately and in accordance with data protection legislation.

Primary Contact Guidance: Developing an Action Plan
The Primary Contact staff member, with the Student EDI Officer in Student Services if required, will meet with the student and offer advice on the support available to them whilst at University and during the transition process. The student may also bring a friend or family member to this meeting for support.

An Action Plan or timescale will be agreed to ensure that the appropriate steps are taken during the student’s transition. Such arrangements are not intended to be prescriptive and should be confidential, with agreement on where copies are kept and who should be informed of the student’s circumstances. A template Action Plan can be found in Appendix 5.

An Action Plan will enable the University to make arrangements for time off study (such as visits to the doctor, post-surgery recovery period etc.) and to agree when changes to records should be made. Any plan and timescales should remain flexible in response to the student’s needs with special attention given to students in programmes of study that require them to undertake course placements, years in industry or years abroad.

This Action Plan may address:

- The date when the student intends to commence any definitive actions, such as (but not limited to):
  - Public change of gender expression
  - Medical appointments
  - Formal request for a change of name on 
  - Hormone therapy
- What time off the student will need for medical appointments or procedures, and/or possible side-effects of medication which may have an impact on their academic performance or wellbeing. Students should be aware that module Learning Outcomes will still need to be met and any absences will need to be agreed with this in mind. If a student or School feels that the transition process is starting to have a negative impact on Learning Outcomes, then intermission may need to be considered as an option. Students should be made aware that this process will vary between programmes of study and may be unique to their individual requirements.
- What supportive arrangements and adjustments are available to the student.
- When to inform the rest of the academic faculty and their fellow students, and whether the student would prefer to do this in person, or have it done for them and if so how they wish this to occur.
- What emotional and mental health support can be put in place for the student if they feel that they would require it, such as counselling or referrals to other relevant agencies.
- Explain how the student is covered by existing policies, such as the [Policy].

When a student starts to express their gender identity, relevant departments and services should ensure that everything is in place to avoid any contradictory information.

It is appropriate to discuss how other colleagues and students will be informed. The student may wish to do this themselves, or they may wish for this to be done for them. The student must maintain full control however, including over language, terminology and means of the information being disclosed and this should be agreed in writing before any information is circulated.
Primary Contact Guidance: Intermission or withdrawal from a module or qualification

The University of [Redacted] recognises if a student undergoes surgical procedures they may need to take time out of study of between one and twelve weeks, or more. A student should discuss timescales for medical treatment with their Primary Contact as early as possible so that appropriate information, advice and guidance can be given. It is important to consider financial implications as well.

A number of options may be possible, depending on the course of study being undertaken by the student, such as banking the assessment scores already completed, taking one or more years out of study, continuing to study but on a part-time basis or maintaining full-time attendance but studying different modules from those the student is currently registered on (please note that this option is normally time restricted). The student should be made aware that not all of these options will be available on all courses, depending on the academic requirements of the School, the assessment criteria, learning outcomes and other factors. The Primary Contact should explore the different options with the student and advise what the most viable course of action would be for the students’ individual circumstances. Further advice and guidance can be found here [Redacted]

International Students (Tier 4)

If an international student requires a Tier 4 General Student Visa to remain in the UK during their period of study, UK Visa’s and Immigration (UKVI) regulations must be taken into consideration. The University has a legal responsibility in relation to the sponsorship of international students under the points-based immigration system. Unfortunately UK Visas and Immigration offer no special Visa concessions to Tier 4 Visa holders who are transitioning.

The University is not able to continue sponsoring students on a Tier 4 Visa if they take a period of leave or intermission of more than 60 days, regardless of the reason for taking an intermission. If the intermission will result in the student being unable to complete their course within their current grant of leave then Tier 4 sponsorship will be withdrawn. After the end of the 60 day period students are expected to return to their full-time studies and continue as before.

Intermissions of more than 60 days mean students will not be engaged in studies for a significant period of time. In line with the Tier 4 Sponsor Guidance, as well as the University’s policy on intermissions for Tier 4 students, the University will report students to the Home Office where an intermission is more than 60 days and the student will be expected to leave the UK. A report made to the Home Office will result in a Home Office Curtailment Letter being sent to a student which requires the student to leave the UK by a specific date.

An international student wishing to suspend their studies for more than 60 days (such as for medical reasons post-surgery) will need to leave the UK. Both the School and the student should seek advice from the [Redacted] Union Advice Centre or [Redacted] Unions Advice Service as early as possible during the transition process. This will enable colleagues to ensure that any arrangements agreed with the student comply with UKVI requirements. Early discussions are also important because a late or unexpected decision to fly home could be affected by health considerations.

It is recognised that students may be unable to return home depending on the stage of transition, medical issues or complications which may arise. We recommend that students speak to the Advice Centre at the earliest opportunity or seek specialist immigration advice if unable to leave the UK.
Please note that international students in the UK with a Tier 4 General Student Visa are not permitted to change to part-time study.

Home students’ intermission restrictions may vary depending on your School and course. Please speak to your course advisor for further details.

Primary Contact Guidance: Telling People

If appropriate, and with the agreement of the student, relevant colleagues in the following services may need to be informed. The Primary Staff Contact and the student should identify a list of appropriate people to tell and how, when and by whom they will be told when completing the student’s Action Plan.

- Programme teams such as tutors, demonstrators and support staff
- Central Student Administration Office
- Academic Adviser
- Fellow students
- Student loans organisations
- Scholarships Office
- Congregations Office
- Postgraduate Support Office
- Undergraduate Support Office
- Student Support and Wellbeing
- Examinations Office
- Financial Support Office
- College Master’s Office
- International Office
- Director of Student Services’ Office
- Accommodation Office
- Library
- Sports Centre
- Union Clubs or Societies
- Volunteer placements
- Work based study placement
- Year in industry placement
- Employer
- Year abroad / Year in industry placement co-ordinators
Appendix 2: General Advice and Guidance to support all trans students

Support Group and

Bullying, Discrimination and Harassment
Confidentiality
Accommodation
Toilet and Changing Facilities
Sport and Leisure Activities
Examinations and alternative arrangements
Careers Advice
Study Abroad
Year in Industry / Placements
Graduates Requesting Change of Status
Replacement Degree Certificates

Support Group

There is a free, confidential peer-support group run in partnership with for all trans, intersex and non-binary gender people at the University of The group is based at the campus and is run by non-binary people for non-binary people. Family and partners are welcome. The group welcomes folk in drab (birth gender mode) or dressed (true gender mode). There are facilities for those who may wish to change on site. Full details and meeting dates are available on the Student Guide.

The Gender and Sexual Diversity Centre is based in . The centre provides counselling, peer support and sexual health and wellbeing advice for LGBTQI people and their families and friends. Full details are available on their website www.-centre.org/

Bullying, Discrimination and Harassment

The University of aims to provide an environment which respects and values the positive contribution of all its students, enabling them to achieve their full potential and to gain benefit and enjoyment from their involvement in the life of the University.

At we are creating an inclusive university community and a society where:

- People are treated with dignity, equality and respect
- Inequalities are challenged
- People are treated fairly with regards to all procedures, assessments and choices
- We anticipate, and respond positively, to different needs and circumstances so that everyone can achieve their potential

The University takes incidents of bullying, discrimination or harassment extremely seriously. Students who wish to report an incident should refer to the Policy for guidance on how to do so and what action will be taken.

2018 Student Services
2017 Student Services
Confidentiality
Confidentiality is crucial.

Inappropriate, casual discussion of a student’s personal circumstances is unacceptable, as is disclosure that has not been agreed with the student. The Action Plan agreed with the student should make clear where disclosure will happen and make clear that arrangements can be changed at any time if the student so wishes. In specified circumstances, the Gender Recognition Act 2004 prohibits disclosure of the fact that someone has applied for a gender recognition certificate (GRC), or disclosure of someone’s gender before the acquisition of a GRC. Such disclosure constitutes a criminal offence liable to a fine. If a student wishes to complain about the conduct of a staff member, they should refer to the Student Complaints Procedure. If a student wishes to complain about the conduct of another student, they should refer to the Regulations on student discipline in relation to non-academic matters.

Accommodation
Students at have access to their own study bedroom in their first year, which includes a bed, study desk and chair and clothes storage. Rooms are available in flats, houses or in corridors. Some rooms have their own en-suite facilities and others have shared shower and toilet facilities. The majority of university accommodation is mixed sex but it is also possible to request single-sex living accommodation when applying for a room via the free text box on the online accommodation application form. Trans students who would like to live in female or male only accommodation can request this via the free text box (this is allocated subject to availability and is not guaranteed however). Applicants can only apply for university accommodation once they have received a course offer and are advised to apply immediately, as rooms are allocated on a first come, first served basis.

Students, including trans students, who are already in on-campus accommodation can request to switch rooms to either mixed-sex or single-sex accommodation depending on availability. Fees for the accommodation are adjusted when students move from one room to another if they are in different price bands. Students who wish to explore this option should contact the Accommodation Office.

If students have any urgent concerns with regards to their living arrangements, they should ask to meet with their College Master in the first instance to try and resolve matters. If necessary short-term emergency accommodation can be provided whilst the concern is investigated.

Toilets and Changing Facilities
Trans students are free to use any gendered changing facility or toilet of their choice on campus, however there are gender neutral facilities if these are preferred. This includes disabled toilets if a trans student feels more confident in utilising these facilities, however trans students are not restricted to using disabled toilets, nor is it the intention to imply that identifying as trans is a disability.

The University of is committed to reviewing if gender neutral facilities can be installed when a new build development is undertaken or a facility is refurbished.

Gender neutral toilets on the campus are available in the following locations.
Gendered facilities are numerous and therefore not identified. There are a limited number of gender neutral toilets on the campus, although students are free to use the gendered toilet and changing facilities of their choice.

Exam invigilators will escort a student to the gendered facility of their choice in an exam situation, and in some examination locations gender neutral facilities are also available if preferred. It is not acceptable to restrict a trans student to using disabled toilets or other unisex facilities.

Sport and Leisure Activities

The University is committed to ensuring that all students have access to sport and leisure activities whilst they are studying, recognising the importance of physical activity for both physical and mental wellbeing.

Trans students can join any sports club or society on a non-competitive basis without requiring specific advice and guidance.

The University of Sports Centre at is open and inclusive to all students. Members of the Sports Centre are free to use any gendered changing or toilet facility of their choice both in the Sports Centre and although both locations have gender neutral changing and toilet facilities available if preferred.

There are no gender neutral changing or toilet facilities at however students are free to use the gendered changing or toilet facilities of their choice. The swimming pool changing area has communal gender neutral cubicle changing facilities.

The Gender Recognition Act 2004 recognises that, in some circumstances, it may be appropriate to restrict a student from participating in certain competitive sports in their true gender identity. This is to ensure fair competition and the safety of all competitors. Such considerations are dependent on a number of physiological factors and should be decided after careful consultation with the involved parties. However the Act makes it clear that a trans person should be given the same access to sports clubs as a cis person.

Sports teams at compete in a variety of national and local leagues, and the regulations and restrictions may vary across them. The British Universities and Colleges Sport Association (BUCS) is committed to supporting institutions in developing an inclusive, relevant and engaging sporting offer for all students. The full policy can be read here. BUCS will defer to the relevant sporting national governing body’s competitive regulations regarding trans students’ involvement in competitive fixtures. In the first instance, trans students wishing to partake in competitive sport should speak to the Sports Team in Union for tailored advice and guidance.

Examinations and alternative arrangements

If a student thinks circumstances may make it difficult or impossible to attend an examination or assessment, for example if it is scheduled within the recovery time after surgery, then they may be able to make alternative arrangements. A student should discuss this with their Primary Contact as soon as possible. The examinations webpages has details of deadlines to request alternative or adapted arrangements www.ac.uk/csa/o/exams/beforetheacy

Careers Advice

Students should note that equality within employment is a right according to law. LGBT+ people are making advances towards achieving equality and the public consciousness has, over the last few
years, shifted in a more positive direction. As an indication of these changing attitudes, hundreds of employers, including prominent graduate recruiters, have signed up to be Diversity Champions with Stonewall.

If a student would like 1:1 careers guidance, please make an appointment with the Careers and Employability Service.

The following sites and organisations provide information and advice about your rights and help with finding LGBT+ friendly employers and jobs.

- **Gay Business Association** is the “LGBT professional’s network for the UK”. Includes directory of member companies, networking events and useful links.
- **Press for Change** includes lots of useful information on employment issues.
- **Stonewall** campaigning organisation. Includes help, advice, and a student guide to employers.
- **Proud Employers** jobs with Stonewall Diversity Champions.
- **The Diversity Group** was set up, with the aim of eliminating barriers within employment, education and training for diverse groups throughout the UK.
- **ACAS** provides help and advice for employers and employees.

**Study Abroad**

Going abroad as part of a degree is an amazing experience and a chance for a student to develop personally, academically and professionally. However, not all countries are LGBT+ friendly, and the University would strongly advise any trans student who is considering a Study Abroad programme to research their destination(s) of choice to assess the local laws, culture and environment with regards to trans and LGBT+ individuals. Safety is the most important factor to consider when making a decision. As part of this research, the University would also strongly advise a student to investigate any regulations on hormone transportation or usage in their country of choice. The University of [URL] cannot advise a student one way or another in their decision, but will provide support to make an educated and informed choice that will help to assure student safety abroad and provide an incredible Study Abroad experience.

A passport will require a letter from a doctor to change a gender marker and the name can be changed with a Deed Poll certificate. However, due to the need to provide a photograph and the costs involved with updating a passport, it is recommended that this is not completed until after a full transition has been achieved. This may therefore have implications for students who wish to study abroad.

There is further useful information on the following sites:

- International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association: [www.iglta.org](http://www.iglta.org)
- International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association: [www.iliag.org](http://www.iliag.org)
- Gay European Tourism Association: [www.geta-europe.org](http://www.geta-europe.org)

**Year in Industry / Placements**

Many courses at the University offer the option of a Year in Industry or a placement with an external organisation. Students who work within an organisations whilst on a Year in Industry or a
place are entitled to the same rights and protections as an employee. Equality within employment is a right according to law.

It is advised that a student speaks to their Year in Industry or Placement Coordinator in the first instance to check that the organisation they are working with is LGBT+ friendly. A good starting point is to check if they have a public Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity policy and / or a Support Policy for Trans Staff. If a student is concerned about the culture of the organisation they are due to be joining, they have the right to discuss their concerns with their Year in Industry or Placement Coordinator.

Where a Year in Industry or placement is abroad, please see the advice under Study Abroad.

Graduates Requesting Change of Status
A status letter confirms a student’s full name (as noted on their student record), date of birth, course title, registration date, completion date, degree classification (if applicable) and graduation date (if applicable). Status letters for past students also state that the course was taught in English. If a student wishes to receive a new status letter in their acquired gender and name, they will also need to supply a Deed Poll certificate or other evidence of legal name change. To provide assurance regarding the validity of status letters, they are supplied on special hologrammed and tamper-proof security paper. A student can apply for a status letter online which normally costs £10.00 per copy but this fee will be waived provided that the student notifies the Central Student Administration Office of the reason for the replacement degree certificate. This information will be treated in strictest confidence.

Please note that it is University policy not to release information for students who have a debt to the University.

Replacement Degree Certificates
A replacement degree certificate may only be requested if the original has been lost or destroyed (there can only ever be one degree certificate in circulation at any one time). If a student wishes to generate a replacement degree certificate with their name, they must return their current degree certificate with a copy of their Deed Poll certificate or other evidence of legal name change. A student can apply for a replacement certificate online which normally costs £20.00 but this fee will be waived provided that the student notifies the Central Student Administration Office of the reason for the replacement degree certificate. This information will be treated in strictest confidence.
Appendix 3 – Terminology

Note: Terminology in the ‘transgender’ field is constantly changing as our understanding and perceptions of gender variance develop. As such this list is subject to change and is non-exhaustive.

Agender / Neutrois
A person who does not identify themselves as having a particular gender.

Androgyne
A person with a gender which is simultaneously masculine and feminine but not necessarily in equal amounts. It is associated with androgyny.

Acquired Gender
A legal term used in the Gender Recognition Act 2004. It refers to the gender that a person who is applying for a gender recognition certificate (GRC) has lived for two years and intends to continue living in. Affirmed gender may be used when a person has transitioned but has decided not to apply for a GRC.

Affirmed Gender
A more common term in describing the post-transition gender role which accords with the gender identity. ‘Affirmed’ should be used in preference to ‘acquired’; the latter is the language of the Gender Recognition Act and is more appropriately used to describe the legal gender status of the individual.

Alter Ego
See ‘Dual Role’.

Bigender
A person whose sense of personal identity encompasses two genders.

Binary / Non-Binary
The gender binary is the classification of sex and gender into two distinct, opposite and disconnected forms of masculine and feminine.

Non-Binary refers to any gender that is not exclusively male or female. Individuals usually go by they / them pronouns but some will choose neo-pronouns (such as xe/xir/xirself). A similar term is genderqueer. Some common non-binary gender identities include: agender, bigender, genderfluid, androgyne and neutrois etc. It is usually considered to be under the transgender umbrella. Research by the Scottish Transgender Alliance (2015) found that 65 per cent of non-binary respondents identify as trans. Just as with trans men and trans women, non-binary people transition and live their lives in various ways – which may or may not include medically transitioning (i.e. taking hormones or having surgeries)

Cisgender
A person whose gender identity aligns with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Demigender
A person who feels partially, but not completely, connected to a particular gender identity.
Demifluid
A person whose gender identity is partially fluid whilst the other part(s) are static.

Demiflux
A person whose gender identity is partially fluid, with the other part(s) being static. This differs from demifluid as flux indicates that one of the genders is non-binary.

Dual Role
A dual role person occasionally wears clothing and/or makeup and accessories that are not traditionally associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Generally, dual role people do not wish to transition and do not necessarily experience gender dysphoria. Some people prefer the term alternate. Historically the terms transvestite and cross dresser were used to describe dual role people, but they are now considered to be outdated. While some people may use the terms to describe themselves, other people may find the terms offensive.

Gender
Gender consists of two related aspects; gender identity, which is the person’s internal perception and experience of their gender; and gender role or expression which is the way the person lives in society and interacts with others based on their gender identity. Gender is less clearly defined than anatomical sex and does not necessarily represent a simple binary choice; some people have a gender identity that is neither clearly male or female.

Gender Confirmation Treatment / Gender Reassignment Surgery
An individual permanently transitioning usually undertakes gender confirmation treatment that includes hormone therapy and often surgery to bring the sex characteristics of the body more in line with the gender identity. The surgery is also sometimes referred to as gender (or sex) reassignment surgery. The term ‘sex change’ is not appropriate or polite.

Gender Dysphoria / Gender Identity Disorder / Gender Incongruence
Gender incongruence is a medical term used to describe a person whose gender identity does not align, to a greater or lesser extent, with the sex assigned at birth. Where this causes discomfort it is known as gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is a term describing the discomfort or distress caused by the discrepancy between a person’s gender identity (their psychological sense of themselves as men or women) and the sex they were assigned at birth (with the accompanying primary/secondary sexual characteristics and/or expected social gender role) (NHS, 2013). Gender dysphoria is not considered a mental health issue but unmanaged dysphoria or the social stigma that may accompany it and any changes a person makes to their gender expression can result in ‘clinically significant levels of distress’ (NHS, 2013). In order to qualify for NHS medical assistance to transition, a trans person in the UK must have a diagnosis of gender dysphoria. As not all trans people have gender dysphoria this presents a significant barrier to accessing medical support and the provisions of the Gender Recognition Act 2004.

Gender Expression
See ‘Gender Presentation’.

Genderfluid
A person who does not identify themselves as having a fixed gender.
Gender Identity
The way one identifies oneself. People have the right to self-identify from the gender spectrum, both in binary and non-binary terms.

Gender Presentation / Gender Expression
While gender identity is subjective and internal to the individual, the presentation of one's self, either through personality or clothing is what is perceived by others. Typically, trans people seek to make their gender expression or presentation to match their gender identity, rather than their assigned gender at birth.

Gender Reassignment / Transitioning
Gender reassignment is a process that is undertaken for the purpose of reassigning a person's gender expression by changing personal characteristics, including physiology. Any part of the process would be covered by the terminology.

Gender Reassignment Surgery
See 'Gender Confirmation Treatment'.

Gender Recognition Certification (GRC)
Gender recognition certificates (GRC) are issued by the gender recognition panel under the provisions of the Gender Recognition Act 2004. The holder of a full GRC is legally recognised in their acquired gender for all purposes. A full GRC is issued to an applicant if they can satisfy the panel that they fulfil all the criteria outlined in the Gender Recognition Act. Applicants can be UK residents or from recognised overseas territories who have already acquired a new legal gender. The act requires that the applicant is over 18, has, or has had, gender dysphoria, has lived in their affirmed gender for two years prior to the application, and intends to live permanently according to their acquired gender status. It is never appropriate to ask a trans person for a GRC and regarded as unlawful because it breaches their right to privacy. Once a person has obtained a GRC their gender history can only be disclosed where there are explicit exceptions in law:
- in accordance with an order of or proceedings before a court or tribunal, when it is strictly relevant to proceedings
- for the purpose of preventing or investigating crime, where it is relevant
- for the purposes of the social security system or a pension scheme

Gender Role
The social norm — the interaction with others — which gives both expression to the inner gender identity and reinforces it.

Gender Variance
Gender variance, also referred to as gender non-conformity, is behaviour or gender expression that does not match socially constructed gender norms for men and women.

Intersex
A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the typical definitions of female or male. Until recently, parents of intersex babies were encouraged to elect for surgery so that their child would conform to stereotypical male or female appearances. As a result, many intersex people can encounter difficulties as the gender assigned at birth may differ from their gender identity and surgery may have compromised sexual, urinary and reproductive function. Today, parents are advised to delay surgery until their child reaches puberty so that the child can inform decision-making. Some parents
do not observe this advice and attitudes will vary country by country. Not all intersex people opt for surgery, and many will consider themselves to be intersex rather than male or female. Some intersex people may decide to transition to their self-identified gender and start to identify as trans.

Legal Sex
A person’s ‘legal’ sex is determined by their sex on their birth certificate and the assumption made at birth is that their gender status (boy, girl) matches. For higher education institutions (HEI’s) and colleges, a person’s legal sex is only relevant for insurance, pension purposes and in rare cases occupational requirements. For the purposes of everyday life (including banking, personal identification and travel), a person’s legal sex may not be the same as their self-identified gender. For instance, a trans woman can have identity documents such as a passport, driving licence and employment records based upon her gender as female, but still have a birth certificate which states that she is male.

LGBT+
While being trans or having a trans history is different from sexual orientation, the forms of prejudice and discrimination directed against trans people can be similar to those directed against lesbian, gay, bisexual plus (LGB+) people and historically the two communities have coexisted and supported each other. As a result, advocacy and support groups often cover LGBT+ issues. Trans people can also identify as LGB+.

Neutrois
See ‘Agender’.

Non-Binary
See ‘Binary’.

Pangender
A person who identifies themselves as a member of all genders.

Polygender
A person whose experiences multiple gender identities either simultaneously or varying between them.

Pronoun
A pronoun is the term used to refer to somebody, for example she/her/hers/herself or he/him/his/himself. Gender-neutral pronouns include
- they/them/their/themselves
- che/chim/chis/chimself
- E/Em/Er/Eirs/Erself
- Per/person/pers/perself
- Xe/hir/hirs/ hirself

Real Life Experience
Real-life ‘experience’ or ‘experience’ are the terms used by the medical profession and refer to the period in which an individual is required to live, work and study full time in their affirmed gender before they can undergo genital surgery. Previously the requirement applied to hormone replacement as well as genital surgery. Some trans staff and students may be asked by a gender identity clinic to provide confirmation from their institution that they are undertaking real-life experience or experience.
Self-Identified Gender
The gender that a person identifies as. The trans community is campaigning for UK law to be based on self-identification as is currently the case in other European countries.

Sex
Refers to the differences in physiology (e.g., reproductive organs) and brain characteristics that lead to a person being categorised as male, female or intersex. This is distinct from gender identity.

Sexual Orientation
Sexual orientation is a separate area from gender identity. Sexual orientation is associated with the sexual attraction between one person and another, which is different from the internal knowledge of one’s own identity.

Trans
An inclusive term for those who identify themselves as transgender. The word ‘trans’ can be used without offence to cover people undergoing gender transition, people who identify as someone with a different gender from that assigned at birth but who may have decided not to undergo medical treatment. This term should be used as an adjective.

Transition
The term used to describe the process of the permanent change of gender role in all spheres of life; family, study, work, leisure pursuits and society generally. The gender identity does not change when a person transitions; the gender role and appearance come into alignment with it.

Transitioning
See ‘Gender Reassignment’.

Transgender
An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from their assigned gender at birth.

Trans History
A person with a trans history will have transitioned to their self-identified gender. Consequently, they may no longer identify as a trans person, and simply see their transition as one part of their history.

Transphobia
Transphobia is a term used to describe the fear, anger, intolerance, resentment and discomfort that some people may have as a result of another person being trans. This can result in discrimination, harassment, victimisation and hate crime.

Trans Man / Trans Woman
A Trans Man is a man who was assigned female at birth. A Trans Woman is a woman who was assigned male at birth.

Trigender
A person who identifies as three genders.
Words not to use

Cross-Dresser
See ‘Transvestite’.

Drag Queen
A male who wears female clothing for public performance. Not to be confused with transvestite as a drag queen is in reference specifically to performers. Also not to be confused with transgender or transsexual as drag queens are typically cisgender and have no desire to change their sex. This is not a term that should be used unless specifically asked to do so by an individual.

Queer
In the past a derogatory term for LGBT+ individuals. The term has now been reclaimed by LGBT+ young people in particular who don’t identify with traditional categories around gender identity and sexual orientation but is still viewed to be derogatory by some. LGBT+ people may identify themselves or their peers as queer, but should never be described as queer by someone outside the community.

Sex Change
Sex refers to the differences in physiology (e.g. reproductive organs) and brain characteristics that lead to a person being categorised as male, female or intersex. This is distinct from gender identity. The gender identity does not change when a person transitions; the gender role and appearance come into alignment with it, therefore the term sex change is not appropriate or polite.

Transvestite
A person (typically male) who derives pleasure from dressing in clothes primarily associated with the opposite sex. Transvestite should not be confused with transgender or transsexual as individuals are normally cisgender and have no desire to change their sex. To refer to a transgender individual as a transvestite is typically seen as derogatory. Transvestite is also not to be confused with Drag Queen as that term is specifically for performers.

Transsexual Person
This term is gradually being replaced with more acceptable terminology and now only refers to a person who psychologically identifies with the opposite sex and may seek medical intervention to live as a member of this sex especially by undergoing surgery and hormone therapy to obtain the necessary physical appearance (such as by changing the external sex organs).
UNIVERSITY OF [...]

Appendix 4 – Support and Advice Reference Guide

This guide will outline what specific sources of advice and support are available to students, or students who have partners, who are transitioning, have transitioned or are intending to transition.

Health Advice

- The University Medical Centre in [...] is an on-campus specialist GP practice providing medical care tailored to meet all the health needs of students at the University www.[...].co.uk/
- The [...]. Surgery [...], is a specialist GP practice providing medical care tailored to meet all the health needs of students at [www.[...].co.uk
- Private GP.
- Gender and Sexual Diversity Centre [...], in partnership with local community based organisations provide access to counselling services, peer support and health and wellbeing services for LGBT+ people www.[...].centre.org/

Academic Advice

- University of [...]. Academic Advisers are provided for all undergraduate students at [...], to support their academic and professional development, encourage students to develop their independent learning and personal planning skills and raise awareness of the opportunities available to students for developing graduate attributes and skills.
- University of [...]. Postgraduate Academic Supervisor perform the same function as an Academic Adviser but for postgraduate students.
- University of [...]. School Student Support Officers are there to provide you with support and advice throughout your academic career.
- University of [...]. Study Abroad Placement Co-ordinator are there to support students in coordinating their Study Abroad placement.
- University of [...]. Year in Industry / Placement Co-ordinator are there to support students with coordinating their Year in Industry or Placement.
- University of [...]. Central Student Administration Office provides support for all student record changes.

General Support / Advice

Student/ [...]. Union led

- [...]. Union LGBT+ Student Society [...], student run support and entertainment group for LGBT+ students at [...]. based at [...]. www.[...].gkt.org.uk/
- [...]. Union’s LGBT+ Student Society [...], student run support and entertainment group for LGBT+ students at [...]. based at [...]. www.facebook.com/LGBT[...].
- Part-Time Officers (LGBT+ Officer Open Place, LGBT+ Officer Trans Place, LGBT+ Officer Women’s Place); represent and support the needs and interests of specific groups of students www.[...].co.uk/representation/officers;
• Advice Centre, have appointments or a drop-in service available for students on a wide range of issues www...co.uk/welfare/advice-centre/

• Union Welfare Officer; full-time elected Officer who represents the needs and interests of students across a variety of welfare issues

• Nightline; free, confidential peer-to-peer student run telephone / email / IM service for students in crisis or who just need someone to talk

University Led

• University of Student Support and Wellbeing services based at provide support, advice and guidance to students with disabilities and students with mental health conditions, as well as students in crisis www.ac.uk/studentwellbeing/

• College Master’s and Master’s Assistants; provide you with support and advice throughout your academic career: www.ac.uk/studentservices/masters/index

• School Student Support Officer; provide you with support and advice throughout your academic career.

• Support Group; free, confidential peer-support group run in partnership with TG Pals for all trans, intersex and non-binary gender people at the University of www.ac.uk/studentervices/equality

• Accommodation Office; support students with all on-campus accommodation enquiries www.ac.uk/accommodation/

• Careers and Employability; provide advice and guidance to students when considering their career options www.ac.uk/ces/

• Chaplaincy; provide spiritual support and guidance to students across a range of faiths www.ac.uk/chaplaincy/

• LGBT+ Staff Network; support network for LGBT+ staff at the University of blogs.ac.uk/lgbtstaff/

• Student EDI Officer; a full-time staff position within Student Services focused on developing support services and structures for students across a range of protected characteristics www.ac.uk/studentservices/staff/index

Local / National Charities

• In partnership with local community based organisations provide access to counselling services, peer support and health and wellbeing services for LGBT+ people www...centre.org/

• Beaumont Society; national self-help body run by and for the transgender community www.beaumontsociety.org.uk

• Pink Therapy; independent therapy organisation working with gender and sexual diversity clients pinktherapy.mobi/

• GIRES; Gender Identity and Research Education Society; support and information for trans people, their families and the professionals who care for them www.gires.org.uk/
Appendix 5 – Action Plan for supporting a student during transition

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Please work through this Action Plan together, referring to the Trans Student Support Policy for advice and guidance. This Action Plan is not to be shared with any individuals other than those identified by the Primary Contact and the student.

Student Contact information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal name of student</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student ID Number</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student email address</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Academic Adviser</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Senior Tutor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the student a Tier 4 student?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Record of initial meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Primary Contact</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are there any concerns in particular that the student wishes to cover as part of this Support Action Plan?
changes agreed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Known As / Name to appear on</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender marker to be changed to:</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title to be changed to:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the email address need to change?</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agreed Timescales

Date when the student intends to commence any 'real-life experience', which may include the expected point or phase of a change of name, title, personal details and stated gender.

Date when the student will start hormone therapy

What amendments will be required to records and systems? Who is responsible for these and when will they be completed by?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>By When</th>
<th>Primary Contact action</th>
<th>Student action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Email address</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Student ID Card</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online records / e-portfolio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>UCAS form</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finance records</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrolment form</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme and module list</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Adviser record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Shop / Employer record</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2018 Student Services
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Support and Wellbeing records</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering / Mentoring record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificates</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Club / Society membership record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Finance and banking details for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University fees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship / Grant record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits office</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Does the student wish to inform fellow students and staff themselves, or have this done for them? What language and terminology would the student like to be used?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who needs to be informed</th>
<th>By When</th>
<th>Primary Contact action</th>
<th>Student action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programme teams (tutors, demonstrators, support staff)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Student Administration Office</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Adviser</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fellow students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Loans Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Education Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scholarships Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Congregations Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Postgraduate Support Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Support Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Support and Wellbeing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examinations Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial Support Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>College Master’s Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Director of Student Services’ Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accommodation Office</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sports Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Union Clubs or Societies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteer Placements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work based study placement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year in industry placement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year Abroad Year in Industry placement</td>
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<tr>
<td>co-ordinators</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Academic Decisions**

Does the student wish to continue their course of study, intermittently or come to some other arrangement (e.g., part-time study)? If yes, are there funding implications to be considered?

What time off will the student need for medical or surgical appointments or procedures?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appointment Date</th>
<th>Length of anticipated time away from the University</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
Do these dates affect assignment deadlines, examinations or other academic commitment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment / examination / academic commitment clash</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</table>

Are there medical side effects anticipated that should be considered?

Are there any reasons why these changes cannot be implemented for the student? If so, what reasonable adjustments will be put in place?

Does the student need to submit an academic concessions form? If yes, when does this need to be submitted by?

Is the student intending to work a year in industry? If yes, what action needs to be taken?
Is the student intending to go on placement? If yes, what action needs to be taken?

Additional Support

Will training or a briefing be required for fellow students or staff members?

Does the student wish to be referred to Student Support and Wellbeing or other agency for additional support?

Does the student have an existing ILP in place? If yes, will this need adjusting?

If the student is in University accommodation, is alternative accommodation required?
Tier 4 students

Does the student wish to suspend their study for more than 60 days? If so, the student has been informed that doing so will result in the University withdrawing their sponsorship and the University will have an obligation to inform the Home Office.

Does the student require specialist Visa advice?

Postgraduate Students

Does the student wish to suspend their study? If yes, are there implications with regards to scholarships, research grants or other sources of funding?

Action Plan Review

Dates of future meetings (please note that the student is entitled to as many review meetings as required in order to ensure a positive University experience)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review meeting</th>
<th>Date and Time</th>
<th>Meeting Notes and agreed actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review meeting 1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Review meeting 2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Agreed named individuals with whom this Action Plan can be shared
Review meeting 3

Checklist
- Student has been informed that evidence of official name change (such as a Deed Poll certificate) is necessary for legal documents such as degree certificates
- Student has been provided with a copy of the Trans Student Support Policy
- Student has been provided with a signed and dated copy of the Action Plan

Declarations of Agreement

I (insert name of student) hereby consent for (insert name of Primary Contact) to change my University documents, records and systems as agreed above.

Signed (student) Date:
Signed (Primary Contact) Date:

I (insert name of student) hereby consent for (insert name of Primary Contact) to disclose information to staff members at the University of [ ] as and when required, where doing so is necessary to facilitate my personal Action Plan.

Signed (student) Date:
Signed (Primary Contact) Date:

I (insert name of student) hereby consent for the University of [ ] to store this Action Plan confidentially, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Signed (student) Date:
Signed (Primary Contact) Date:
Appendix 6: Legal Framework

Legal Framework
Two key pieces of legislation have direct relevance to gender identity issues: the Equality Act 2010 and the Gender Recognition Act 2004. Further detailed information on the legal background can be found in the ECU guidance ‘Trans staff and students in HE and colleges: improving experiences’. This guidance will assist staff to increase their awareness of gender identity issues and covers the background and process of gender reassignment; the legal framework, practical matters to consider and responsibilities involved when supporting a person who is transitioning. In addition the Data Protection Act (1998) outlines the protocols that need to be followed to protect sensitive personal data.

Equality Act 2010
As part of the Equality Act 2010, the Act protects employees against harassment, victimisation and discrimination on the basis of gender reassignment whilst they are in employment. The Act fundamentally protects a person at all stages of their gender reassignment (whether they are planning to transition, are in the process of transitioning or have transitioned). The Act also protects:
- Trans people who are not under medical supervision;
- People who face discrimination through being perceived by others as trans;
- People who are discriminated against by being associated with someone who is in the process of transitioning or has transitioned.

Importantly, the EHRC technical guidance states that ‘under the [Equality] Act gender reassignment is a personal process… rather than a medical process. Protection applies from the moment the person indicates their intention to start the reassignment process, even if they subsequently change their mind. The act does not require someone to undergo medical treatment in order to be protected’ (EHRC, 2012)

Gender Recognition Act 2004
The Act allows people who have completed their transition and meet certain criteria to apply for a Gender Recognition Certificate. This certificate allows them to change their identity, for example, by obtaining a birth certificate in their acquired gender, or marrying in their acquired gender. The Act makes it a criminal offence to pass information about a person’s trans status to a third person without the consent of the trans person.

Data Protection Act 1998
Information about a person’s transgender status is considered ‘sensitive personal data’ and is subject to tighter controls than other personal data. Explicit consent is required before it can be processed.
- Personal data must be looked after properly following the eight data protection principles, which include ensuring personal data is accurate, secure and processed fairly and lawfully.
- Failure to change a person’s title, name and gender when requested could lead to the following offences under the Act:
  - Disclosure of personal information that is used, held or disclosed unfairly, or without proper security,
- Failure to ensure personal information is accurate and up-to-date;
- Processing of data likely to cause distress to the individual.