You’re Here, You’re Queer:

Now What?

Joining UCL as an LGBT+ Student

UCLU LGBT+ Network

2016-2017
Welcome, Fresher!

Good luck, and don’t fuck it up

For lots of LGBT+ students, university is the first chance we get to truly discover and express our identities. Growing up in a majority-straight society, where men are masculine and women are feminine and there’s no space for anything in-between, is difficult and exhausting. Almost everyone in UCLU’s LGBT+ Network has experience of having to hide their identity, of having to change their behaviour so that people won’t notice that you’re different, and of keeping secrets from friends and family. Luckily, university gives you a fresh start, and the Network is here to support you through that!

This guide aims to do three things: tell you about the events and support the Network provides, cover some basic information it would be useful for you as an LGBT+ student to know, and show you where else to go for help and advice. If you have any other questions, email our LGBT+ Officer at uclu-lgbt.officer@ucl.ac.uk, who you can talk to you for confidential advice and support. Please don’t hesitate to get in touch!
UCLU Events

Here is a list of exciting events to look forward in your first 2 weeks at UCL:

**22/9/16 - International Student's Breakfast** – Come to the Print Room Café for tea, coffee and other breakfast treats among fellow LGBT+ international students trying to settle in London.

**1/10/16 - Glittoris** - Come to Phineas for our friendly, signature club night, filled with the best LGBT+ anthems, cheap drinks, special prizes and... glitter, of course.

**4/10/16 – First Forum Meeting** – The formal launch of the Network’s plans for the year, including the They for Them campaign. Come along to learn how the Network functions, and suggest your ideas to make life better for you.

**4/10/16 – Bar Crawl – 8pm-Late** – Our most popular event from last year is back! Join us at Student Central (ULU) before we take a tour of some of Soho’s classic queer venues and party well into the night.

**5/10/16 – Picnic in the Park** – Meet us in the Main Quad before heading to Regents Park to chat, relax, or doze off the Bar Crawl hangover. Nibbles will be provided but please bring your own food or drink to share!

**9/10/16 – Crafternoon Detox** – Feeling down after your fifth night out in a row? Is adult life just too much, and you’re ready to go back to primary school? Join us for a relaxing session of painting, t-shirt making and glitter gluing, with free tea, biscuits and smoothies.

Keep updated with these events and more via the **closed** UCLU LGBT+ Facebook Group or our **public** Facebook Page UCLU LGBT+.
What We Wish We’d Known

Acting Out

1. Some people are naturally more confident than others and find it easier to approach large groups of people and make endless small talk. Of those who aren’t, some simply need a nudge in the right direction before flourishing. Whilst it isn’t your responsibility to talk to everyone within the vicinity you’re in, if you do see someone on the fringe of the group wanting to join in don’t hesitate if possible to ask them to join in or ask the circle you’re in to open up for them.

2. Not everyone who comes to LGBT+ events is looking to pull. Some people want to be in a space where they can finally meet people who they relate to, and create friendships or networks of people to help them along the way. The LGBT+ community unfortunately (and unfairly) has been given a hyper-sexualised reputation, which new students may have internalised. So please be weary whilst you’re out on the prowl that not everyone is looking for the same thing, and not to overstep the mark.

3. When you’re having a discussion with people you know barely, be careful when discussing very sensitive, potentially triggering topics. Notify beforehand when you will be discussing something triggering to give somebody a chance to veto the topic or to walk away. When an individual is sharing their personal experiences, hesitate from playing Devil’s Advocate. It’s not easy sharing these things to people you don’t know well, so please be sensitive.

Coming Out

1. Don’t feel like you have to come out. Older, richer, more privileged people will tell you “you have a moral duty to come out, to show society that LGBT+ people exist”; they’re wrong. You need to look after yourself: if you’re still financially dependent on your parents, if your home environment is harmful to LGBT+ people, or even if you just can’t be bothered, then don’t. If you can, come out on your terms, not anyone else’s.

2. Coming out is a process. If there are multiple facets of your identity you need to come out about, feel free to come out about one aspect at a time. If you want to get used to being out to close friends before you come out to your family, then do it if it makes you feel comfortable. Coming out is solely and exclusively about what makes you comfortable.

3. Coming out makes some things better, but it’s not a panacea. In the long term, you’ll probably be happier if the labels you use to define yourself correspond to the labels other people use to describe you, because it’s hard to meaningfully interact with other people if you’re covering for a big secret. In the short term, however, you may well find that people treat you differently, for better or for worse.

4. There is no “right” way to come out. One of the authors of this booklet came out, variously, at their grandmother’s funeral, ……………. Do whatever seems right to you; talk to your friends or committee members if you need any specific advice.
5. Although you may be out, bear in mind that not all your friends are. When sharing photos of LGBT+ events, tagging people in memes or relaying particularly memorable quotes, always consider that what you share could out someone when they’re not ready to come out themselves. If you make a mistake, correct it as quickly as possible.

Going Out

1. Do you give in to the Fear of Missing Out or do you just want to spend the night-in? Many of us have been in this situation, and as time will tell there is no shame in picking the latter option, even if it doesn't give you something exciting to talk about later. It's tempting as freshers to go out at any opportunity, however, if you've been asked to go out to a club for the fifth time having never had a good time... chances are you'll end up leaving bitter, tired and disappointed again. You don't want to waste your time and energy investing in things you don't like for the sake of conforming. Trying out new experiences are important, but once you've found what you like and don't like, don't be afraid to say no.

2. Be mindful of your own and each other's safety and whereabouts. In larger venues it's very easy to lose people and for groups to split off, so make sure to have phones charged or come up with a common meeting point when one of you is lost.

3. Be mindful of people who do not drink. There are plenty of people out there who do enjoy going out late without a drink for numerous reasons (e.g. health, religion). They are probably used to being questioned about this choice which makes them feel awkward and unwelcome, so please refrain from pressuring them to drink.

Sex

1. Try and inform yourself as much as possible before you enter a sexual relationship with someone. Sex ed in schools is woefully inadequate, especially for LGBT+ people. The internet is useful, but try and make sure you use sources you can trust. We would recommend the Oh Joy Sex Toy webcomic (the Sex Ed section), Sexplanations on YouTube, or Dan Savage’s ‘Savage Love’ column.

2. Take things at your own pace, and don’t feel like you have to do anything you’re uncomfortable with. If someone makes you feel uncomfortable, talk to someone you trust about it - the Committee is here to help, and we'll do what we can to make the Network a safe space for you.

3. **Virginity is a social construct.** There is no one definition of sex, you can lose your virginity without being penetrated by a penis, and don’t let anyone else define or minimise your sexual experiences.

Relationships

1. The key to every relationship is communication. Many relationships fail when problems from either party remain buried and are allowed to fester, resulting in resentment. It's very tempting to hide away your concerns in case you may lose someone you really care about,
however, playing pretend means you're not being yourself. You'd want this special person to accept and respect you for you, not someone else.

2. Do what makes YOU happy! If you both make each other happy, great. But when there is a constant imbalance of satisfaction from either party don't feel like you should stay for the sake of stability or keeping up appearances.

3. Being in a relationship doesn't mean that you have to spend much less time with your friends or cut them off completely. University is the time to expand and explore, so you definitely do not want to look back on these years wishing that you could have spent more time forging life-changing or life-long friendships and experiences.

4. You don't HAVE to be in a relationship! Even if it seems like all your friends are happily settled, not to worry. Looks can be deceiving as couples tend to show you what they want you to see. It's also not a competition to see who can escape single-hood first. In the meantime, there are plenty of other ways of making life fulfilling.

**Sexual Health**

1. Protection, protection, protection! It's easy to think that bad things that happen to other people won't happen to you, but plenty of unlucky individuals have also felt similarly complacent so don't be caught out! The number of HIV cases has been rising over the years, with currently 17 people diagnosed with the virus everyday in the UK.

2. If you are often sexually active, make sure to get tested at your nearest sex clinic every 3 to 6 months. Whilst gay and bisexual men are at a higher risk of contracting STIs, again, don't be complacent if you don't fall under this category. Being tested regularly ensures that you are not potentially putting other people's health at risk in future.

3. Do not hesitate to tell your sexual partner what you like and don't like. Sex is a meeting of two bodies and minds, and so both must be respected.

4. **NO** means **NO**. If your sexual partner has not consented, do not cross that line. Non-consensual incidences can leave not just physical scars but also mental scars that can remain for years.

**Mental Health**

1. LGBT+ people, compared to our cis, straight counterparts, are more susceptible to a range of mental health problems. This is in large due to being the target of bullying, discrimination and ridicule on a systematic, structural level.

2. The first step is always to talk. Find a place, a person whoever it may be that you trust and start from there. Don't worry about not being able to find an instant solution on the spot. A solution cannot be found until you acknowledge your situation and your feelings attached to it.
3. There isn't just one perfect solution that fits everyone. Certain methods affect people varyingly, so along the journey feel free to try out new experiences (where possible) to find what ultimately suits you the most.

4. Physical fitness has been shown to alleviate stress due to the release of hormones in the brain that promote happiness. Similarly, taking part in the creative world such as Art or Drama can give you brilliant opportunities to express yourself. UCLU offers a wide range of extra-curricular societies that can cater to your tastes.

5. Learning to say no to commitments you know deep down you can't manage is very important. Whilst you may feel pressure to please everybody and help people in need, ultimately you can't do other people justice if you aren't in the right head space in the first place. Put emphasis on self-care and your needs first before taking on more than you have to. Find ways of being suitably assertive to draw the line, and if people do not take notice then do not feel obliged to keep responding to their requests.
What We Want You To Know

Being a part of a marginalised community such as the LGBT+ community does not mean that we cannot be prejudiced towards others, least of all people within our own community. Given that we are made of different genders, ethnic backgrounds and abilities, our individual experiences will vary due. With those whom we do not share similar struggles, it is important for us to listen and learn ways in which we can make each other feel welcome in our community and how we can prevent continuation of in-fighting. Below are some examples of intersections within the LGBT+ Network would like to highlight.

Women

1. Being a gay or bisexual man doesn't mean that you aren't capable of being sexist or misogynistic towards women. It doesn't give you a free pass to name us with terms such as "bitch" or the C word that are demeaning to women. It doesn't give you a free pass to make fun of our bodies simply because you are not attracted to us, given that women's bodies are constantly policed and scrutinised by society at large.

2. LGBT+ spaces are not designed just for men, therefore it becomes increasingly isolating when our faces and voices are flat out ignored and silenced in favour of men. Typical dismissive comments are along the lines women not being fun or being sexless, generalisations that prevent us from integrating ourselves within the wider LGBT+ community.

3. There isn't one way of being lesbian. Not every lesbian is "butch", and those who appear more feminine are not any less queer than their more masculine-presenting siblings. Embrace these differences, instead of pitting us against each other or making some of us feel we need to conform to a particular standard.

Bisexuals

1. We do actually exist. Whereas some gays and lesbians use the bisexual label as a means of easing themselves out of the closet, it doesn't mean that everyone who uses the label is doing so for the same reason. Closeted gay and lesbians shouldn't be criticised for their method of coming out as it's a matter of personal safety which only each person can assess for themselves. Equally, the identities, lives and views of bisexuals shouldn't be erased.

2. We aren't all greedy and are not any more likely to cheat on our partners than gays, lesbians (and straights). The notion that we are greedy implies that we are attracted to more people. This cannot be proven since bisexuality exists within a spectrum: it isn't a simple as being 50% "gay" and 50% "straight". Different bisexuals can have different
affinities to different genders. Ultimately, cheating has nothing to do with the number of "options" one has. It has everything to do with having a complete lack of respect for your partner, which is not exclusive to a particular sexuality.

3. Bisexuality, despite its etymology, doesn't literally mean attraction to only two genders (male and female). For a lot of us, we identified as bisexual before we were aware of the term pansexual (attraction to people regardless of gender) and therefore associate bisexuality equally with pansexuality to avoid confusion amongst our straight peers.

Trans and Non-Binary

1. The gender binary refers to two genders: male and female. Society codes everyone along these two lines from the moment we are born, from the colours we like to the clothes we wear. Non-binary people include people who exist within the spectrum between male and female (e.g. gender fluid) or people who simply fit outside the binary (e.g. agender). Non-binary genders isn't a new concept that was invented by Tumblr. These genders existed for centuries in numerous cultures, before being erased by the West who enforced the gender binary concept worldwide at the height of colonialism.

2. Non-binary people do not perpetuate or support the idea of rigid gender roles (masculinity and femininity). The path between realising that there you might be non-binary and fully accepting that position is full of difficult contemplating. It might help people to come to a decision in terms of not fitting into gender roles, but it is not the be all and end all. Gender and which part of the spectrum we fit into is completely subjective. Ultimately, if a particular gender identity makes someone feel good and prevents them from being able to be placed comfortable back into their previous box then please respect that decision.

3. Sex and gender are NOT the same thing. Being male has nothing to do with having a penis, nor does being female has anything to do with having a vagina. So upon meeting someone, even if they pass or appear to be male or female, never assume unless explicitly stated. Equally, it is incredibly insensitive to ask people what genitals they have to check who they are.

4. Unless the gender of someone you are talking to or referring to is known to you, use gender neutral pronouns such as “they” or “them” to refer to, well, them. Just because someone presents as male or female that doesn't mean that they actually are. We do use “they” or “them” in everyday life often when we do not know a person's gender identity (e.g. "what's their name?" "if you had a child what would you name them?").

5. Not everybody who is trans or non-binary feels the need to transition or has transitioned, nor does every trans person feel "trapped in the wrong body". The trans community is very broad and therefore not one single narrative can conveniently describe our journeys and how we perceive ourselves. Please be mindful of asking questions such as "so when are you transitioning?" that can back us into a corner.
People of Colour

1. When people talk about someone “looking queer”, it often stems from this idea that the LGBT+ identity is a white thing. People of colour are often automatically read as straight, even in LGBT+ spaces, which makes us not feel “queer enough” simply because we don’t look the part or have the queer aesthetic down to a T. This ultimately makes us feel unwelcome in spaces we have every right of being in.

2. “No blacks, no asians”. These are not natural preferences. Members of the same ethnic background do not all look the same, act the same or think the same way. Therefore by tossing us all aside with the same brush suggests that you have learned to associate people of colour with old, negative, racist stereotypes that are not representative of us as individuals.

3. People of colour are not any less tolerant of the LGBT+ community than white people. Given the rich history of queer cultures outside of the western world prior to colonialism (which, to this day, has resulted in 50 commonwealth countries still governed by anti-sodomy laws), we’d suggest otherwise. So when asking us questions such as “was it difficult coming out to your parents?”, be aware of the implication such a question has. It can put us in an awkward position of having to sell out our ethnic communities as inherently intolerant people whilst not being comfortable to embrace our ethnicities in light of this within LGBT+ spaces.
Where To Go

The LGBT+ Committee

**LGBT+ Officer - Matthew Wagaine**

I'm Matthew (or Matt) and I will be running the LGBT+ Network here at UCL. My role as Officer is to represent the needs and interests of LGBT+ students within the Union, which includes providing events and campaigns with the help of my wonderful committee. In particular, I have 3 aims for the year: 1) Improving the pastoral care and mental health welfare of our community, 2) Making our spaces and events more inclusive to all intersections within our community and 3) Increasing the number of events that can educate us on our history, our on-going struggles and how we can become more socially aware and active.

**Campaigns Representative - Johnny Allain-Labon**

Johnny is the Campaigns Officer for the network; it's his job to work with UCL, UCLU and the student body to make life better for LGBT+ students. Outside of that he studies physics, is social secretary for the UCLU Debating Society and drinks copiously, often but not always in that order.

**Media Representative - Josh Lister**

Hey everyone!! I'm Josh and I'll be your new Media Secretary. I aim to make the society much more prevalent online, so that our fabulous events are as visible as possible. Fun fact: I once wiped out the whole of ski school and still passed. Oh I also have no common sense.
Secretary - George Barker

As Secretary, during my tenure I hope to improve the efficiency of the LGBT+ network and ensure the network is both organised and accountable, as well as open and inclusive to the whole UCL community. I am a gay medic heralding from the North, and London was quite the shock to the system indeed - but an enjoyable leap of faith. Congratulations on making it to UCL; see you in Heaven! (or hell!)

Bisexual Representative - Sarah George

Hi, I’m Sarah and I represent bisexual students and all those who identify under the bisexual umbrella! This year I want to raise awareness of issues faced by bisexual people, both outside and inside the LGBT+ community. Fun fact: I know way more about Harry Potter than is probably necessary!
Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Representative - George Waddell

Hi, I'm George the new BME Rep for the LGBT+ Network. My role is to represent the views and opinions of black and minority ethnic LGBT+ students at UCL, whether this is within the academic or social arena. Matt did an excellent job as BME Rep last year, and I plan to continue this through holding social events throughout the year and ensuring I am always available to help with any issues. The LGBT+ Community at UCL is amazingly diverse, and I hope to work with the rest of the committee to ensure this diversity is represented fully in our work. Fun Fact: I was on Blue Peter as a child!

RUMS Representative - Andrew Tindall

I aim to represent all LGBT+ medical students at UCL by being a go-to, creating specific events and making the medical school as accepting of anyone as possible. I was also co-opted as the LGBT+ Social Secretary. Looking after and arranging socials that everyone can enjoy and meet new people at is my main priority as Social Sec.
I'm Suzy and I'm a second year Zoologist and nap enthusiast. As Women's Rep it's my aim to ensure all female-types are supported, and know of and have people to enjoy queer spaces with, especially those specifically for women. Also passionate about bees.

We also have vacancies available for the Asexual, Disabled, Freshers' and Trans Representatives! So if you self-define as either of these identities and would love to become a part of the committee, there will be elections. You can submit your nominations for these positions at uclu.org between Tuesday 6th September and Wednesday 10th October at 10am. Voting will then open on Wednesday 19th October before closing on Wednesday 26th October at 10am, with results being revealed later that evening. Good luck!
And now a word from our sponsor...

Tom Edwards, 2nd Year Arts & Sciences student and Outgoing Campaigns Representative 2015-2016

"London is an exciting, vibrant and queer city, but some of the best opportunities for engaging with queer events are passed through word of mouth, not TimeOut! I went to many LGBT+ events and found the atmosphere welcoming and positive, so when the possibility of running for a position was advertised via email and I jumped at the opportunity!

This network is hugely important because UCL has students from around the world, I think it allows you to share issues surrounding LGBT+ with people from very different backgrounds. In addition University and London can both be overwhelming, and it's important to have a group that shares similar issues to you.

I know that as a new student, things can seem a bit overwhelming, but the LGBT+ network provided a huge amount of support for me and gave me the chance to do the same for others around me. As well as organising events, we have worked on campaigns like They for Them, launched this year to raise awareness of trans and non-binary gender identities. My advice to new students who identify as LGBT+ is to leap at any and all opportunities. I've learned lots from my friends at the LGBT+ network and had the opportunity to be involved in things I would have otherwise not heard about."

We hope you have found this guide useful and we cannot wait to meet you for what will be a great year at UCLU LGBT+!