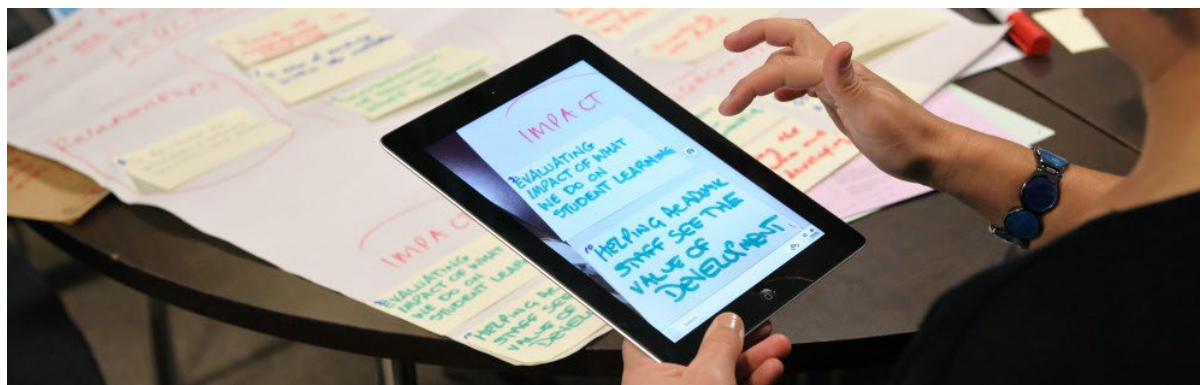


## Supporting and leading educational change



### “Queering the curriculum” to engender inclusivity

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All LGBTQIA+ young people “deserve an education that reflects who they are” (Stonewall 2017). The inclusivity mantra “see me, be me” has never been more apt. That’s why at London Met, several of my colleagues and I are working to queer the curriculum, developing “classroom landscapes and experiences that create safety for queer participants” (Thomas-Reid, 2018).

To accomplish this, we use the Ward-Gale Model for LGBTQ-inclusivity in Higher Education (Ward & Gale, 2016), concentrating on three domains of inclusivity – increasing awareness, additive approaches and transformative practice – and three stages within that: language, role models and curriculum content. Inclusive teaching and learning practice lie “at the intersection of both” (Warwick 2024) and can “serve as a starting point” for those new to the model (Lehner, 2023).

I teach Journalism, an easy subject to queer, so the learning curve has not been steep. But inclusivity, by its very definition, can encompass all subjects and disciplines. Last year, our School of Computing and Digital Media presented a talk about how queer theory can guide us in rethinking computing and digital media education, which included using VR (virtual reality) to explore the trans and non-binary experience. A colleague in Politics and International Relations now teaches modules that seek to “reflect students’ lived experiences at the global, national and local level”, including discussing challenges to LGBTQ+ rights worldwide, while a Dietetics lecturer now points out to students that as nutritional assessments are often binary, they should be mindful that trans men can have different nutrition considerations.

It’s easy to see why queering is essential. Heteronormativity/cisnormativity erases the spectrum of sexual diversity and its expressions in all its forms, and in higher education has a negative impact on both staff and students whose lives are outside those parameters. It assumes that everyone is or should be heterosexual and cisgender (the sex they were assigned at birth), and that being so is somehow the “norm” and therefore superior to other forms of sexual expression and gender identity. Three in five trans students and seven percent of LGBTQ+ students who are not trans have experienced negative comments about their identity at university, and while progress has been made, universities can do more “so that all LGBT students can feel safe, included and free to be themselves” (Stonewall 2017).

For me, being LGBTQ+-inclusive has become a cornerstone of my teaching. In my newsroom production module, following the Ward-Gale model, I “increase awareness” by showing students how to avoid outdated terms such as “transsexual” and develop a basic understanding of different identities. My “additive approaches” include regular discussions of articles that reflect everyone, including stories with queer interviewees who often are featured not *because* they are queer, but who might *just happen* to be queer (yes, there’s a difference). Sometimes being queer is the focus: recent self-directed student articles in my magazine journalism module included “Trans, Queer and HIV-positive”, “Bisexuality: Not Just a Phase”, and “Gender-Neutral Fashion”.

As the Ward-Gale model points out, the third stage of inclusivity, “transformative practice”, works to “ensure the curriculum reflects the gender and sexual diversity in the community” (University of Warwick, 2024). I strive to do that. As writing to a target audience is crucial to journalism, I encourage students to define theirs with precision. A mood board for a glossy student monthly featuring half-naked men, for instance, aimed to attract a “straight and bisexual audience of women” not just “women”, as my students initially assumed. I also include LGBT topics and themes in my weekly student newsletter, the *Hackademic*, along with work opportunities that are LGBT-inclusive, offering freelance positions with outlets such as *Pink News* alongside the BBC, *Lonely Planet* and *The Dial*. We’ve also added an LGBT+ editor to the editorial role list of our student website, *Holloway Express*.

Queering the curriculum transforms the way students, regardless of their gender, sexuality or identity, can understand and embrace the concept of sexual and gender diversity. It’s a recipe that works: a bisexual student from the north of England told me that finding his own pride didn’t happen until he was encouraged to write about it in my modules. “Writing queer articles has given me so much towards my confidence, as a queer man and as a journalist,” he said.

*\*\* London Met has climbed 53 places, to 162nd, in this year’s Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and has been awarded a Bronze award for its work to create a more inclusive workplace.*

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