

Briefing – Policy Proposal

Title: The Union Should Lobby UCL to Conduct an Institution-Wide Review of Academic Curriculums for Inclusivity and Gender Equity

Date: 22/01/25

Audience: Education Zone

What is the current situation at UCL related to this proposal?

UCL meets its commitments to gender equality and the requirements of Horizon Europe's Gender Equality Plan through Athena Swan, broader Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work and other activities. While these criteria are primarily aimed at the fair treatment and employment of UCL staff, there is a specific thematic obligation to the "Integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content". This thematic area relates to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and how it mandates UCL to curate its learning and research resources.¹ This monitoring is done with resources provided on UCL's Teaching and Learning site, which offers informational guides on various topics, such as "Inclusive teaching, learning and assessment" and "Using inclusive language in education". Of this resource, 11 results are related directly to inclusivity, but none directly mention gender equity.² However, UCL had a development working group for staff and students called Liberating the Curriculum (LTC). Its core statement was to ensure "the work of marginalised scholars on race, sexuality, gender and disability are fairly represented in curricula."³ This group has not been active since 2017.

UCL launched The Programme Excellence Project (PEP) in October 2023. This project aims to comprehensively review UCL's undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. It is one of the core academic initiatives in UCL's Strategic Plan 2022-27. This project includes a specific curriculum review, which aims to reduce module complexity and streamline the quality of education across UCL.⁴ As of January 2025, UCL has released newly approved Curriculum Design Principles, as agreed by the Education Committee on January 13, 2025. The Curriculum Design Principles and the Curriculum Review are intended to enhance the quality of courses of study. The overall goal is to foster discussions between students and course leaders about ways to improve course design and delivery, ultimately leading to better student outcomes and experiences.⁵ The UCL Curriculum Design Principles centre equality, inclusion, and diversity as essential components, specifically in ensuring Design Principle 1: Cutting-Edge Content.⁶ As part of these aims, inclusivity in the curriculum is important, but there are no specific references to gender equity.

The Students' Union has representation in UCL spaces related to the curriculum at UCL. The Education, Equity & Inclusion Officer and Postgraduate Officers are Ex Officio members of the Education Committee, which is involved with approving and reviewing curriculum changes. One undergraduate and postgraduate student was nominated to the committee by the Students' Union. Therefore, the Union has a presence in spaces to lobby UCL on the curriculum matters.

¹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion/equality-areas/gender-equality/gender-equality-plan>

² <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/>

³ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/research-based-education/liberating-curriculum>

⁴ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/education-excellence/programme-excellence-project>

⁵ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/news/2025/jan/approval-ucls-curriculum-design-principles-and-pep2-curriculum-review-process>

⁶ [UCL's Curriculum Design Principles](#)

What would change if the policy was successful?

If this policy were successful, the Education Officer would bring inclusivity and gender equity to the Education Committee as a matter of importance. Additionally, it would be recommended that the team behind PEP consider building a mechanism within the Curriculum Review to evaluate the equity and inclusivity of the curriculum regularly. This point would feed into the Curriculum Design Principle: Cutting-Edge Content.

What is the relevant national context to this situation?

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) defines inclusivity as “enabling all staff and students to participate fully in educational activities on an equivalent basis to their peers.” They also adopt an intersectional approach to this definition, recognising that students are individuals, not just members of a demographic group.⁷ With this definition in mind, the idea of an inclusive curriculum and how it can be sustained is a recurring topic within the higher education sector.

For example, in 2024, Advance HE published a literature review on the inclusive curriculum. This review consolidated works from 2015 onwards to help improve the inclusive curriculum movement in higher education. This literature review acknowledges several key insights into the inclusive curriculum, including the fact that there is no standardised definition of what it means to be ‘inclusive’. Furthermore, it also identifies that there is little to no evaluation of the impact of the inclusive curriculum, meaning that it becomes difficult to justify its use and effects.⁸ This does not, however, discourage the inclusive curriculum but outlines why it is important that institutions make an extra effort to review their content for this purpose.

The QAA and Hull University, developed with York St Johns, Keele, Staffordshire, Derby Universities, Kings College London and University Academy Manchester, released the ‘Inclusive Education Framework’ in 2024. Within this framework is ‘Curriculum Design and Delivery’. This work identifies that the following conditions must be met for an institution to have an inclusive curriculum:

1. “Be transparent about the assumed knowledge and skills required for success.
2. Adopt a diverse and decolonised range of perspectives.
3. Allow students to personalise their curriculum where possible.
4. Proactively manage and remove barriers to engagement.
5. Give students authentic opportunities to practise their knowledge and skills.
6. Ensure activities are inclusive.”

It also provides checklists for personal practice and a programme team to follow.⁹ This work has been regarded as the most comprehensive inclusive curriculum design in the last few years.

However, there is a distinct lack of modern (post-2015) research into gender equity specifically in the curricula. While ongoing research examines the importance of removing barriers for women wishing to access and participate in higher education, there is less focus on how the curriculum can be reimagined or changed. This may be due to the earlier stated point that there is no singularly recognised definition of an inclusive curriculum and, therefore, what a gender-inclusive curriculum may mean. Charlotte Morris, Tasmin Hinton-Smith, Rosa Marvell and Kimberley Brayson, in their research into higher education practitioners wanting to address gender in the curriculum, found they faced inherent barriers to doing so. This included barriers related to gendered academic cultures, which de-prioritise gender and label it as not relevant, and the treatment of non-male academics as less-than. Their research also suggests that gender equity cannot be added to the

⁷ <https://www.inclusiveeducationframework.info/#explore>

⁸ [Inclusive Curriculum Literature Review November 2024](#)

⁹ <https://www.inclusiveeducationframework.info/framework/curriculum/>

