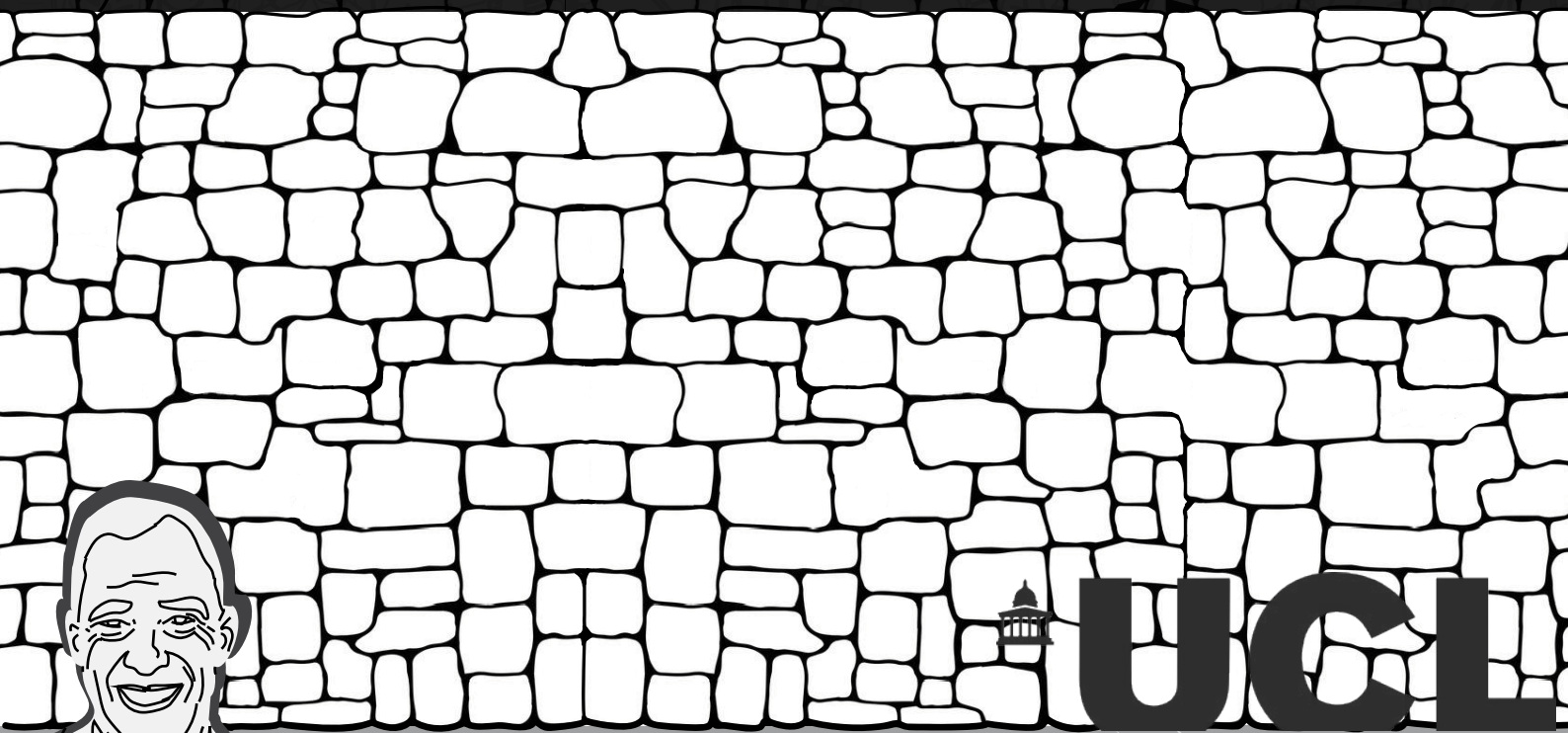


# The Cheese Grater

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Stonewall-ed, security shortcomings, a second campus...need we say more?

## UCL stonewalls Stonewall: "It's like talking to a stone wall"



I can't  
hear you!



# UCL

# The Story Behind UCL’s Decision to Reject Stone-wall

**Catherine Amhurst**  
**Note: The Academic Board Agenda and materials discussed in the December 10th meeting were made available by UCL via [FOI request](#) on January 28th 2021. The information used for this article is based on an unredacted version of the same document seen by *The Cheese Grater*.**

UCL made [national headlines](#) in December 2021 as the first higher education institution in the UK to formally cut ties with the LGBTQ+ charity Stonewall. Since 2006, it has been a member of Stonewall’s UK Diversity Champions programme and was [the first university to join its Global Network](#) in 2014. Through this affiliation, the charity serves in an advisory capacity by assisting employers across public and private sectors in establishing informed and inclusive policies for their LGBTQ+ staff. During this period, UCL participated in Stonewall’s Workplace Equality Index, frequently [featuring in its top 100 employers](#). UCL’s departure from these schemes comes amid a growing wave of hostility toward the charity - led by a loose coalition of politicians, journalists and disgruntled former members - following its 2015 decision to include transgender rights among its campaign objectives.

The initial suspension of UCL’s Stonewall membership took place in 2020 - this was [stated to be](#) a temporary measure, citing budget cuts precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic as the key rationale. The university’s subsequent decision to permanently confirm the separation was [announced](#) on December 10 2021. This was described as having been “informed by thoughtful and respectful debates at both [the] EDI ([Equality,](#)

[Diversity and Inclusion](#)) Committee and Academic Board.”

## The Background of Gender Critical Feminism at UCL

Among the core figures involved in the vote was Alice Sullivan of the Social Research Institute, who presented the anti-Stonewall letter during the December 10 meeting alongside members of the [UCL Women’s Liberation Special Interest Group](#) (SIG), of which she is a convenor. The group was founded in June 2019 to co-convene the [2020 Women’s Liberation Conference](#) at the Institute of Education (IOE). It is associated with national “Gender Critical Feminist” organisations, including Women’s Place UK (WPUK), LGB Alliance (for whom Sullivan was a panellist at their [2021 conference](#)) and Fair Play For Women. Since 2017, these groups have advocated against transgender rights initiatives such as self-identification, access to single-sex spaces and affirmative care for children and young people experiencing gender dysphoria. As an extension of these organisations, the UCL Women’s Liberation SIG has been active in advancing a gender critical agenda on campus for the last two years. This has included hosting seminars with similar themes, featuring figures including Lisa Littman (proponent of the [widely discredited ‘Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria’ hypothesis](#) that defined trans-identification as a social contagion, and attributing gender dysphoria among children and young people to peer influence). They have also issued statements in support of WPUK after it was denounced as a hate group by several prominent labour MPs.

These groups have been engaged in an ongoing dispute with Stonewall for a number of years. Specifically, they have [campaigning to prevent Stonewall-backed reforms](#) to the 2004 Gender Recognition Act that that would formalise the right to self-identification for transgender people. Importantly, Sullivan herself has also published a series of articles targeting Stonewall since 2019, with a notable [piece](#) co-authored with Professor Judith Suissa of the IOE for the British Educational Research Association.

This extensive prior campaigning against Stonewall would become a defining factor in the events surrounding the December 10 meeting.

## Before The Meeting

Interviews with members of the Academic Board, corroborated by documentation of the proceedings, reveal a decision-making process that favoured the interests of the anti-Stonewall contingent in a number of respects.

One of the most notable factors is the apparent disparity in the preparation time available to the pro-Stonewall and anti-Stonewall groups, along with the limited information available to Academic Board members, prior to the meeting. The meeting, with “discussion of UCL’s membership of Stonewall” as its stated objective, was [first announced in the November 3 Academic Board meeting](#) to be hosted on December 10. By early December, members of the EDI had been asked to assemble general key information outlining the case for rejoining Stonewall, which was to be presented at this meeting. However, it was not until December 2 that the EDI was notified by the Provost’s

office that a detailed letter, arguing the case against rejoining, was already in circulation. This meant that, if they wanted to present a pro-Stonewall stance in the agenda, they needed to write a letter and gather [a minimum of ten signatories](#) in a short time frame; since an Agenda must be circulated five working days before the meeting, the pro-Stonewall contingent were left with less than two days to do this. As this also needed to be done within the final weeks of term, it presented a significant challenge to those involved. By the time of submission, they had acquired 15 signatories, while the anti-Stonewall letter numbered 66.

Additionally, some Academic Board members report that they were unaware that a vote was due to take place. Emails acquired by *The Cheese Grater* show that it was only on December 8 - two days before the meeting - that Nick McGhee, the Academic Board Secretary, was able to confirm a vote was actually taking place. A member of the LGBTQ+ Steering Group told *The Cheese Grater* that they expected a general discussion related to Stonewall: “we were given the impression that our consultation feeding into the supposedly balanced document prepared by [Pro-Provost] Sasha Roseneil would be the basis of the academic board discussion.” While McGhee sent an email to all the board members on December 9 announcing there would be a vote, this was missed by some academics. Although it is not clear if the anti-Stonewall contingent were anticipating a vote, their existing level of organisation - reflected by the already active Women’s Liberation SIG and the letter with 66 signatories - suggests that, at the very least, they benefited from the shorter time frame given to the pro-Stonewall group.

Another potential concern about the fairness of the vote surrounded the supposed neutrality of the discussion’s framing. In her background statements, Pro-Provost Sasha Roseneil uncritically

repeats, as fact, several of the same misrepresentations outlined in the letter presented by Alice Sullivan - whom she also cites as a source. For example, she reiterates assertions that Stonewall seeks to remove birth-assigned sex as a variable in biomedical and sociological research, and that the acceptance of transgender people’s stated identity necessitates the removal of single-sex spaces. Elsewhere, she describes WPUK, LGB Alliance, Fair Play for Women and Sex Matters in neutral terms as “groups of feminists”, without mentioning widespread denunciation by organisations such as the [Labour Campaign for Trans Rights](#) of what are seen as “trans-exclusionist hate groups”.

Despite this lack of scrutiny, the background section does technically fulfil its function of representing the views of both parties. Nevertheless, the uncritical presentation of the anti-Stonewall argument in the purportedly neutral background text, particularly in the context of a higher education institution, may be a cause for concern.

The questionable neutrality of the substance of the discussion is further complicated by the flawed epistemic basis of the “debate”. Roseneil’s background presentation fails to, at any point, establish key definitions for fundamental concepts such as academic freedom, freedom of expression, or transphobia. In a discussion whose central themes were, specifically, academic freedom and the protection of LGBTQ+ rights in education, this omission weakened the possibility of an informed debate. This is made all the more striking by the fact that the Academic Board possesses a specific framework for this exact purpose in the form of Sub-Committees and Working Groups. [Tasked with creating](#) “terms of reference [...] to focus on specific issues or develop an area of work for the Board”, they serve to provide key definitions for discussions in areas of possible political contention. They

were recently utilised in the debate surrounding UCL’s adoption of the IHRA definition of anti-semitism. [Established in December of 2019](#), the IHRA definition of Antisemitism and definition of Islamophobia Working Groups were composed of specialists nominated from a range of different departments, who submitted a balanced analysis based on testimony from students and staff. The hasty nature of the procedures preceding the meeting thus suggests a lack of rigour in the handling of the Stonewall arguments, which would be reflected in the meeting’s discussion itself.

## The Meeting

First-hand accounts of the December 10 meeting and the accompanying documentation raise significant doubts over the “thoughtful and respectful debate” UCL purports to have held. While the contents of both letters had been available to members five days beforehand, the sum total of this “debate” took place within the hour-and-forty-minute timeframe of the meeting itself. According to members present, the proceedings amounted to a canvassing of opinion from the Academic Board, with no formal framework for analysing or challenging any of the claims made. It was revealed that arguments were simply put forward and accepted at face value by the meeting convenors, and the issue at hand was put to a vote thereafter.

As the basis for institutional decision-making, the Board’s apparent lack of scrutiny is alarming. These concerns become all the more urgent in light of the prevalent misinformation that has come to define the national debate surrounding Stonewall and transgender rights. Analysis of the letter presented to the Academic Board by Professor Sullivan reveals numerous examples of misrepresentation of fact. These range from misleading statements and misattribution of sources to general

mischaracterization and subjective judgement presented as fact.

Among these is the claim that, by including transgender and cisgender women in the broader definition of “woman”, Stonewall is seeking to erase the concept of both womanhood and “biological sex”. This represents primarily a semantic dispute, one that can be avoided through clear distinction of gender, medical history and birth-assigned sex (reflected in the [ONS](#) and [NHS](#) guidelines). Based on this logic, Sullivan and her colleagues further equate it to “a refusal to acknowledge biological categories” in biomedical and social research.

A further recurring theme in Sullivan’s testimony is a fundamental misrepresentation of Stonewall’s basic function. She attributes to the organisation multiple powers to dictate actions that in reality it neither holds, nor has given any indication of seeking to attain. The primary rationale for the view that Stonewall is able to influence policy in this way is based on a misconception that its policies are prescriptive - claiming UCL “outsources [its] thinking” on LGBTQ+ issues - and that membership is conditional on an unquestioning acceptance of its dictates. In reality, Stonewall’s function [centres on advocacy and education](#), and decisions as to how universities interpret and implement its advice are left to their own administrations. Sullivan and her associates nonetheless use this wilful misunderstanding to level a list of baseless accusations - including allegations of bribery - while erroneously attributing the actions of particular universities to the direct actions or policies of Stonewall.

Other sections of the letter attribute Stonewall with non-existent policies, such as the concept of “no debate”, claiming they issued guidelines for “barring potential speakers on the grounds that their views on sex and

gender may make some students feel unsafe.” In reality “no debate” - a corruption of a slogan popular in activist circles which states that the legitimacy of trans people’s gender identities and their equal treatment within society is “not up for debate” - has never been an explicit or codified policy of Stonewall. Additionally, the [Stonewall event guidelines](#) that Sullivan cites contain no instructions to bar speakers on any grounds but do stress that universities are places to “explore challenging topics and debates, and – rightly – are institutions that promote and uphold the principle of free speech.”

Beyond the claims regarding the supposed removal of biological sex made by Sullivan and her colleagues, and references to independent decisions taken by [The University of Essex](#) and [NatCen](#), the arguments presented contained no concrete examples of Stonewall’s policies directly impinging on teaching or research within UCL or elsewhere, which have been cited as crucial reasons for leaving Stonewall. The majority of the examples mentioned also only refer to academics receiving professional sanctions for allegedly using their positions to promote transphobia, with little or no connection to the academic content of their work.

Members of the Academic Board present also disclosed that since the chat function acted as a sign-up sheet for speakers, it could not be turned off during the proceedings. This meant that many of these same fallacies could be repeated during the depositions given by members speaking in favour of rejoining. One attendee stated how “mistruths and mischaracterization were voiced [with] loads of gender-critical academics piling in. Any comments for reapplying to the Stonewall schemes were dismissed out of hand, or as a threat to women in public spaces,” with the tone of the discussion being likened to “the worst of what Twitter

can be like.” The chat function was therefore supposedly abused by some anti-Stonewall supporters to detract from their rival speakers, undermining the legitimacy of a supposedly fair academic debate.

**UCL Women’s Liberation SIG - A Gender Critical Lobby?**

While the lack of substantive debate surrounding the vote is in itself problematic, a second key factor in its skewed outcome is the actions of Alice Sullivan, Judith Suissa and the Women’s Liberation SIG. By creating an identifiable list of affiliates, the Women’s Liberation SIG has made it possible to identify a pattern of correlation between its members and the departmental affiliation of the anti-Stonewall letter’s signatories. The result presents a troubling picture of the extent to which networking and leveraging of personal connections appear to have influenced the vote.

Of the 66 signatories to Alice Sullivan’s letter, 36 were from the IoE, where the majority of the Women’s Liberation Group is based. Of these, 20 are based in the Social Research Institute, where Sullivan is Head of Research. A further 15 signatories consist of members of the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience, Great Ormond Street Hospital, the Bartlett School Faculty of the Built Environment and SELCS. All of these (with the exception of SELCS) include one or more staff that are either affiliated with the Women’s Liberation SIG or have identifiable connections to Alice Sullivan, such as prior professional affiliation or mutual status on social media. This means that two thirds of a nominally university-wide group come from just five departments, with the remaining 15 representing all 100+ other departments across UCL.

In an email to *The Cheese Grater*, Alan Sokal, from the Department

of Mathematics and one of the anti-Stonewall letter’s signatories, said that: “I became aware of these issues [regarding Stonewall], about a year-and-a-half ago, by discussion with gender-critical feminist colleagues (notably Alice Sullivan and Judith Suissa).” The remaining signatories were reticent when approached for comment, but if Sokal’s experience is indicative of the others, then the extent of Sullivan and the Women’s Liberation SIG’s influence on campus presents a significant challenge to any neutral discussion of transgender inclusivity in university policy.

Combined with the departmental affiliation, this evidence of canvassing by Sullivan and others indicates potential substantial prior organisation leading up to the December 10 vote. This is particularly significant in light of the relatively small number of staff represented in the decision-making process. Of the 1830 members of the Academic Board with attendance and voting rights, less than 17% participated in the final vote, including abstentions. Assuming all 66 anti-Stonewall signatories voted on both motions, they comprise over a third of the final figure (183 No votes for rejoining the Diversity Champions Programme and 175 No votes for reporting to the Workplace Equality Index). Not only does this mean that the outcome was determined by a minority of UCL’s staff, but the small scale of the vote makes achieving an overwhelming majority a seemingly simple task for a determined and well-organised party such as the Women’s Liberation SIG.

It remains unclear how early Sullivan et al. became involved in the process of leaving Stonewall, or what influence they may have had prior to

the meeting on [November 3](#). Nevertheless, the UCL Women’s Liberation SIG’s prior opposition to Stonewall and their well-established network meant that they were more prepared for a vote. Compounded by the shorter time frame for their opponents to prepare a letter, late and poor communication that there would be a vote, the lack of an independent working group, insufficient scrutiny over the anti-Stonewall arguments, and the low turnout, the conditions of the meeting were favourable for them to successfully lobby against re-joining Stonewall.

**The Role Of Senior Management**

While the circumstances during and surrounding the December 10 meeting appear to have favoured the anti-Stonewall contingent, the power to uphold the Academic Board’s decision ultimately lies in the University Management Committee (UMC), chaired by UCL Provost, Dr. Michael Spence. The Board only acts in an advisory capacity, and for this reason the administration sanctioned their input along with the EDI Committee’s. However, when they produced conflicting judgements, the UMC decided to back the Academic Board. It is important to note that the EDI Committee has been organised to represent different stakeholders at UCL, including students, whose views are often disregarded in such matters, while the Academic Board almost exclusively features the academic faculty. While academics may be deemed as the most appropriate choice for critical evaluation of university policy, the Board’s 17% participation is hardly a representation of the views of the UCL community. It is also worth noting that, in June 2021, the [Provost dismissed concerns about Stonewall](#)

impeding on academic freedom; he confirmed that “should a conflict arise between an external organisation’s policies and UCL’s own policies, UCL’s policies would always take precedence; there had been no evidence this had occurred before.” Accordingly, Spence’s rationale for backing the Academic Board decision appears to contradict his earlier statements.

Questions also arise regarding the role of Professor Sasha Roseneil, recently appointed as the first [Pro-Provost \(Equity & Inclusion\)](#). One member of the EDI team, who recently left UCL, wrote a scathing email criticising Roseneil directly. They stated, “when Sasha could finally find a few minutes to meet with the EDI team... ‘step up and do your job’ was her most repeated line... My faith in the future of EDI work at this university is shredded, especially under a so-called leader of EDI who appears to accept and even benefit from systemic structural barriers at UCL.” While these claims cannot be independently verified, there is an evident loss of faith and personal blame ascribed to Roseneil within the EDI Team. This raises a question regarding the purpose of instating a representative EDI Committee when its views are wholly disregarded by the Provost and potentially belittled by its Chair.

**Implications Beyond UCL**

The impact of UCL’s decision is eminent on a number of levels inside and beyond campus. UCL is the first higher education institution to sever ties with Stonewall. If the decision - and the many highly suspicious contributing factors - is allowed to go unchallenged, then it is likely UCL may serve as the blueprint for a wave of similar departures across the higher education

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sector. For now, however, the greatest impact of the decision is being felt within the university itself. Even before the details of the meeting itself became available, students and staff across UCL had [expressed dissatisfaction](#) with both the transparency of the decision-making process and its representativity of general attitudes towards Stonewall and trans-inclusivity. [A petition](#) was launched shortly after the decision was announced and, at the time of writing, counts over 6000 signatures.

Crucially, this also induces serious apprehension about the safety of UCL's transgender community, and the environment on campus for LGBTQ+ staff and students. [In a joint statement](#) responding to the decision, the UCL Student Union Trans Officer and Equity Officer claimed that it “has the potential to create an environment where gender prejudice and transphobic language is justified under the guise of academic freedom.”

When contacted for comment, a UCL spokesperson said: “*UCL has established governance procedures for decision-making and these were followed thoroughly. Our decision to not re-join Stonewall's Diversity Champions Programme or make a submission to the 2023 Workplace Equality Index was informed by thoughtful and respectful debates at both EDI Committee and Academic Board, which recognised the importance, complexity, and sensitivity of issues relating to sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex.*

*“We are very aware that there are members of our community who are upset and angry about UCL's decision not to rejoin Stonewall, and we acknowledge their deep feelings. UCL's policies and protections for LGBTQ+ staff and students remain in place and are unchanged. We introduced policies to support trans members of our community some years before Stonewall started campaigning on trans rights, and we*

*remain deeply committed to advancing the inclusion of trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming members of our community.*

*“We are determined that UCL will become an environment in which everyone is able to be themselves, and is respected as a valued member of the university. We are establishing an [LGBTQ+ Equality Implementation group](#) which will build on our existing work and engage representatives of the LGBTQ+ community at UCL to develop a strong programme of action that tackles all forms of inequality, marginalisation, and discrimination experienced by LGBTQ+ colleagues and students.”*

While the UMC's decision is effectively final, the discourse surrounding it is ongoing. Still, the events of and surrounding the vote reveal much about the flawed decision-making process of UCL's Academic Board. The short notice, lack of an independent investigation and rushed debate appear to have allowed a small group to wield their personal connections to reverse university policy. The decision to focus on a manufactured threat to academic freedom rather than addressing the real needs of UCL staff and students for equity and inclusion suggests a pivotal shift from its founding values that will define the university for years to come.

In the midst of LGBT+ History Month, UCL - a supposedly progressive institution - leads the sector in reversing progress towards LGBT+ equality. The tragic irony is that it is Stonewall, named after the trans-led riots that catalysed the LGBT+ rights movement, against which UCL has taken its ignoble stand.

**In response to a request for comment prior to publication, Alice Sullivan wrote the following statement.**

*This article argues that a variety of imagined procedural issues were the cause of the pro-Stonewall side losing the debate at UCL, while ignoring the more likely explanation that they had the weaker arguments.*

*The article mentions my name 19 times, yet I was not approached for comment. It contains so many falsehoods that to correct them all would require an equally lengthy piece. Perhaps the most brazen inaccuracy is the claim that no concrete examples of violations to academic freedom linked to Stonewall were provided to the Academic Board. Anyone reading the papers can see that several such examples were provided. Just one of these is the fact that [I have been no-platformed](#) from a research methods seminar simply because of my advocacy in favour of retaining data collection on sex. Nancy Kelley, now CEO of Stonewall, was involved in the cancellation of the event in question, simply to avoid hearing my views. [My speech](#) to Academic Board recounted that a group of UCL EDI Vice-Deans attempted to have a 2020 [conference on women's rights](#), co-organized by UCL academics and our third sector partners Woman's Place UK, cancelled on the basis that it was in “[direct contradiction to Stonewall's UK Workplace Equality Index](#)”.*

*Catherine Amburst falsely accuses me of “numerous instances of misinformation”, a defamatory claim which she is unable to support. Stonewall's “no debate” position and opposition to sex-based data collection are well-documented. I would refer readers to my peer-reviewed papers on questions of sex and gender: “[The gender wars, academic freedom and education](#)”; “[Sex and the census: why surveys should not conflate sex and gender identity](#)”; “[Sex and the office for national statistics: A case study in policy capture](#)”. Stonewall's vilification of its opponents encourages bullying and silencing tactics. UCL is the first university to hold an [open debate on Stonewall membership](#). It is perhaps unsurprising that the advocates of “no debate” are displeased with the outcome outcome.*

# Violated, Harassed, Ignored: Abuse in Halls by UCL Guards

*“[He] leaned over the desk and sniffed [me] in three places, typically where you put perfume.”*

**Jamie Dorrington and Nandini Agarwal**

*Content Warning: The following article discusses instances of sexual harassment.*

**We thank all those who took the time to share their story with us; all names have been redacted and replaced with pseudonyms.**

September 2020 saw thousands of students move into University Halls of Residence to live away from home for the first time. Many were expecting to enter an open, safe, and welcoming environment - a reprieve from the months of restrictive COVID regulations. However, some were deprived of this experience. Multiple residents suffered bullying, intimidation and sexual harassment at the hands of their own security guards. These experiences were exacerbated by UCL's bureaucratic, and sometimes offensive, responses that saw administrators blame some victims for breaching COVID regulations rather than address their complaints.

On December 29, 2020, Isabel wrote to her Accommodation Advisor explaining the conditions that prompted her to vacate her room at John Dodgson House merely six weeks after moving in. She blamed her premature departure on the “intimidating threat” posed by UCL security. Once, Isabel shared, she was affronted by a security guard who entered her room without knocking to ensure that she was following quarantine rules. On another occasion, when Isabel had lost her mask and returned to retrieve one from her room, her attempt at an explanation was met with shouting from security:

“Stop talking back at me! Do not provoke me to report you!”

Isabel said that constantly being infantilized and demeaned “heavily impacted [her] mental health and sense of safety in [her] own home.” Within six weeks, security guards' invasive behaviour forced her to leave Halls and return to her home country. Upon reporting this, her Accommodation Advisor reassured her that they would ask the alleged security officer to “provide a statement” and then “come back to [her]” – Isabel has not yet received a follow-up email.

This incident is one of many that reflect the abuse of power carried out by some security guards at UCL Accommodation and the inadequate response by authorities. In another instance, Priya, a resident of Schafer House, found her identity being questioned by “two grown, adult men” in her otherwise empty flat at 10 PM last year.

On the night of January 24, 2020, Priya was collecting a food delivery from reception for an injured friend. She did not expect a security guard to accompany her back to her room to check her ID. Although she presented her passport and UCL identification, he refused to believe that the room she walked out of was actually hers. Later that night, he showed up with a colleague, insisting that “she's a liar,” and proceeded to enter her room. After an inspection of her belongings, they left “without any apologies.”

This intrusion was unauthorised under the terms of her contract - which mandates a 24-hour notice before entering a resident's room. Priya reports feeling humiliated and intimidated following the incident, leaving her

uncomfortable in her own home. Following a report about this incident, UCL Accommodation's response involved an acknowledgement of the situation, an apology and a promise to escalate the matter to “relevant parties.” Yet, Priya, like Isabel, was never contacted again.

Beyond general intimidation, multiple women have also come forward to share their experiences of sexual harassment by accommodation security last year.

In an interview with *The Cheese Grater*, Charlotte revealed that she was often a victim of inappropriate, sexual comments at John Adams Hall. She recounted how a security guard at the reception “leaned over the desk and sniffed [her] in three places, typically where you put perfume,” pointing to her neck and shoulders. On a separate occasion, he asked her and her friends to keep quiet so he could “return to his phone sex.” Charlotte described feeling “scared” whenever she passed the reception.

In another case, a former resident of Frances Gardner House, Lily, wrote in an email to her Deputy Accommodation Manager that “a security guard kept asking for my name and told me I was beautiful.” Later, he followed her to her flat and asked to see her ID. She asked him to wait in the kitchen while she retrieved it from her bedroom but he did not listen. As she was about to step out of her room, Lily found him standing right outside her door. He then blew her a kiss as he left. His “suspicious and weird” behaviour along with the unnecessarily frequent “flat checks” left her feeling unsafe. The response to her email was prompt, and stated that the “operative was immediately removed from the

site” and “will not be allowed back to the premises, or any other UCL Residences”. However, this swift action appears to be an anomaly among other incidents.

Emma, another resident of Frances Gardner House, was mistakenly caught up in an altercation between security and two boys. As she attempted to leave, the security guard obstructed her way and “pushed [her] hard, using his hands to stop [her] from leaving.” Moreover, persistent probing about whether she had a boyfriend, inappropriate requests for her Snapchat username, and comments like, “Come here skinny girl, where are you going?” only deepened her discomfort.

Following this harassment, Emma wrote to the management complaining about how they made her feel “physically threatened, incredibly distressed, and frightened.” The Residence Manager for Langton Close and Frances Gardner expressed her apologies, but not without mentioning Emma’s previous breaches of UCL’s no-guest policy. She further stated that they will speak to the accused security guard to “get his side of events” and to “clear any misunderstandings” before taking this report further. Several weeks and follow-up emails later, the Residence Manager replied that the guard “denies pushing or blocking anyone’s way” and thus closed the report.

The vagueness of responses combined with the failure to escalate complaints emerges as a common theme across UCL Accommodation Management. Olivia, another Frances Gardner House resident, attempted to open a conversation between management and students following repeated breaches of privacy by security guards after 11 PM, despite rules stating that security could not enter flats after this time. She wrote that the constant “intrusion of personal space” had created a deeply flawed living environment, “especially for women.”

UCL Accommodation responded stating that her “concerns and queries” would be passed on to a superior, and that security were conducting more frequent checks due to an increase in social gatherings. However, she was never contacted again.

Some residents, afraid that management would target them over prior breaches of COVID regulations if they reported security guards, spoke to their elected Hall Representatives. Oliver Matheret, Hall Representative of John Dodgson House last year, revealed to *The Cheese Grater* that he found himself inundated with “a lot of complaints concerning security, especially from the women in halls.” Students reached out to Matheret in order to report instances of harassment to management, yet he describes how his attempts at escalation were met with demands for direct reports from victims. With students scared to report directly and unable to go through their student representatives, few avenues remained to lodge complaints. Matheret claims that, despite his attempts to raise the issue, the same “treatment [of residents] persisted.”

Alex Skliros, former Hall Representative at Langton Close and Frances Gardner and the current Housing and Accommodation Officer for UCL’s Students’ Union, reports a similar experience. While discussing the frequency of complaints of bullying, intimidation, or harassment, Skliros stated that “I had a couple of cases a week.” He affirmed that, despite the absence of “overt sexual acts,” there were “certainly many instances in which female residents were made uncomfortable by male security guards.” Skliros says he attempted to represent his constituents by raising individuals’ complaints and following up on UCL’s response, along with prompting discussions in meetings with student officials and management. When asked about the nature of the

response to these attempts, he said, “by UCL, by the management -- sluggish.” In many cases, despite there often being multiple witnesses, he noted that UCL countered that the complainants were not able to prove that “X and Y were there.” Skliros also avers that the investigative and disciplinary processes were “not nearly as rigorous as they should have been.”

The Cheese Grater contacted UCL for comment on the allegations levelled against security guards and other accommodation staff.

A spokesperson said: “*The safety and wellbeing of our students is our highest priority and we are deeply concerned by these reports of unacceptable behaviour. Working with our security provider, we will always take action to ensure that anyone found to have behaved in an unacceptable way no longer works at UCL. Investigations into a number of these incidents were acted upon. We have now opened a formal investigation into how all these complaints were handled.*”

The university also claims to have taken steps this year to improve the rigour of its hiring practises in relation to security guards: “*In addition, UCL has recently changed our security guard provider, introduced additional training and coaching for our security supervisors and we have significantly reduced the use of temporary security guards in residential accommodation and on campus.*”

While these changes are undoubtedly welcome by students at accommodation, they suggest an initial safeguarding failure by UCL.

According to the spokesperson, “*all Security Officers are trained in compliance with SIA Licensing.*” This [Security Industry Authority accreditation](#) is a general one required for most security guards in the UK and offered by third-party companies. It is required for jobs including door supervision, CCTV

surveillance and retail store guards. The university further states that “*Security Officers have also had additional training/coaching on how to interact with the overall student body and supervisors are tasked with training their teams for increased awareness.*” The number of officers who received this training is not clear, but it is notably not stated as “*all*”, as is the case with the SIA licence.

Furthermore, the fact that supervisors are responsible for training officers on “*increased awareness*” may be concerning. This abdication of responsibility by higher authorities may have led to the poor training of some security officers in dealing with students. Indeed, UCL’s introduction

of “*additional training and coaching*” for supervisors suggests a retroactive move to counter their inadequate execution of duties last year. Also, while they have “*significantly reduced the use of temporary security guards,*” UCL evidently still uses temporary contractors who may lack the experience and training necessary to protect students.

The university’s amendments to its hiring and training procedures evidence a repentance and genuine attempt at improving student safety. However, they have come too late, and UCL’s initial shortcomings in protecting students in accommodation have caused permanent damage. Even with more training procedures, some

cases of harassment are likely inevitable. For this reason, the response to reports must also be scrutinised. UCL Accommodation figures’ apathetic and accusatory reaction in many of these cases signals an endemic issue. Their job is, above all, to provide services to students often paying exorbitant rent to live in UCL accommodation. However, instead of defending them when they were victims of harassment, some administrators sided with students’ abusers. While steps to ameliorate abuse are undoubtedly welcome by students, UCL must do more to combat a culture of suspicion and opacity in dealing with these cases when they are reported.

# UCL East: Flowery Promises Conceal Costly Commercialisation

*As UCL prepares to open its new campus, questions arise over its true purpose and value to Bloomsbury’s current students.*

**Emilija Deveikyte**  
In 2013, Students’ Union UCL [declared](#) the failure of the university’s plans to build a second campus in Stratford a “momentous victory” against gentrification and against the “socially reckless agendas of today’s universities.” Nine years later, UCL is on a smoother road to developing its aptly-named campus, UCL East, in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP). [Promising](#) to deliver “cutting-edge facilities for genuine collaboration across disciplines and communities”, the campus’ 2022 opening is fast approaching. Despite UCL celebrating the completion of the development, it reveals the university’s prioritisation of commercial growth and luxurious investment over the education of its current students. While the flashy facilities will no doubt attract more students, the majority of the student body who remain in Bloomsbury, and whose fees have aided this development, will reap no benefits.

The “high profile location of Phase 1 in the Olympic Park and the East Bank” aims, [as the university describes](#), to help UCL establish a “strong presence” and a “clear identity” in London’s “new ambitious cultural and educational district.” Its [promises](#) are undeniably impressive: more than fifty new cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, “cutting-edge facilities”, high-quality residences for students, and public engagement and exhibition spaces.

In an interview with *The Cheese Grater*, Paola Lettieri, director of UCL East said, “our campus is an opportunity to supercharge the rate at which we tackle the biggest issues facing people and the planet”. What the education sector needs most today, according to Lettieri, is innovation in areas like robotics, engineering, architecture, manufacturing and the creative industries. UCL’s expansion

into East London aims to provide “bespoke facilities to bring students and staff together” to tackle problems in an “urgent, complex and integrated” manner.

However, the development fails to tackle a significant issue plaguing staff and students alike: overcrowding. Ideally, at the forefront of this project should lie a solution to the desperate need for learning spaces. The promise of a campus that houses 4000 students and 260 academic staff can sound, on the surface, relieving to the current population of Bloomsbury who are suffering from overcrowding; the doubling of UCL’s student body over ten years has left little room to breathe. However, even with the extra space that is provided, 4000 students is a mere drop in the approximate 44,000-student ocean that currently populates the Bloomsbury campus. Yet, UCL could not even provide this minor reprieve to overcrowding and



## Society Bitch

Valentine's Day was a real treat for Soc Bitch this year. Honestly, any V-Day would have been better than last year when I tangoed with COVID, but this one was especially nice because I felt overcome by relief. *Pi Media* and *The Cheese Grater* had been uncharacteristically working together on a rather serious project, but of course this fell apart when Pi discovered they had to do some actual writing. Soc Bitch's annual masked ball would have been a fucking nightmare if she had to pity-invite Pi.

There's been a robbery, and no, I'm not referring to the hundreds of you

has instead opted to use the Stratford campus to host students from more than fifty new degree programmes, increasing its population even further.

Despite failing to offer space to current students, UCL argues that this expansion, both of infrastructure and student numbers, has a world-saving purpose. Lettieri details how this will work, asserting that "the complex problems that face society today require 'integrated solutions'" and that "we cannot afford to leave to chance those breakthroughs and discoveries that only emerge when great minds or ideas just happen to collide. At UCL East we are creating the conditions and spaces where they happen routinely." It seems that collaboration lies at the heart of UCL East's global vision. However, this raises questions regarding the appropriateness of the university's separation of campuses. The university claims the journey between Bloomsbury

who are stealing from yourselves by not using Yoyo at SU bars and cafes. UCL's beloved student radio society, Rare FM, have had their studio ransacked. In what was aptly described as a "targeted job", some villainous soul who hates wannabe Greg Jameses smashed the glass and stole both their Compact Disc Jockeys (CDJs). The worst part is people around the globe were unable to hear the news because Rare's current affairs shows were nowhere to be heard. Fortunately, they've put in CCTV so nobody will ever try this sort of escapade again.

I have no idea who stole the audio equipment. Separately, my podcasting career has really taken off in recent weeks. Segments of my show include The Soc Bitch Stitch (where I describe how to embroider Bentham's face) and Life of Pi (where I discuss the numerous ways in which I prefer Bengal tigers to Pi Media).

and Stratford to be an easily accessible "7 minutes on the fast train from St Pancras to Stratford International." Yet this accessibility is a privilege for those who are able to afford the £7 one-way journey, for which the alternative is a less attractive 45-minute tube journey. It is easy for students to feel disconnected in city campus universities, and, as Johara Meyer, Students' Union Sustainability Officer, told *The Cheese Grater*, "having the majority of student life take place within walking distance of the main campus has always been a vital part of ensuring students feel like they belong at our university". If interdisciplinary collaboration is the key to solving the world's problems, why not create a united community in which the "great minds or ideas" of all UCL's degrees can collide?

Other promises show similar superficiality. In [Phase 1, the UCL East Programme](#) vows to create a "distinct

and confident campus", providing an "appropriate identity" for UCL on the Park. A first glance at the development's "[masterplan](#)" shows a list of benefits that seem exciting. Phrases like "active frontages", "chance interactions" and "high sustainable design" decorate their promises, but such fanciful phrases can easily be mistaken for abstract, commercial jargon. Further, claims of benefits such as "vibrant public spaces" and "movement in, around and through the buildings" carry no real substance, and it is difficult for students to envision what advantages this development may bring.

UCL East's purported commitment to sustainability also seems dubious. "UCL is so focused on the question 'how can we make this building more sustainable?' when they really should be asking 'is it sustainable to build at all?'" notes Johara Meyer. When posed with the question of what UCL is doing to minimise its environmental impact in the construction of the campus, Lettieri proclaims that "UCL East has been designed and built with sustainability at its core, inside and out." The Director also reveals how UCL will become a "zero-carbon university across all [its] operations by 2030". But one key question remains: how? "From turning rubble into skateboard ramps or incorporating rainwater harvesting, to low-energy lighting and highly efficient mechanical ventilation, we have worked to minimise our construction's carbon footprint." Although such actions are welcome, the university has failed to consider - or ignored - the significant emissions from producing construction materials, transportation and fuelling vehicles on-site. While their website notes that "the project team have supported clean energy by keeping running costs and energy consumption to a minimum," regardless of what technocentric solutions they are making use of to make this project "greener," construction still produces an extensive footprint. Yet again, any scrutiny of

the narratives surrounding UCL East reveal strong words but feeble action.

### So, what's it all about?

Despite plenty of abstract commitments, one palpable promise of UCL East's master plan is its aim to provide "[cutting-edge facilities](#)." The literature about the new campus makes repeated reference to these, calling them "[best-in-class](#)", "[brand-new](#)" and "[state-of-the-art](#)". While many of these facilities have technical applications in fields such as engineering and medicine, others appear to represent luxury rather than utility. For example, the accommodation it seeks to offer, such as the Pool Street West building, will be "high-quality", consisting of self-catered, en-suite rooms, with no alternative for a shared bathroom or smaller bedrooms. If expensive housing was not lavish enough, the Stratford campus also appropriately plans to open a 160-seat cinema. While UCL claim this will be used to "showcase students' work," their website shows it off: "Fully equipped, and open to students and the local community, our cinema will give everyone in the area the chance to see great works of cinematic art and to curate their own programmes of film." It seems that, while much of the investment in UCL East serves an educative purpose, much of it represents needless luxury. The lavish nature of the accommodation alone suggests the demographic that the campus seeks to attract is wealthy students who can pay high fees.

## If you want a functional Students' Union, you won't get one here.

### Samir Ismail: SU Correspondent

The other day, I got a text from my editor: "There's a virtual Students' Union Executive meeting, you should go check it out". Naturally, I found myself rolling my eyes, but as a dutiful journalist who loves and respects his

This apparent appeal to the tastes of the world's elite implies UCL's true aim is not to solve global problems but rather to attract high fee-paying students. In doing so, the university takes a great leap in the "[international facilities' arms race](#)", competing internationally to attract wealthy students who can pay £28,000 for a degree. With this as its goal, UCL East's characterisation as a long-term financial investment may be more apt. The massive infrastructure project has cost at least [£483 million](#) so far, funded by at least [£280 million](#) of borrowed money. While the rest was to be funded by "[philanthropic donations](#)" - including [£100m from the government](#) - students have seen a per capita spending drop of [as much as 27%](#) in some sectors of UCL in recent years. While this may not be directly related to the project's finances, one must wonder whether the spending cuts would be incurred if there were not an ongoing [£1.25bn infrastructure project](#). UCL also seems unlikely to boost funding for student services anytime soon, especially considering it must pay back its debts. While the investment in UCL East may well pay off in the long-term by increasing the university's revenue from international students, it has, and will likely continue to, come at the cost of its current students.

The ornate language employed by UCL East's marketing team is a blatant attempt to conceal the university's prioritisation of commercial reputability and the allure of "luxury" over the

education services that it provides to its students. While the promise of bespoke facilities may attract more students, and UCL might find itself benefitting from this in the long-term, there is no doubt that these expansion plans will have virtually no advantages for its current students. Bloomsbury will likely remain overcrowded, and student spending will likely face further cuts. Instead of solving the world's problems, UCL East appears to reflect a principal one: it values profit over people.

In response to this article, a UCL spokesperson said: "*Our new campus will expand the teaching, learning and research capacity of UCL in ways impossible to achieve in Bloomsbury, at the same time as enhancing opportunities and facilities for everyone in the UCL community.*"

*By bringing together students, staff and researchers from across disciplines to work together on the biggest challenges facing our planet, this is also an investment for the benefit of generations to come.*

*In developing UCL East, we continue to value the significant contribution made by the Student Forum; set up almost four years ago, its members have informed the look and feel of the spaces. Students also sit on the UCL East Operations Board and are able to provide comment and feedback on a range of strategic and operational decisions."*

editor, I was intrigued to go to my first SU meeting. Despite my fantasies of the SU bureaucracy confined to a stuffy grey room, I found myself in an all too familiar position - logging into Zoom. I expected the meeting itself to be straightforward: the Chair would

announce the agenda and the proposals would be unanimously confirmed by the rest of the Union Executive. Luckily for me, I didn't have to sit through such a tedious affair. Instead, I had a front seat to a dramatic spectacle that introduced me to the frustrations

of SU politics.

The meeting kicked off with a simple discussion about the minutes from the last meeting. But sooner than I, or anybody else, could have expected, it erupted over one issue – who would fill the empty seat on the Finance Committee. The Finance Committee oversees the budget of the SU and makes strategic decisions about where Students’ Union money, our money, is best placed. There are various members who sit on the committee, four of whom are students confirmed by the Union Executive. One such position still needed to be filled.

The Chair asked the floor if anyone would like to nominate themselves for the seat. Only one person threw their hat into the ring: Thomas (Tom) Barringer. Tom is heavily involved in the ‘Stop Scabbing’ contingent of the Student Trustees, running unsuccessfully alongside Meg Day and Jenna Ali in October’s elections. He was openly critical of the Sabbatical Officers in his campaign, even writing that “the Sabbatical Officers are lying to you through their teeth.”

Tom was asked by the Chair and the SU Union Affairs Officer, Osman Teklies, to give an impromptu minute-long speech about why he would be opportune for the role. While he clearly didn’t expect to give a speech, he nevertheless managed to string together a well-formulated expression of vision and interest. After he finished, all non-executive members were asked to leave so that a vote could be held on the issue. Here, it is important to note that all SU Executive discussions are supposed to be held in the open so they can be scrutinised.

Personally, as I had watched Tom give the best speech someone could possibly give on such short notice, I was sure that the Executive would vote him through with flying colours - not least because he was the only nominee. Instead, when all the non-executive members were invited back into the room, it became clear something had happened. The vote was a resounding no.

Tom was apoplectic at the news, striking out at the Sabbatical Officers for rejecting the only student who put themselves up for the post. After the vote, there appeared two messages in the Zoom chat: ‘Good vote everyone’ and ‘Point proven.’ These fateful words were written by the Activities and Engagement Officer (and Outlook celebrity), Ilyas Benmouna, despite the fact there are not supposed to be any discussions while the SU Executive votes, just a vote. This suspicious oversight by Ilyas, probably written in arrogance and pride as he successfully blocked one of the few students remotely concerned with student affairs, soon became the main issue of the meeting.

As soon as Tom noticed the messages, he began to hound Ilyas, to no avail. What ensued was a shouting match between Tom and the majority of those present. Osman repeatedly asked Tom to stop shouting. In the middle of it all, Ilyas made a convenient announcement that he had to leave early to attend some pre-planned event and would therefore not be able to answer questions at the end with the rest of the Sabbatical Officers.

After the shouting match, Osman had Tom removed for being

purposefully obstructive. Meanwhile, Ilyas slipped away, not to be seen again. This chaotic display exposes a huge problem with the Union Executive. First, their open discussion during the vote points towards an ostentatious disregard for SU rules and procedure. Further, Ilyas’ early departure and their dismissal of Tom implies an apathy to politically engaged students and a lack of transparency. Tom was unable to respond to any of the allegations made against him or dispute his rejection for the post, leaving the seat empty and limiting student representation on the committee.

Ultimately, Tom probably did have to be kicked out of the meeting - he was shouting over the Sabbatical Officers and the meeting could not continue. But I don’t blame him for his reaction. As the only candidate running, they failed to offer a valid reason for his rejection. Furthermore, amidst a dismal level of student participation in SU politics, his dismissal suggests that the Sabbs are more than content to keep students out of the Union. For my first meeting, I can’t say I was bored by the show, but I was disappointed by the actors’ performance.

*Tom Barringer responded in familiarly animated language to this article, criticising the “shameless gaggle of self-important bureaucrats that call themselves this year’s Sabbatical Officers.” However, he was not despondent, citing the recent SU strike referendum as proof of “the power of the student body.” He also was optimistic about upcoming elections: “our team will dominate the Students’ Union executive elections this term.”*

*Osman and Ilyas did not respond to our request for comment.*

**Lily-Jo Davies**

I chose Social Sciences as my undergraduate degree thinking, almost naively, that understanding the world around me would help me change it. I wanted to be introduced to centuries’ worth of revolutionary ideas from authors, scholars, and philosophers that would act as tools to solve the problems we so earnestly debate in class. I was excited to study a diverse array of thinkers from different backgrounds and to hear their inputs on pressing social issues.

In my second year, I undertook a module on Social Theory, which has proven to be the most interesting and intellectually compelling course I’ve taken thus far. From class inequality to imperialism, we have discussed almost every topic relevant to understanding ourselves — us as a society. Yet something about the course left a bitter aftertaste. Every week, the lectures focused on a particular social theory and studied through the works of 1-3 scholars. For a ten-week course, that amounts to roughly 20-30 different intellectuals. However, of these, maybe five were women and scholars from Black or minority ethnic backgrounds were also highly under-represented. The fact that I’m able to count the number of women on the syllabus on one hand may give you an idea of the scope of this underrepresentation. Further, most sociologists from BAME backgrounds were concentrated in the lecture on postcolonialism and thus in the week that expressively focused on race relations and racial injustices.

## The Damning Depop Divide

**Disha Takle**

I was fourteen when I first downloaded Depop. Back then, I could find a nice top or dress for £10 and get a good bargain for all the classic brands. Now, whenever I log onto the app, I see the most ridiculous stuff there – cargo

Surely, confining BAME sociologists to race-related themes or topics goes, somewhat ironically, against the very arguments for equality and inclusivity the scholars are trying to make.

One of the more troubling aspects of this imbalance in the syllabus is the department’s blatant awareness of the situation. Indeed, the Social Sciences faculty, and UCL in general, appear genuinely concerned with this issue, and do frequently involve students in discussions about inclusivity. This module’s Moodle page features a tab with resources to learn more about academics from minority backgrounds.

Within this lies a link to the Global Social Theory website, a free, online resource for students and academics promoting the study of social theory from a more global perspective by providing a variety of concepts theorised by scholars around the globe as a direct response to the student-led campaign “Why is my Curriculum White?” It is an essential resource, and if you are interested in social theory, I encourage you to go have a look. From bell hooks to Stuart Hall, it features an assortment of thinkers striving to theorise solutions to current social issues.

The Moodle page also features a link to UCL’s “Liberating the Curriculum” working group, a student- and staff-led initiative working towards a more inclusive, representative curriculum that goes beyond the traditional white, male and Euro-centric theories omnipresent in academia.

While the module’s efforts to be inclusive should be appreciated, the scholarship by these often marginalised groups is largely separated from the curriculum. They are not the ones that constitute the course’s meat, the ones featured in the titles or with theories bearing their names. They exist, but they exist as a separate other, seemingly thrown into the Moodle page in a weak attempt to be inclusive. Frustratingly, every lesson emphasises this lack of diversity, with a small PSA reminding us that the theorists we have just spent the past two hours studying are, in fact, white, cisgender males. Thus, the question remains: if the module leaders are aware that there exists an imbalance, and are also knowledgeable about non-white and non-male thinkers, why do they still fail to produce an inclusive curriculum?

This piece is not meant as an angry rant. This module has taught me an incredible amount – the scholars we have studied, ranging from Weber, Durkheim, and Bourdieu were all fascinating and provided unique insights into the world around me. But does that have to mean that the curriculum cannot make more space for thinkers from different backgrounds? A link to a website doing a much better job at inclusivity is not enough. A reminder in a seminar of the curriculum’s blatantly obvious lack of representation is not enough. UCL may recognise the need to decolonise the curriculum, but it still lacks the initiative required to achieve this vital goal.

pants with stains priced at £30 and children’s clothes rebranded as a size XS!

Depop was founded in 2011 to facilitate the reselling of vintage, used or repurposed clothing. What drew

me, and most users, to Depop, over its predecessor eBay, is its user-friendly interface modelled after Instagram. Sellers can post pictures of their items, along with descriptions, prices, and hashtags. There also exists a chat feature which allows negotiations

## Separate But Equal: Social Sciences’ Superficial Inclusivity

and deals. Users can follow sellers and preferred categories to be able to see relevant posts on their personal feeds. Additionally, the Explore page features listings curated by Depop’s staff. Although its founder, Simon Beckerman, [envisioned](#) it as a place for small business owners to kick off their sales, the social e-commerce platform’s biggest audience turned out to be regular individuals trading items straight from their closets.

As someone who is enthusiastic about thrift shopping, Depop has been one of my favourite platforms to shop from – no longer limited to the thrift stores in my immediate vicinity, I can browse for items across the country. Lately, however, certain dubious selling practices on it have made me reevaluate my frequent usage of the app.

Countless videos on Youtube and Tiktok dissecting the gentrification of thrift shopping and how Depop has supposedly contributed to it have been flooding my feeds for some time now. Similarly, [‘Depop drama’ Instagram accounts](#), along with [forums on Reddit](#), are popping up for users to publicly vent out their frustrations. I recently came across a [Tiktok video](#) featuring a creator complaining about how a blue argyle sweater vest was being sold for \$50, when ‘it was probably thrifted for \$2’. While I sympathised with the outraged buyer about the exorbitant price hike, I could also see why the seller would want to gain a profit of off these pieces of clothing. Between unhappy buyers and frustrated sellers, Depop is fostering a community struggling with over-saturation and exploitation which begs the question: how did it even get here?

I decided I would do my bit of online sleuthing, and after doom-scrolling on Instagram, Youtube and Tiktok (and swiping through the hellscape Reddit is), I’ve put together the bits and pieces of evidence I found to explain the

the relationship between gentrification and Depop, one that is more complicated than it seems.

**The Buyers’ Dilemma**

The general consensus amongst buyers has been that the app is alienating its initial base of consumers by contributing to the gentrification of thrift stores through poor regulation of price hikes on second-hand items, drop-shipping and frequent scamming.

‘Unreasonable markups’ is a common phrase in the sub-Reddit I regularly browse. Often, I notice buyers poking fun at the absurd listings they see – a toddler’s t-shirt rebranded as a ‘Y2K baby tee’ listed for \$35, or dresses from Reformation tagged ‘vintage’. It is important to highlight that garments can only be described as ‘vintage’ if they are older than 20 years. Yet, sellers falsely tag ‘vintage’ on clothing from fast fashion brands such as Shein to gain traction on search feeds and hike prices. Surely, that 2016 Pretty Little Thing dress isn’t vintage yet!

Moreover, the issue of drop-shipping has been plaguing buyers for years now. Drop-shipping refers to a selling practice of purchasing wholesale, on-trend products from third-party websites such as Ali Express or Amazon, and selling it at a tremendous markup for a profit. Mistaken for second-hand or hand-made items, cow-print jeans, avocado earrings and similar trendy products saturate the market. In reality, they are poorly made in unethical work environments and until March 2020, when Depop [banned drop-shipping](#) on its platform, buyers constantly got [scammed](#) into purchasing drop-shipped items for three times the original cost-price.

Put this way, it is easy to empathise with the buyers’ plight. Low-income individuals passionate about sustainability seem to be priced out

of the second-hand clothing market, which was created for them in the first place. However, buyers rarely consider what it is like to be a seller on Depop.

**The Sellers’ Plight**

Youtuber and ex-Depop seller Alli Vera’s [28-minute-long video](#) titled ‘Why I Quit Depop’, explains their perspective perfectly.

Vera described the process and the effort of being a reseller on Depop in detail. ‘It is very time consuming’, she says. ‘It’s not just looking at charity stores and picking up items to sell... I have to curate the items, clean them, mend them and take pictures of them to show them in the best light’. She goes on to say how the hike in price is also because ‘you are not just paying for the item. You are paying for my eye... my ability to look for it and make it accessible’. The returns aren’t always guaranteed either. Vera notes that ‘you don’t know when an item will sell or not. It’s always a risk knowing I might not make my money back on something’.

Interestingly, Vera’s account highlights that buyers are no longer just paying for the item, but also for the resources spent sourcing it, cleaning it and photographing it, which may explain the difference between original costs and selling prices.

**Is it gentrification or simply inflation?**

‘It’s funny actually’, Vera remarks, ‘so many kids go on out here talking about how resellers are ‘stealing’ from low-income people. Literally such a majority of sellers are from low-income areas’. Yet, at the same time, by selling their curated items at a profit to boost their income and compensate for their efforts, successful low-income Depop users like Vera are taking the opportunity to buy cheap clothes

from the original charity shops away from other individuals who wish to be environmentally conscious on a budget.

While both sides of the argument appear valid, upon diving into the origins of thrifting practises, I discovered that the commercialisation of resale platforms is indeed contributing to the gentrification of thrifting. Thrifting was conceptualised as a common practice in the [early 1900s](#) after the founding of organisations such as Goodwill and Salvation Army. Originally targeted towards low-income groups due to their affordability, thrifting and similar sustainable practices have since been co-opted by younger generations as ‘trendy’ and subsequently commercialised into profitable businesses.

The internet accredits Depop’s success to the growing awareness of the evils of the fast fashion industry. Presently, the fashion industry contributes to [10% of total carbon emissions](#), making it the second largest polluter in the world. This, along with accelerated trend cycles and overconsumption, has caused the shelf life of clothes to shorten. When what is no longer popular is either sent to landfills or incinerated, thrifting presents itself as a better alternative: it closes the loop, gives clothes a new life and reduces waste.

Thus, while reselling thrifted clothes at hiked-up prices generates earnings

## A little rant about sprinkles

I could go on for days about how classic rainbow sprinkles are an insult to the senses, but I have taken some time off today to condense my thoughts.

Point one: if sprinkles were a font, they would be Comic Sans. You would never look at a heaping of sprinkles and think, “Ah, yes. These confectionary rabbit droppings certainly hold the same elegance and grace as something written in Times New Roman.” That in

for low-income sellers, it also creates economic barriers for low-income buyers. Because one of the main attractions of pre-used clothing is its affordability, by driving up their prices, we are gatekeeping a sustainable practice. As gentrification, simply put, refers to the process of making something ‘refined’ or ‘respectable’, these economic barriers contribute to gentrifying practices of platforms like Depop by limiting affordability and accessibility to sustainability. What’s worse is that this may drive shoppers towards fast fashion brands due to their inexpensive prices.

However, one user remarked on a Depop subreddit that there’s a lot of rage directed at individuals rather than institutions. It is easier to villainise people who can afford to visit multiple thrift stores and buy piles of items while ignoring the mechanism that makes this behaviour desirable.

**Do something, Depop!**

Vera’s video also discussed the lack of support from Depop itself. She states, ‘They used to encourage sales by covering shipping costs or reducing their fees. They don’t do that anymore’. Moreover, sellers are required to give a percentage of their earnings to Depop -- ‘last year, I had to give them about \$2000 in fees. Sure, it’s just 10%, but for someone who does this full time, it is a lot of money’.

itself is already infuriating.

But it doesn’t stop there. Besides their unfortunate shape, they also make my teeth angry. With absolutely no tactile prowess, they infiltrate, smatter, and colonise not only any smooth dessert – specifically designed to soothe the gourmand’s taste buds with its polished homogeneity – but also all of my cavities.

Despite these apparent problems and the growing animosity between buyers and sellers, Depop is doing better than ever. In the last year itself, the £4 billion company experienced a [200% rise in traffic and a 300% rise in sales](#). Still, to avoid alienating their large consumer base, Depop should evolve to encourage transparency and better regulate selling practices.

For buyers, Depop can improve their personalised algorithms and engage in further social responsibility by providing information on thrift-gentrification and conducting price inspections to ensure affordability and reasonable pricing. This could involve mandating that the original price of the item is included alongside the selling price. The company can support their sellers by re-introducing schemes such as ‘no-seller-fees’ or ‘no-shipping-costs’, and encourage small business owners and creative businesses over resellers.

Personally, I still believe that platforms like Depop are a great avenue for thrift-shopping – they’re quick, relatively cheap and encourage environmentally conscious practices. Yet, what started out as an inclusive and collaborative community has spiralled into a divisive and exclusionary one. While I agree that there is no ethical consumption under capitalism, Depop was, and can remain to be, a step in the right direction.

Do sprinkles have a taste? Yes, they do, and it’s the evil love child of expired dextrose tablets and Willy Wonka’s pubes.

If sprinkles had a sound, it would be a car crash. A knife scratching a ceramic plate. The auditory equivalent of trypophobia.

*I guess they’re kinda fun for kids’ birthdays though \*shrugs\*.*

# Geraldine, 19, seeking arrangements with an elderly man

Hello. Petite, attractive brunette studying international relations with a specialisation in intergenerational contact at UCL. Seeking a self-assured, financially confident 55+ male for domestic arrangements.

## Non-negotiables:

- Seven-figure income
- Daughter born in the 20th century (she cannot call you daddy, I will)
- Preferably bald
- Must be a Barb
- Must have an energy efficiency rating of at least a B.

## Molly-Mae is the QUEEN of QUOTES

You couldn't have measured my delight when blonde brains, beauty and Love Island icon, not to mention ALLITERATIVE NAME LEGEND, Molly-Mae, revealed that she was a guest on the podcast series *Diary of a CEO* this week. Literally quivering in anticipation, I listened in pure rapture as my QUEEN and role model detailed how, if Beyoncé has the same 24 hours in a day as us, why on God's green earth

aren't we all creative directors of Pretty Little Thing at the age of 22?

I couldn't believe how right she was. By the end of the podcast, I was shivering in sheer shame at how, aged 21, Beyoncé had already released five albums with Destiny's Child and I, an unproductive, pathetic peasant, have released NONE. So, I set out to implement Molly-Mae's 24-hour-a-day

rule (constantly reminding myself that I have the same 24 hours in my day as Beyoncé) and here's how it went.

Hours 0-1: Wake up and tell myself how bootylicious I am in the mirror. Attempt a cold shower and immediately shriek in agony once making contact with the water. Turn the water back to scalding. It's okay, I'll brush my teeth with cold water to make up for it.

Hours 1-2: Fake cry on the tube to seem alluring, vulnerable and mysterious on my way to uni. Maybe hum a tune or two from behind my mask lest there are any record label executives on the same carriage that want to sign me, produce seven of my albums, and then strip me of all my music copyright, leaving me to embark on an incredible comeback arc where I re-record all of my albums and send my art straight back to number 1 on the charts, ensuring career longevity and an eternal legacy.

Hours 2-4: Listen to my first lecture and furiously take notes. Ugh, why is my friend asking about my weekend? Does she think Beyoncé talks about her weekend with her friends instead of instead of RISING AND GRINDING?

Hours 4-6: Wander around central London, once again singing out loud so a record executive or creative director will notice me.

Hours 6-7: Eat lunch while applying to every reality TV show possible.

Hours 7-9: Lecture number two on Zoom. Hey, there are 46 participants on this call. What if I unmute myself and give my lecturer some fashion advice? If I'm extra sassy, someone will absolutely record it and put it on TikTok, fast tracking me to fashion designer fame. I spend the next 1.4 hours composing a script of what I plan to say to the lecturer, but alas, the meeting ends by the time I am ready to speak up.

Hours 9-10: Cancel drinks later

this evening for the hustle. Go into Bloomsbury Fitness to take a thorough look at the equipment, then get the tube back home.

Hours 10-12: Record myself singing on TikTok until my flatmate comes home and tells me to stop caterwauling. Sigh. My first hater. I quickly take her down with a declaration to my 82 followers that she is CANCELLED.

Hours 12-16: Watch "Molly-Mae's Best Moments" on YouTube, followed by Beyoncé's Lemonade documentary. Yes, I watch my stuff in order of awesomeness.

Hours 16-24: Make my sleep productive by putting on "Molly-Mae subliminal" in the background.

## What's Appening with this WhatsApp shite?

By a disgruntled third year AKA pensioner

TRIGGER WARNING: MARK ZUCKERBERG

I was content once. I could dip into the group chat for my society, my halls, or my course and affix any emoji I wanted to any message. When someone asked who wanted to attend an event but all the messages that followed were completely unrelated, I could gleefully thumbs up the original message. It did not even cross my mind that one day I would be forced to reply with a thumbs up in a separate message of its own, thus disrupting the new conversation. Alas, this is the sick world we live in now. The Messenger group chats of my glorious first year have been ousted

by WhatsApp, a platform somehow so popular that it is used by every age group, from hip young freshers to Tory MPs and even your great-uncle who despises every other form of social media.

I could perhaps understand if everyone wanted to move away from a platform owned by Facebook/Meta/Whatever-Mark-Zuckerberg-Has-Renamed-It-To-When-This-Is-Published to one owned by a less conniving corporation. But we've collectively swum out of one deadly fishing net into another one which is attached to the same trawler and riddled with privacy issues. Crucially,

the second fishing net doesn't have in-message reactions, and it's this insanity that has made me lose my mind.

Nevertheless, this change has inspired a new hobby. After joining all my favourite societies' newly-formed WhatsApp groups, I have, so far, sold phone numbers of 620 people to the local hoodlums. While this has not fully mitigated the emotional cost of leaving Messenger behind, it was enlightening to experience the thrill of crime - a feeling these WhatsApp pushers know All Too Well™ (Taylor's Version) (10 Minute Version).

## Woman reminded of her own mortality by mild stomach pain during night

A woman has reported being shaken to her core after experiencing moderate

gastrointestinal discomfort during the early hours of Thursday morning.

'I mean, I'm normally pretty healthy,' she began. 'I only smoke socially, that

is, with friends on most weeknights, and I can't even finish a whole packet of chocolate Digestives on my own.'

But last night, her surety became not-so-sure.

'I was experiencing some definite twinges in the lower left-hand region of my abdomen, and when I took a Rennie\* they didn't go away', she explained. 'I was lying awake at 2am, and although I tried having some Kellogg's Fruit and Fibre\*\* to settle my stomach, I still felt like I needed to fart.'

As she quickly discovered, the first casualty of stomachache is innocence.

'I thought I was invincible, really. You know how no one thinks they're going to die? Yeah, well that was me. And now? Well...I just don't know. My stomach making all these gurgling noises makes me think that something could be wrong. What if my body is failing me? What if I have a tapeworm? Can tapeworms eat humans?'


Not long after uttering this sentence, she fell asleep. She woke up at 9.47am

feeling perfectly well.

*\*DISCLAIMER: The Cheese Grater Magazine, University College London is not sponsored by Rennie. You may also wish to ingest Gaviscon to diversify your portfolio.*

*\*\*DISCLAIMER II: The Cheese Grater Magazine, University College London is not sponsored by Kellogg's Fruit and Fibre. You may also ingest Coco Pops, Shreddies or a cereal of your choice to diversify your portfolio.*

## Quick and Easy Recipe for Busy Uni Students

Users rated this recipe:  5 stars

Hundreds of people make butter on toast every day. Who doesn't love easy, cheap, nutritionally worthless, comfort food?

When I was all but a sperm cell in my father's balls, I first eavesdropped on a conversation between my parents. I distinctly remember one of them saying: "I really love this butter on toast."

At this point, I must also express my deepest gratitude to my grandma for giving me this recipe after I had begged threatened to put her in a state-funded

retirement home if she continued to refuse her for it. Thanks Nana!

Truly, this snack has been a companion through my fondest memories – my first day of school, my marriage and the passing of my pet hamster due to inter-hamster-cannibalism. During my days at university, I have never considered butter on toast to be a struggle meal. To me, it is a luxurious symbiosis between saturated fats and carbs.

But what makes this butter on toast so delectable? The beauty in this recipe lies in its simplicity. It has all the hallmarks of classic butter on toast – it's savoury, moist, and you can never

predict if the toast will be as white as a cheese and wine social or burnt to a charcoal crisp because you can't look inside of your electric toaster (how inconvenient!). If you want to get a little crazy, you can hit it with a pinch of salt.

What's also amazing about this recipe is that you can freeze and store it for up to a month!

### Ingredients:

- Butter
- Toast
- Salt (optional)

### Directions:

1. Apply thin layer of butter on toast.

## Twitter can't get enough of our Stonewall article



Homunculus 🦖 @tryingattimes · 8h

Replying to @jaffofalo and @cathy\_amhurst

Buzz off, little boy. Women have rights, and your penis isn't a magic wand that makes you a genius.




 22



 Tip

EE

23:13

16% 

Messages

Climate

Contact

Hey Climate

Lately, I feel like our relationship hasn't been the same anymore. You've been so temperamental. After being together for so long, I know that it's normal for you to be hot and cold. But it's been so much worse as of late. Your mood swings have become more extreme, more erratic. Sometimes, you suddenly storm in and leave me in a puddle of tears. Other times you just ignore me for months on end and leave me hanging dry like a desert. I can no longer predict which version of you I am going to get.

I can feel myself burning every time you flare up at me. But have you bothered checking up on me? Do you even care?

You've changed. I know who you are and this isn't you. We've been through so much together. I've seen you through all your ups and downs. But it's different this time. It's like I don't even recognise you anymore. Things just haven't been the same since I caught you with Human. Flashing at them and making thunderous sounds for them. I've seen the way Human has made you hot and wet.

How dare you.

I hate how much Human has affected our relationship. Can we please just go back to how we were before all this? Climate, can you please stop changing? Please? Call me if you see this.

HEY EARTH

MAYBE YOU SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT TWICE BEFORE YOU LET HUMAN EXPLORE ALL YOUR CREVICES AND DRILL HOLES INTO YOU. SCREW YOU.

## **REASONS WHY BORIS JOHNSON IS \$ECRETLY A RAPPER**

1. Many girlfriends, mistresses and baby mamas
2. Doesn't use his real name (Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson)
3. Rocks that post-sex messy hair
4. Has a mildly sexual nickname, BoJo, which also rhymes
5. Doesn't let anything get in the way of his birthday party, not even his own laws
6. Spits fire disses which incorporate alliteration, such as chlorinated chicken
7. Doesn't wear protection (caught COVID & has many children)
8. Majorly mismanaging dangerous situations, leading to deaths
9. Inserts himself into random 'A-list' circles (i.e. Ghislaine Maxwell) like Travis did with the Kardashians
10. Refuses to be silenced by the haters

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