

Exploring and mitigating barriers for trans and non-binary researchers to engage in research collaborations and networks

Dr Stephanie McKendry & Dr Sidonie Ecochard

Key findings

- **Trans, non-binary and gender diverse researchers are present across all career stages and disciplines in UK research and innovation (R&I).** Survey responses (n=77) and interviews (n=11) confirm representation in STEM, social sciences, humanities, and health fields, highlighting the need for sector-wide inclusive practices.
- **Barriers to participation remain pervasive and have intensified in the current socio-political climate.** Participants reported constraints on mobility, visibility, and safety, with many describing heightened anxiety following recent legal changes and institutional policy uncertainty.
 - **Mobility is a critical challenge.** Relocation for career progression is often curtailed by concerns about access to gender-affirming healthcare and safety. Opportunities for collaboration and dissemination are limited by hostile legal contexts in the UK and abroad.
 - **Visibility carries significant risk.** Researchers frequently limit public engagement and conference attendance to avoid harassment, reputational harm, or targeted abuse—particularly when working on trans-related topics.
 - **Institutional responses vary widely, shaping experiences of inclusion or exclusion.** Some universities acted to maintain trans-inclusive policies, while others withdrew or delayed decisions, creating insecurity and distress.
- **Despite systemic barriers, researchers demonstrate resilience and agency.** Strategies include career reorientation, building networks of solidarity, and tactical risk management to sustain engagement in research.

Background

Original TransEDU Project

Emerging evidence suggests trans and non-binary researchers encounter numerous systemic barriers within Higher Education (HE), particularly around networking, publishing, funding and institutional transphobia (McKendry and Lawrence, [2017](#), 2019; [Pearce, 2020](#)). In fact, gender diverse people have poorer experiences than their cisgender (non-trans) counterparts in general within HE. In the earlier iteration of the TransEDU Project, McKendry and Lawrence (2017) explored the experiences of applicants, students and staff within Scotland's colleges and universities. Through surveys and interviews, the project found that 86% of research participants experienced significant barriers to their learning or work in the tertiary sector which they attributed directly to their gender identity. Those involved in research encountered barriers around professional networking, publishing and wellbeing.

Collaborative Cultures Project

This work is part of the larger [Cultures of Collaboration in a Socially Progressive Technological University](#) project supported by the Wellcome Trust, Grant Number 228116/Z/23/Z. The overarching project aims to focus on enhancing collaborative research and innovation culture by addressing two key challenges:

1. Co-producing inclusive research and innovation cultures with industry, public and third-sector partners.
2. Valuing and recognising the everyday contributions which sustain thriving collaborative research and innovation cultures.

Our funding was provided as an element of the [Inclusive and Collaborative Research Cultures](#) funding call, granted in January 2025 alongside eleven other projects. Within it, we sought to determine what barriers exist for trans, non-binary and gender diverse people to engage in the research process generally and in collaborative activity specifically? And how can the barriers faced by trans, non-binary and gender diverse postgraduate and early career researchers be mitigated to improve the long-term viability of their research careers?

What we already know

A variety of research work has been undertaken exploring the issues and barriers that those within the broader LGBTQI+ umbrella may face in academia. There can be a lack of focus on trans and non-binary experiences specifically, however ([Bilimoria & Stewart, 2009](#); [Veldhuis, 2022](#)). There is often a focus on inclusion within STEM (science, technology, engineering and medicine) fields ([Reggiani, Gagnon & Lunn, 2023](#)), which presupposes the 'norm' of experiences within the arts or social science fields.

Research exists exploring the overall experiences of trans and non-binary staff and students in HE. There is, however, a gap in our understanding of the specific experiences, challenges and support needs of trans postgraduate researchers, early career researchers and academics. We know that trans and non-binary staff and students have concerns about networking with peers, the recruitment process and publication history (Lawrence & Mckendry, 2019). Fieldwork can also present unique challenges (Pearce, 2020). These are all essential activities for a successful researcher. But little, if anything, is known about how best to support them in navigating those activities or how they can successfully collaborate with external partners.

Benato, Fraser and White (2024) explored the experiences of non-binary people in HE and noted that they were more likely to find that their gender had been erased at university than validated, accepted or seen. They were also significantly less likely to be open about their gender at work than in other aspects of their life, with just 31% being fully open with colleagues. In such circumstances, the ability of trans and non-binary researchers to navigate successful research careers is likely to be compromised (Maughan, Natalier & Mulholland, 2022). The opportunities for collaboration with external networks and partners may be limited or curtailed and there is likely to be significant under-representation. Trans and non-binary researchers may be reluctant to contact potential partners or may face hostility or a lack of understanding when they do so, thus creating an equality barrier.

Finally, the levels of gender diversity literacy amongst the UK research population are little understood and likely to be reasonably low, given current evidence suggesting that non-binary people feel their identities are often overlooked and erased in Higher Education contexts (Benato, Fraser & White, 2024) and existing equality interventions for LGBTQI+ researchers are often perceived to be tokenistic with limited impact (Reggiani, Gagnon & Lunn, 2023). Moreover, existing research on data collection and analysis – including in academic research – indicates that existing practices offer incomplete accounts of LGBTQI+ lives (Guyan, 2022) and often overlooks or oversimplifies the complexity of lived experience relating to trans and non-binary lives and embodiments.

Political/cultural/legal context

There is evidence to suggest that the general experiences of trans and non-binary people are getting worse (LGBT Youth Scotland, 2024). Recent years have seen a marked rise in anti-trans discourse in media, government, social media and society. In the UK, the rights and lives of trans people have become a flashpoint in an omnipresent culture war that has intensified in recent years to global attention and criticism (United Nations, 2023a; United Nations, 2023b; ILGA Europe, 2025).

Anti-trans and trans hostile media coverage has risen exponentially since 2019 (Gwenffrewi, 2022). Anti-LGBTQI+ hate crimes have also risen exponentially; indeed, hate crimes perpetrated against trans people have seen the sharpest increase – with a rise of 11% between 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 (Guardian, 2023; Home Office, 2023). Accounts from

trans researchers and from academics researching trans populations or topics indicate that the current context has had a significant impact upon their research (Pearce, 2020), however there is limited available recent research data on experiences.

The time period in which this project was undertaken is significant, as a moment of further heightened insecurity and uncertainty for trans and non-binary people within the UK. The [Supreme Court ruling](#) of 16 April 2025 determined that references in the Equality Act 2010 to 'man', 'woman' and 'sex', were references to 'biological sex' (meaning 'the sex of a person at birth'). Whilst the ruling did not remove protections on the basis of Gender Reassignment, it has potentially profound implications for how equality law is interpreted. For many trans people and their families, it brought uncertainty around their right to participate in daily life, their access to workplace and public facilities, and their ability to join organisations and networks. The Equality and Human Rights Commission issued interim guidance to organisations on 24 April, which has since been withdrawn from their [webpages](#), and has consulted on a statutory code of practice. This was submitted to the UK Government on 4 September but, by February 2026, no code has been laid before Parliament and there has been no further detail on how the ruling's implications are to be considered and, where necessary, monitored or enforced.

During this gap, the University and College Union ([UCU, May 2025](#)) recommended that universities wait for statutory guidance before making any changes to policies and engage in consultation with trans and non-binary staff and students. However, Higher Education institutions responded in a variety of ways. Some published statements amending previously trans-inclusive policies on facilities, for example, by asserting that trans women should now use male or unisex provision and trans men use female or unisex facilities ([Pink News, July 2025](#)). Others noted the anxiety the ruling had provoked and committed to finding an inclusive way forward ([York St John University, July 2025](#)). This uncertainty is likely to have heightened anxieties and created concerns for trans and non-binary researchers.

About the research

The study was undertaken in 2025 by Dr Stephanie McKendry, Dr Matson Lawrence and Dr Sidonie Ecochard, with empirical data collection taking place between July and October 2025. The overall aim of the project was to explore how best to support trans, non-binary and gender diverse researchers, nurture collaborative activities, and improve trans inclusion and literacy within the research process.

Research questions

- What barriers exist for trans, non-binary and gender diverse people to engage in the research process generally and in collaborative activity specifically?

- How can the barriers faced by trans, non-binary and gender diverse postgraduate and early career researchers be mitigated to improve the long-term viability of their research careers?

Definitions

We have applied the same definitions as in our original TransEDU research:

Trans is an umbrella term used to denote people whose gender identity differs from the gender and sex they were assigned at birth. This can include (trans) women, (trans) men, and non-binary and other gender diverse people. Trans people may make, or have made, social and / or physical changes to more closely align to their gender identity. A **trans man** is someone who was assigned female at birth but has a male gender identity. A **trans woman** is someone who was assigned male at birth but has a female gender identity.

The term **gender diverse** can denote people who experience their gender identity as outside of the binary of man and woman, including non-binary, genderqueer, agender, and dual role people. We use this term in addition to ‘trans’ because not all those who have diverse gender identities use ‘trans’ to describe themselves. This term is also useful for those who are questioning or unsure about their gender identity.

Trans and gender diverse people are protected under the [Equality Act 2010](#), currently through the protected characteristic of ‘gender reassignment’. The Act proscribes both direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of a person’s trans status, including in education, employment, housing, and the provision of services.

Methodology

The study used a mixed-methods approach, combining an online survey with one-to-one online interviews. This approach allowed the exploration of both breadth and depth in the data, enabling us to document overall trends while also attending to the complexity of individual lived experiences ([Wasti et al., 2022](#); [Östlund et al., 2020](#)), such as different disciplines, career stages, and institutions in the UK. Ethics approval for the study was obtained from the School of Social Work and Social Policy of the University of Strathclyde.

The survey included both quantitative and open-text questions. It explored barriers to inclusion and career progression, perceptions of the current research environment, and the types of support that are available, or missing, for gender diverse researchers. Open-text questions gave participants space to share more detail in their own words. At the end of the survey, participants could choose to take part in a follow-up interview. The survey was disseminated through multiple channels, including outreach to EDI offices, LGBTQI+ and trans staff networks, professional and topic-based researcher networks (such as EqualEngineers), institutional newsletters, social media, and word of mouth. The semi-structured interviews built on the survey findings, allowing exploration of these themes in

greater depth. They provided insight into the day-to-day realities of gender diverse researchers and the strategies they use to navigate their careers.

Qualitative data from open-text survey responses and interview transcripts were imported into NVivo and systematically coded to identify recurring themes and patterns. Thematic analysis (coding and identifying patterns) has been widely recognised as a robust qualitative method for analysing interview and textual data, especially when combined with software like NVivo for transparency and rigor ([Ahmed, 2025](#); [Dhakal et al., 2022](#)). Quantitative survey data—including Likert-scale items, demographic variables, and multiple-choice responses—were analysed descriptively by calculating response distributions. Together, these approaches provided a robust thematic understanding of participants' perspectives as well as a clear overview of broader response trends across the sample.

Advisory Group

The project was supported by an advisory group comprising trans and non-binary researchers with expertise in research on gender diverse communities, alongside internal stakeholders with relevant knowledge of researcher support and career development. The group played an active role throughout the project, co-designing and reviewing data collection tools, providing feedback on engagement strategies, and contributing to the interpretation of findings. They also advised on the development of research outputs, including this report, and helped disseminate the survey through their networks to maximise reach and participation.

Findings

Before presenting the key themes, this section first introduces the survey and interview participants to provide context for the findings. The findings presented in this section focus on what is most novel, significant, and practically relevant in the data. Rather than revisiting issues already well documented in the literature—such as misgendering or deadnaming—the analysis highlights specific barriers experienced by trans, non-binary, and other gender diverse researchers in their careers. These include challenges related to career mobility, professional visibility, and safety. The discussion also considers how institutional contexts shape these experiences, with differences between institutions influencing opportunities and constraints. Finally, the findings explore how participants navigate these conditions and the strategies they employ to sustain engagement and progress within the UK research and innovation system. The findings draw upon both the survey and interview data throughout.

Our participants

This section outlines the demographic and professional profile of the survey and interview participants to provide context for the findings.

Survey Respondents

A total of 77 individuals completed the online survey, after removing partial responses. They represented diverse academic discipline, seniority and lived experience. For example, there were participants who were carers, parents, and from care-experienced backgrounds. Respondents represented a range of career stages: 14% identified as senior researchers (n=11), 12% as mid-career (n=9), 34% as early-career (n=26), and 40% as postgraduate or aspiring researchers (n=31). Participants worked across a wide range of disciplines, including STEM, Medicine and Healthcare, Social Sciences, and Humanities. They were based across all four nations of the UK: England (54%, n=42), Scotland (35%, n=27), with the remainder from Wales and Northern Ireland.

Participants ranged in age from under 25 to 65, with the largest proportion in the 26–30 age group (23%, n=18). Most respondents identified as White British (67%, n=50), with 33% (n=27) from other ethnic backgrounds. Gender identities included non-binary (41%, n=39), trans men (21%, n=20), trans women (17%, n=17), agender, unsure, and beyond the gender binary. Intersex people were also represented.

Additional characteristics included having a disability or long-term health condition (49%, n=38), neurodivergence (67%, n=50), and socio-economic disadvantage (16%, n=12). Detail on the demographic composition of the cohort has been kept to a minimum to ensure the anonymity of our participants. Overall, however, the respondent group reflected broad disciplinary and demographic diversity across the UK's research and innovation landscape.

Interview Participants

Eleven participants took part in follow-up interviews. Interviewees reflected similar diversity to survey respondents, spanning all career stages and subject areas. The interview sample broadly reflected the diversity of the wider respondent group, providing complementary qualitative depth to the survey findings.

Barriers

The following section examines the key barriers identified by participants, focusing on challenges that are both novel and significant in shaping their research careers.

Mobility

Mobility is widely regarded as a critical component of academic career progression. Researchers are often expected to relocate for postdoctoral positions and move between institutions to build professional networks and gain broader research experience ([Momeni et al., 2022](#); [Seeber et al., 2023](#)). Within prevailing research cultures, mobility is frequently framed as a marker of commitment and productivity, and as a prerequisite for securing permanent posts and advancing in highly competitive academic labour markets ([Cañibano et al., 2020](#); [Castellacci & Viñas-Bardolet, 2021](#)). However, for trans, non-binary, and other

gender diverse researchers, mobility is frequently constrained by structural, institutional, and social barriers.

Participants described how relocation and travel decisions are shaped by concerns about safety, access to healthcare, and institutional policies. Moving to a new institution often entails changing general practitioners, which can result in losing access to gender-affirming care due to restrictive NHS protocols and extended NHS waiting lists. One researcher explained:

“I cannot move institution because I’d need to move house, and if I changed GP, I’d almost certainly lose access to gender-affirming care.”

International mobility also poses additional challenges. Several participants reported declining conference invitations or research collaborations in countries where gender diverse communities face legal or social hostility. This limits opportunities for dissemination and networking, which are vital for career advancement. As one participant noted:

“Questions of safety impact on how much global research culture I am able to be a part of—what locations are safe enough?”

Within the UK, current policy changes and uncertainty around facilities contribute to hesitation and anxiety about moving between institutions. One participant reflected:

“Do I feel safe moving to a different institution where I don’t know what the politics are around these things, I don’t know what the practical facilities are?”

Overall, the findings show that mobility—normally a marker of ambition and success in research careers—becomes a source of risk and exclusion for gender diverse researchers.

Visibility

Visibility is widely recognised as a critical factor in academic career progression. Researchers who are visible—through publications, conference presentations, media and social media engagement, and professional networks—are more likely to build collaborations, attract funding, evidence impact and influence, and secure permanent positions ([Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014](#); Momeni et al., 2022). However, for trans, non-binary, and other gender diverse researchers, visibility often entails risk. Being “seen” can expose individuals to discrimination, harassment, or reputational harm, creating a tension between advancing a career and safeguarding personal wellbeing.

Participants described how the current social and political climate amplifies these risks. Some deliberately limited their visibility to avoid hostility, even when this meant declining opportunities for collaboration, dissemination or leadership:

“I had to skip out on doing conferences and even internal talks because I didn’t want to be seen... Not going to conferences comes with its own issues for pursuing a research career.”

“I find it hard to balance my desire to go unnoticed as a trans woman whilst also being visible as a researcher.”

While the need to limit visibility affected all participants, it was particularly acute for researchers working on trans or LGBTQI+ issues. Several described withdrawing from public engagement or social media due to fear of targeted harassment:

“I’ve had to be cautious about what I say in public spheres... if a journalist picks it up, it could turn into something very big.”

A few participants acknowledged that visibility occasionally brought benefits—such as invitations to speak or collaborate—but these were often outweighed by personal risk. Some consequently pivoted away from trans-related research or reduced their public profile. One participant reflected:

“I wanted to look at issues around trans healthcare, but the debate was becoming too toxic for me to feel I could risk putting my head above the parapet.”

Overall, the findings show that visibility—ordinarily a marker of recognition and success in academia—is experienced as a source of vulnerability for gender diverse researchers. The constant need to negotiate between professional advancement and personal safety constrains both individual careers and the broader production of knowledge within the UK research and innovation system.

Being/feeling unsafe

Safety emerged as one of the most significant themes across interviews and survey responses with trans, non-binary, and other gender diverse researchers. Participants described a persistent sense of vulnerability alongside a marked shift in recent years. Many recalled that research environments once felt like relatively safe spaces—“bubbles”—insulated from wider societal debates and hostility. However, this sense of security has eroded. The broader legal, political, and media climate—characterised by intense public discussion and policy uncertainty—has begun to spill into the research and innovation field, reshaping everyday experiences of work. As one participant put it:

“I’ve always found work was my safe bubble... and now that’s sort of being jeopardised by that wider context, but also by the decisions the university’s making. It feels like it’s me against the world at the moment.”

Participants described safety concerns ranging from institutional and policy-level issues to everyday worries. Some avoided particular buildings, events, or meetings due to fears of negative reactions or exclusion:

“I was given leeway... to skip out on doing, not just the conferences but also internal talks.”

“I’m personally quite cautious of what kind of events I go to... there’s a lot of discussion like ‘this event may not be the most inclusive’... So I won’t go to that.”

Concerns about facilities were particularly acute following recent policy changes and the removal of gender-neutral provisions in some institutions. For some, uncertainty about which toilets they could safely use became a source of ongoing stress:

“When you are not sure which toilet you might be able to use on a day-to-day basis, or even worse that someone might now feel emboldened to make it an issue, it does not make for an inclusive environment.”

The wider political context amplified these anxieties. Several participants described living in a “constant state of anxiety” due to public debate and legal uncertainty, which spilled over into their ability to work and engage professionally:

“I find it difficult to get out of bed in the morning or leave my home because the situation is so bleak. I live in a constant state of anxiety, grief, anger, and fear... Teaching on gender in this climate feels rather fraught.”

For some, these conditions escalated into direct challenges, including online harassment and reputational risks:

“I have received extensive threats and harassment due to negative perceptions of my work, and my relation to it as a trans woman... I’ve had numerous mental health crises in the workplace due to my experiences.”

Even in the absence of overt incidents, the anticipation of harm shaped decisions about disclosure, networking, and research topics. As one researcher explained:

“Although I know my supervisors and cohort are safe people and supportive, I hesitate to fully come out and be authentically myself due to the current climate.”

Overall, safety concerns exert a chilling effect for individuals and across the research and innovation system. The constant negotiation of risk—whether in physical spaces, online environments, or professional networks—creates an additional layer of labour that is invisible yet profound in its impact. As one participant summarised:

“It makes it difficult to feel integrated and accepted... I have to worry about encountering prejudice wherever I go in the UK, and in many other places in the world.”

Institutional context

Participants described long-standing differences in institutional practice and culture, which became more consequential in the current legal and political climate—including the Supreme Court ruling and recent cases on ‘gender-critical’ beliefs in the workplace. Some institutions acted decisively to maintain inclusion, while others withdrew policies or delayed decisions. These choices reshaped researchers’ sense of belonging and security, showing that

institutions are not simply “contexts” but active determinants of whether trans, non-binary and gender diverse researchers can participate fully and safely in academic life, as highlighted in the following examples.

Policy withdrawal and opaque communication deepened insecurity, leaving many feeling unsupported. One participant noted:

“They’ve just taken the trans-inclusion policy off the website... and they’ve removed references to misgendering as harassment. So I don’t really know what’s going to happen.”

Beyond policies, the changing institutional climate influenced how safe and included researchers felt. The framing of ‘gender-critical’ activity as an issue of ‘free speech’ often compounded this vulnerability. For Higher Education institutions in England, The Office for Students regulates matters related to ‘free speech’ through their conditions of registration, thus placing a statutory duty on Higher Education Providers ([OfS, 2023](#), [OfS, 2025](#)). To reduce the potential for conflict with ‘gender critical’ staff members, participants described avoiding meetings, events, or spaces—a challenge for careers built on collaboration and dissemination. Others described self-censoring to manage situations where ‘free speech’ was applied unevenly, creating pressure and emotional strain that restricted their participation in academic life:

“The institution strictly protects ‘gender critical’ speech as free expression, I am not allowed to criticise it, or even listen to others criticising it... I have to be very careful about what I say and who I listen to.”

Toilets emerged as the most visible and contested site of decision-making. Delays in replacing signage and inconsistent provision caused significant distress:

“Every single week, sometimes twice a week, this sign’s getting taken off the door... I started to get really paranoid about this.”

In the instance above, these actions took place so persistently they could not be dismissed as mistakes or accidents but were instead perceived as deliberately transphobic provocations.

Participants stressed that these were not minor inconveniences but a daily barrier that shaped whether they came to campus at all. In some cases, the stress escalated into severe anxiety and even mental health crises:

“I realised it was due to the fact that I was feeling unsafe about using toilet facilities... I ended up having to go to A&E to speak to a mental health nurse.”

These accounts underline how basic infrastructural decisions can profoundly affect wellbeing and participation, making visible allyship and practical support even more critical. Against this backdrop, positive examples showed the opposite effect: proactive outreach and visible allyship helped mitigate anxiety and restore trust:

“After the Supreme Court ruling a lot of people in the university actually sent me emails saying ‘are you okay? Is there any support you need?’”

Overall, differences between institutional contexts meant that action could either buffer or amplify harm for gender diverse researchers. Institutional responses—on policy, communication, and engagement—were pivotal in shaping whether researchers felt safe and able to participate fully in academic life.

Strategies employed

This section outlines the ways participants navigated the barriers identified above, highlighting how they actively adapt to and resist exclusionary conditions within the research environment.

Several participants described mobility and career shifts as deliberate strategies to find safer, more affirming environments. Some sought opportunities abroad or outside academia altogether, while others redefined their roles within it—pivoting toward teaching, management, or less politicised research areas to preserve wellbeing and professional continuity:

“It really made me question being at this university, or even staying in the country... I’ve been mostly avoiding coming on campus and seriously considering leaving—either for another university or leaving the UK altogether.”

“The pragmatic step feels like to phase down the research a little bit... maybe make it a bit more generic topics around public health or pedagogy.”

Where institutions offered limited or uneven support, participants built alternative networks of care and solidarity. Trans-led or LGBTQI+ academic groups, grassroots organising, and peer mentoring functioned as informal infrastructures for collaboration and mutual protection. These networks were described as “lifelines”, enabling researchers to share resources, amplify voices, and collectively challenge exclusionary practices:

“We’ve started building friendship and support through the LGBT staff network... it’s been an upside of all this, meeting others and creating spaces where we can talk and organise.”

Visibility and safety were managed continuously and tactically. Participants assessed the risks of conference travel, public engagement, and online activity, balancing professional participation with self-protection. Such choices were not acts of retreat but calculated measures to ensure sustainability in a volatile and hostile climate.

Despite adversity, participants emphasised persistence and hope—continuing to publish, teach, and apply for opportunities that align with their values. These accounts reveal resilience not as endurance alone, but as an active process of adaptation, solidarity, and refusal to be erased:

“Research is an interesting job and I love it... I work with trans+ groups and individuals and try to make our lives better.”

“I keep going because it matters—showing up is part of the resistance.”

Recommendations for institutions/organisations

1. Issue visible statements of support and inclusion

Failure to communicate institutional commitment risks being perceived as disengagement by trans, non-binary, and gender diverse researchers. Institutions should publish clear statements affirming respect and inclusion, referencing the Equality Act 2010 protections for gender reassignment. These statements should avoid unrealistic promises but emphasise commitment to dignity and equality, and signpost available support services. Silence is often perceived as a lack of care, support, or inclusion.

2. Audit and improve facilities before making policy changes

Facilities access is a critical issue driving exclusion. Institutions should conduct a comprehensive review of toilets and other related provision across all buildings to ensure they meet the needs of trans and gender diverse staff and students before implementing any changes.

3. Provide training opportunities for all staff

Training should focus on understanding lived experiences of trans and non-binary people, equipping colleagues and managers to offer appropriate support and foster inclusive environments.

4. Develop alternative dissemination routes for research

Institutions should create mechanisms for trans researchers to share work without exposure to risk—such as virtual conferences, online seminars, and digital networking—while ensuring these contributions are recognised in career progression frameworks.

5. Develop a media strategy to support and protect trans and non-binary staff

Institutions should have clear protocols within their press office to respond appropriately if they become the object of negative reporting. It may also be beneficial to have a named contact with whom staff can engage if they are approached by hostile reporters.

6. Provide media training for academic staff who are trans and non-binary or whose research encompasses LGBTQI+ topics

Specialist media training can support researchers to manage potentially fraught press interest and develop a proactive media strategy.

7. Rethink career progression indicators

Review key performance indicators to value socially driven research and collaboration with grassroots organisations. Institutions should ensure that impact-oriented work is recognised equally alongside conventional metrics. They should also recognise the individual context for researchers since universal indicators of prestige, such as those related to mobility and visibility, may disadvantage trans and non-binary researchers.

8. Respond swiftly and transparently to reports of transphobia

Institutions should ensure that reports of perceived transphobia are handled swiftly, fairly, and communicated clearly.

9. Embed Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and staff consultation in decision-making

Ensure that those with lived experience—including trans and non-binary research staff—are actively involved in shaping policies and decisions that affect them.

10. Establish and support staff networks

Institutions should maintain an LGBTQI+ staff network and consult researchers on whether a dedicated trans-specific network or network sub-group is desired. Where no network exists, steps should be taken to create one.

Conclusion

In a fraught socio-cultural environment, the trans and non-binary participants in this project have demonstrated perseverance, adaptability and resistance. Their experiences within the research and innovation sector have been challenging nonetheless, with barriers and complexities sometimes mitigated by institutions and, in other cases, made manifestly worse.

Systemic barriers appear to be actively harming research quality and the production of knowledge – talented researchers are leaving the profession or pivoting away from certain topics. Collaborative research aims to strengthen research quality with the inclusion of diverse perspectives to address complex challenges. If trans and non-binary colleagues do not feel safe sharing their perspectives, genuine collaboration will be hindered.

Institutions, and individuals within them, may not be able to alter the wider cultural climate. They can, however, make a material and positive difference to the experiences and career opportunities of their trans and non-binary colleagues within the sector. Allyship, active inclusion and decision-making processes that engage with the lived experience and views of trans and non-binary researchers are necessary and effective steps to improve the research and innovation environment for all.

References

- Ahmed, S. K., Mohammed, R. A., Nashwan, A. J., Ibrahim, R. H., Abdalla, A. Q., Ameen, B. M. M., & Khdir, R. M. (2025). Using thematic analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, 6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2025.100198>
- Benato, R., Fraser, J., & White, F. R. (2024). Getting beyond peeing and pronouns: Living non-binary gender in higher education. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 33(5), 698–710. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2024.2334067>
- Bilimoria, D., & Stewart, A. J. (2009). “Don't Ask, Don't Tell”: The academic climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender faculty in science and engineering. *NWSA Journal*, 21(2), 85–103. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ff.2009.a316151>
- Cañibano, C., D'Este, P., Otamendi, F. J., & Woolley, R. (2020). Scientific careers and the mobility of European researchers: An analysis of international mobility by career stage. *Higher Education*, 80, 1175–1193. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00536-z>
- Castellacci, F., & Viñas-Bardolet, C. (2021). Permanent contracts and job satisfaction in academia: Evidence from European countries. *Studies in Higher Education*, 46(9), 1866–1880. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1711041>
- Dhakal K. (2022). NVivo. *Journal of the Medical Library Association: JMLA*, 110(2), 270–272. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2022.1271>
- Equality and Human Rights Commission. (2025). UK Supreme Court ruling: Meaning of sex in the Equality Act – Our work [Webpage withdrawn]. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/our-work/uk-supreme-court-ruling-meaning-sex-equality-act-our-work>
- Gwenffrewi, G. (2022). Punk Mood, Junk Food: Portrayals of Transgender Apocalypse. In H. Gavin (Ed.), *Women and the Abuse of Power* (pp. 79–97). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80043-334-220221008>
- Guardian. (2023, October 5). *Hate crimes against transgender people hit record high in England and Wales*. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/oct/05/record-rise-hate-crimes-transgender-people-reported-england-and-wales>
- Guyan, K. (2022). *Queer Data: Using gender, sex and sexuality data for action*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Home Office. (2023). *Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2022 to 2023 edition*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2022-to-2023>
- ILGA Europe. (2025, May 5). *UK joins Hungary and Georgia with the biggest drops on annual LGBTI rights ranking*. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/press-release/press-release-uk-joins-hungary-and-georgia-with-the-biggest-drops-on-annual-lgbti-rights-ranking/>
- Lawrence, M., & McKendry, S. (2019). *Supporting transgender and non-binary students and staff in further and higher education: Practical advice for colleges and universities*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. ISBN: 978-1-78592-345-6

LGBT Scotland. (2024). *Trans Report 2024*. <https://lgbtyouth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Trans-Report-2024-digital-final-V2.pdf>

Maughan, L., Natalier, K., & Mulholland, M. (2022). Institutional transphobia: Barriers to transgender research in early years education. *Gender and Education*, 34(6), 721–737. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2022.2057930>

McKendry, S., & Lawrence, M. (2017). *TransEDU Scotland: Researching the experience of trans and gender diverse applicants, students and staff in Scotland's colleges and universities*. University of Strathclyde. Retrieved from https://pure.strath.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/69432011/Mckendry_Lawrence_TransEDU_2017_Trans_Edu_Scotland_Researching_the_experience_of_trans_and_gender.pdf

Momeni, F., Karimi, F., Mayr, P., Peters, I., & Dietze, S. (2022). The many facets of academic mobility and its impact on scholars' career. *Journal of Informetrics*, 16(2), 101280. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2022.101280>

Pearce, R. (2020). A methodology for the marginalised: Surviving oppression and traumatic fieldwork in the neoliberal academy. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 23(5), 569–579. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0038038520904918>

Office for Students (OfS). (2023). *Freedom of Speech: what can we do?* <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/freedom-of-speech/freedom-of-speech/what-can-we-do/>

Office for Students (OfS). (2025). *Update on Freedom of Speech Act*. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/blog/update-on-freedom-of-speech-act/>

Östlund, U., Kidd, L., Wengström, Y., & Rowa-Dewar, N. (2011). Combining qualitative and quantitative research within mixed method research designs: a methodological review. *International journal of nursing studies*, 48(3), 369–383. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2010.10.005>

Pink News. (2025, July 17). Reading Uni students 'scared' to use toilets under anti-trans policy. Pink News. <https://www.thepinknews.com/2025/07/17/university-of-reading-trans-policy/>

Reggiani, M., Gagnon, J. D., & Lunn, R. J. (2023). *LGBT+ academics' and PhD students' experiences of visibility in STEM: More than raising the rainbow flag*. *Higher Education*, 87(1), 69–87. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-00993-2>

Seeber, M., Debacker, N., Meoli, M., & Vandeveld, K. (2022). Exploring the effects of mobility and foreign nationality on internal career progression in universities. *Higher Education*, 85(4), 1041–1081. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00878-w>

Supreme Court of the United Kingdom. (2025, April 16). Judgment on Equality Act interpretation. https://supremecourt.uk/uploads/uksc_2024_0042_judgment_aea6c48cee.pdf

United Nations. (2023a). *UK: Keep calm and respect diversity says UN expert*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/05/uk-keep-calm-and-respect-diversity-says-un-expert>

United Nations. (2023b). *United Nations Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity*.
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/sexualorientation/statements/eom-statement-UK-IE-SOGI-2023-05-10.pdf>

University & College Union (UCU). (2025, May). Supreme Court ruling guidance for branches.
https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/15115/Supreme-Court-Ruling-Branch-Guidance/pdf/Supreme_Court_ruling_guidance_for_UCU_branches_v2.pdf

Van den Brink, M., & Benschop, Y. (2014). Gender in academic networking: The role of gatekeepers in professorial recruitment. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51(3), 460–492.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12060>

Veldhuis, C. B. (2022). Doubly marginalized: Addressing the minority stressors experienced by LGBTQ+ researchers who do LGBTQ+ research. *Health Education & Behavior*, 49(6), 960–974.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10901981221116795>

Wasti, S. P., Simkhada, P., van Teijlingen, E. R., Sathian, B., & Banerjee, I. (2022). The Growing Importance of Mixed-Methods Research in Health. *Nepal journal of epidemiology*, 12(1), 1175–1178.
<https://doi.org/10.3126/nje.v12i1.43633>