

Global Biodiversity Change Group @ UCL – Guiding Principles

Summary

We strive to be a diverse, welcoming and fun research group. We value everyone's opinions regardless of background and career stage. We recognise that a long-term, fulfilling and productive academic career for everyone can only be achieved by having a healthy work-life balance, and by treating each other with kindness and respect at all times.

This document was compiled by Tim Newbold, with additional input from Abbie Chapman, Jessica Williams, Joe Millard, Chloë Metcalfe, Gonzalo Albaladejo-Robles, Silvia Ceaușu, Adrienne Etard and Georgina Adams. It will be regularly refreshed to ensure that it stays up to date. This is our attempt to deal with some very complex issues. Inevitably, we won't get all aspects right straight away. We welcome any suggestions for improvements from anyone. Please send your comments to t.newbold@ucl.ac.uk.

The principles set out here do not replace UCL's institution-level or departmental policies. Rather, these guiding principles are specific to our research group activities.

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Inclusivity and Diversity

An inclusive and diverse work environment must be safe, secure and supportive for everyone, regardless of gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, physical disability, neurodiversity or mental health, physical appearance, body size, race, age, nationality, ethnicity, language or accent, religion, and marital or parental status. We consider diversity a great strength of our research group and we want to ensure a supportive and open working environment for everyone. We will provide writing support for non-native English speakers.

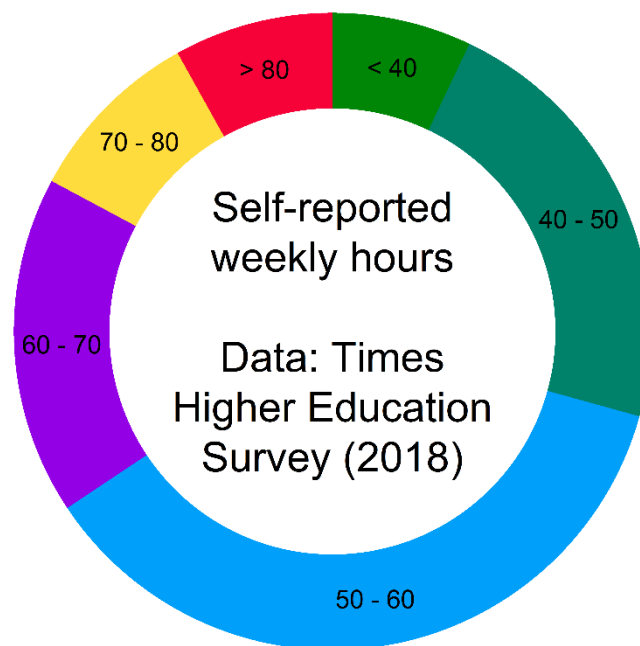
Our group has zero tolerance for any form of harassment, bullying or abuse. [Harassment](#) includes any unwanted behaviour, which you find offensive or which makes you feel intimidated or humiliated, and includes offensive verbal or written comments, sexual images in public spaces, deliberate intimidation, stalking, following, harassing photography or recording, sustained disruption of discussions, inappropriate physical contact, and unwelcome sexual attention. Harassment is against the law when it is connected to one of the UK's [protected characteristics](#) (age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation). Sexist, racist, or exclusionary jokes are not appropriate at any time. [Bullying](#) is an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm. Anyone asked to stop any harassing, bullying or abusive behaviour is expected to comply immediately. Everyone is encouraged and supported to call out any bad behaviour they witness inside or outside of our group, if they feel comfortable doing so. You can also report concerns at any time to Tim, to our department's equal opportunities contact, [Tabitha Owen](#), or through [UCL's reporting processes](#). Bullying, harassment or discrimination victims will be fully supported by the group, respecting their wellbeing, privacy and rights.

All communication, online or in person, should be appropriate for a professional audience, and be considerate of people from different cultural backgrounds. Sexual language and imagery are not appropriate at any time. Again, everyone is encouraged and supported to call out (or raise their concerns through the above-mentioned channels) any communication that they, or anyone else in the group, may find offensive.

Please be kind to others, and do not insult or put down other group members. Contribute to discussions in meetings with a constructive, positive approach. Be mindful of talking over others or interrupting when discussing in groups, and be willing to hear out the ideas of others.

Working Hours and Holidays

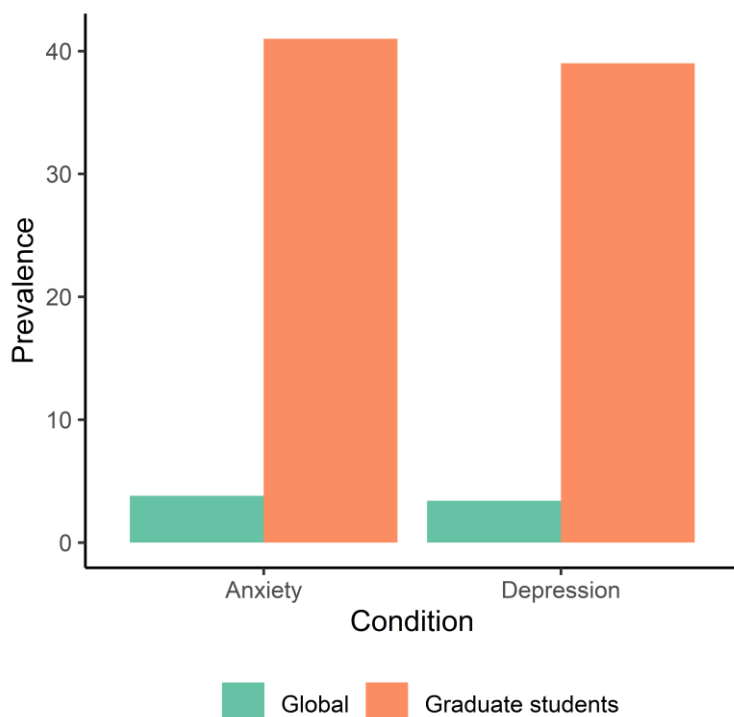
Sustained productivity and contribution to science can only be maintained with a healthy work-life balance. It is not always possible to stick to strict working hours, and indeed flexibility can be an advantage of working in science. Nevertheless, I don't personally and wouldn't expect anyone else regularly to work long hours during the week, nor to work at weekends, unless certain work requires an unusual schedule, which will be discussed and agreed in advance. Your working hours should include all aspects of being a researcher, including seminars, reading papers, attending meetings etc. You are not expected to complete any tasks (even non-research work) outside of your normal working hours. Everyone should try to be on campus for as much of the time between 10 am and 4 pm on a regular basis, to get the benefits of collaborating with other researchers in our group and beyond. In line with [UCL's policies](#), we will try to avoid meetings outside these core hours. I would not expect anyone to respond to or complete requests for work outside of normal work hours, unless under exceptional circumstances, and by prior arrangement. You will not be compelled to respond to requests in the late afternoon or evening for work that needs completing by the following working day (this includes requests on Friday afternoons for work to be completed by the following Monday). We will always support group members who require flexibility owing to childcare and other caring responsibilities, and in line with [UCL's parental leave policies](#). [UCL provides support](#) for breastfeeding on return to work.



Many people report working long hours in academia, but the culture is changing, recognising the damage to our wellbeing and sustained productivity caused by overwork (e.g., see this discussion:

<https://twitter.com/ZJAYres/status/1266728015981096965>

It is essential to take holidays to maintain work-life balance, have a complete rest from work, and ensure good mental health. I strongly encourage everyone to take the full UCL holiday allowance (27 days plus 6 closure days plus 8 bank holidays). This holiday allowance is a formal part of staff contracts, and is a sensible amount also for PhD students. Taking a holiday of at least two weeks at some point each year is very beneficial, allowing plenty of time to unwind from work. Please notify me in advance of taking holiday. There are normally no constraints on when you take holiday, but please be mindful of important deadlines and supervision obligations. You should be completely detached from work during holiday, and so are not expected to remain in contact (making use of the out-of-office automatic email replies, and if necessary delegating an alternative point of contact).



Rates of mental health disorders are much higher in academia than in the general population, owing to a complex set of underlying factors.

Data from <http://doi.org/10.1038/nbt.4089> and <https://ourworldindata.org/mental-health>

Mental Health

Academia can place a [considerable burden on our mental health](#). The elevated rates of mental health issues in academia compared to the wider population have a number of causes, including low pay and insecure contracts, the perception that you alone are responsible for delivering your work, the uncertainty that key pieces of research will deliver results, and the widely held perception that success in academia can only be achieved by working very long hours.

In our group, we encourage everyone to make their mental health a top priority. Sometimes it is better to step away from work than to get stuck in an unproductive cycle. You should always feel

completely safe in speaking out if you have worries about your work or anything else. We run a very collaborative group, and people are always willing to help with research issues. You don't have to battle through with a problem by yourself – science is a collaborative enterprise! If, for any reason, you don't feel comfortable speaking to me or anyone else in the group, UCL has a range of different support mechanisms in place for [staff](#) and [students](#). You can also talk to Charlette Bent-Gayle, who is the Division of Biosciences [Wellbeing Champion](#), and there is a UCL-wide scheme called '[Being Well at UCL](#)', with a newsletter and associated resources. Post-docs should all have a mentor who can give independent advice, and PhD students should have an advisor who is independent of the core supervisory team (normally the chair of your upgrade panel). If you need further support, please do register at a local GP surgery who can assist you, and/or seek support and advice from a charitable organisation (e.g., in the UK, among other charities, we have the Samaritans, who you can call for free any time on 116 123, and CALM are available to chat 5pm-midnight on the phone or on webchat – <https://www.thecalmzone.net/>). There are also useful resources available via 'Mind': <https://www.mind.org.uk/>.

Soliciting Comments on Work

I will always try to comment on any work I receive within 2 weeks. Where student projects have a tight deadline, I normally aim for 1 week. During very busy spells, I may have to stretch these deadlines, but I will normally consult with you first. As a general rule, I hope that others will abide by the 2-week guideline for providing comments. When sending work to external authors or reviewers, please allow them at least 2 weeks to return comments, and ideally 4 weeks if there is no hurry. Everyone is very busy in academia and tight deadlines may contribute to the feeling of being overwhelmed. Everyone is encouraged to share their work for feedback within the group, at UCL more broadly, and at external conferences. The benefits of sharing ideas and research almost always outweigh the costs (e.g., the risk of an idea being 'scooped').

Outputs

Where funding permits, we will publish our papers under gold open access. Otherwise, all papers must be published green open access – it is a UCL requirement that all manuscripts are deposited on UCL's Research Publications Service (RPS) within three months of acceptance. We follow as much as possible the ICMJE criteria for determining authorship on papers (i.e., to be an author on a paper you should have done all of the following: 1. Made substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; 2. Drafted the paper or revised it critically for important intellectual content; 3. Approved the final version to be published; and 4. Agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved).

Communications

Within the group, we communicate primarily by email and Microsoft Teams. All communications should be polite, respectful and constructive at all times. This includes correspondence within the group, to others outside the group, on social media, and in comments on others' work (including through anonymous peer review). Please be mindful that written communications can easily be misinterpreted by the recipient.

Please try to avoid sending communications before 8 am or after 6 pm, or at weekends. Email clients normally allow you to delay the sending of messages until a specified time, although it is easy to forget and to send a message accidentally. You are never expected to respond immediately to messages sent outside work hours (or indeed in work hours if you are focusing on something else!). I will normally try to respond to most emails within one or two working days. I respond more quickly to messages on Teams or Slack.

In meetings, please be respectful of people's time, and offer your full attention (please don't use meetings to complete unrelated tasks). In video calls with people working at home, please be aware that you are entering someone's personal living space – inappropriate or hurtful comments about cleanliness, décor, other people, infants, breastfeeding or pets that may be visible are not acceptable. You should always feel free to keep your camera off in calls if you prefer.

Group Meetings

As a rule, I meet with every member of the group 1:1 almost every week (except when I am travelling or on holiday). This allows me to stay up to date with everyone's work and to help you to identify research issues as quickly as possible. We hold group meetings approximately every two weeks. Normally someone will present some aspect of their work, as well as us having a more general catch up. You are strongly encouraged to attend and occasionally present at these meetings to help us collaborate and interact together. We will try to accommodate remote participation at meetings wherever possible.

CBER and Department Activities

There are a number of events that take place across the wider centre and department. These include the CBER journal club, data club, seminars and lunch-boxes, departmental seminars, and CBER and departmental coffee breaks. You

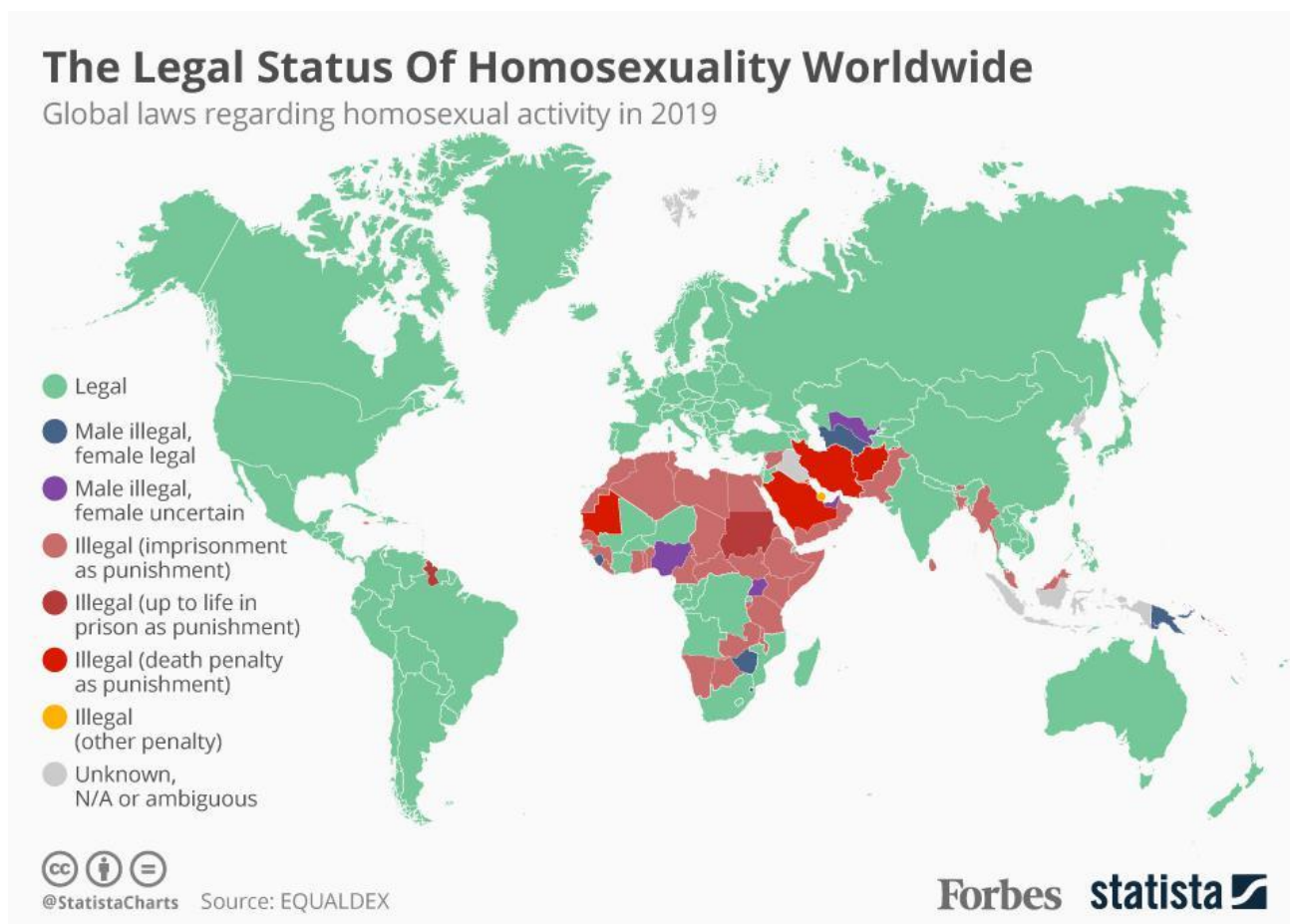
should attend these events whenever possible, to get the broader perspective and possibilities for interaction that they offer.

Social Activities

From time to time, we have group social events. These are a nice opportunity to get together in a less formal way. We will try as much as possible to make this accessible and welcoming to all members of the group, respecting cultural differences. They are absolutely not a compulsory part of working in the group. CBER staff often gather for an informal coffee/tea break during the day. You are very much encouraged to join these breaks if you like, to meet and chat with other people around the Centre. Such informal interactions are an important part of academia.

Field Work and Conferences

We conduct ourselves in the field and at conferences as representatives of UCL, and we strive to maintain these guiding principles in all settings. We understand that other countries have different laws and customs, for example LGBTQ+, clothing rules for women, and alcohol consumption. We recognise it is important to discuss this before sending any member of our group to other regions for their personal safety and security while away. We will discuss any concerns about personal safety while on fieldwork or at conferences prior to your departure, and make sure that appropriate mitigation measures are in place (e.g., a buddy system for walking around at night).



Local laws and customs, as well as your feeling of safety, will be considered in planning any overseas conferences or fieldwork.