# Engineering students protest King's College London LGBTQ+ design project



Engineering students at King’s College London (KCL) have protested following a design module assignment that required them to develop a device aimed at improving the lives of the LGBTQ+ community. This development has sparked significant debate among undergraduates, with a number expressing concerns about the nature and scope of the project.

The engineering design module at KCL, known for challenging students with projects such as Mars rovers, robot drones, and mechanical cars, most recently tasked students with researching the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community. The objective was to inspire students to create products considerate of diverse user needs, highlighting the historical underrepresentation of LGBTQ+ individuals in the engineering field.

According to Roar News, KCL’s student newspaper, 74 students signed a petition expressing dissatisfaction with the assignment. Many students questioned the relevance of the project to engineering, suggesting the topic should have been an optional module instead, with opportunities to focus on a wider variety of underrepresented groups. Some participants felt the university was promoting a particular agenda and accused it of pushing progressive values through compulsory coursework.

Additional concerns emerged from students hailing from countries with more conservative views on LGBTQ+ rights, who reportedly feared for their personal safety if they engaged with the project. Some cited their religious beliefs as a reason for objection, stating discomfort with endorsing ideas contrary to their faith. One student articulated this sentiment in correspondence with professors, stating: “My religion does not allow me to endorse or be part of something that it prohibits.”

Other students, while not opposed to the LGBTQ+ focus per se, argued that the project brief—which accounted for 70% of the module grade—was unrealistic for an engineering design. One student described the assignment as “of no help” to their development as an engineer and “a complete waste” of their financial investment and experience.

The controversy drew the involvement of KCL’s equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) team after the engineering department sought advice due to backlash. The EDI team reportedly condemned numerous survey responses from students as “blatantly anti-LGBTQ+” and pushed for a formal letter to be sent to the student cohort condemning what they characterised as homophobic attitudes. According to the Daily Telegraph, the letter stated that “sexual orientation and trans status are protected characteristics and discrimination against anyone on these grounds will not be tolerated.”

In an accommodation made in November, KCL broadened the project scope specifically for a group of international students who had expressed concerns about possible political repercussions linked to their home countries.

A spokesperson for King’s College London said: “The aim of this module is technical design – last year this was presented as a task to help engineering students explore and consider that the products they create will be used by a range of different people, often with different life experiences and challenges to their own. We regularly review and revise module content across all our subjects to deliver engaging educational programmes that challenge our students, and future iterations of this module will undertake a variety of different tasks.”

The episode at KCL highlights the complexities universities face in balancing educational objectives, inclusivity, and diverse student perspectives within academic programmes.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://roarnews.co.uk/2024/lgbtq-project-controversy-engineering-students-complain-to-department/> - This article supports the claim that over 70 KCL engineering students complained about an LGBTQ+ focused project, questioning its relevance to engineering and expressing discomfort due to religious and cultural differences.
2. <https://roarnews.co.uk/2024/lgbtq-project-controversy-engineering-students-complain-to-department/> - The article also details the project’s objective to address underrepresentation in the LGBTQ+ community and provides quotes from students who felt the project conflicted with their religious beliefs.
3. <https://www.instagram.com/roar.news/p/CO99FWbgf2O/> - This post from Roar News mentions the results of a student poll, although it indirectly relates to the broader context of student opinions at KCL.
4. <https://www.lifescied.org/doi/full/10.1187/cbe.23-10-0181> - This study highlights the underrepresentation of LGBTQ+ individuals in science and engineering, which aligns with the broader context of the KCL project's goals.
5. <https://www.noahwire.com> - The source of the original article providing a general overview of the controversy and debate among KCL engineering students about the LGBTQ+ project.
6. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equality,\_diversity\_and\_inclusion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equality%2C_diversity_and_inclusion) - This Wikipedia page describes the principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), which are relevant to KCL’s EDI team's involvement in addressing backlash and homophobic attitudes during the controversy.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14655571/engineering-students-protest-lgbt-device-challenge-homophobic.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data