Foreword

In 2019, the UvA formally adopted a university-wide policy on diversity and inclusion. This policy applies to all faculties, staff and service departments and encompasses multiple areas of policy, along with a wide range of actions and action holders. The document was then incorporated into the Strategic Plan as well. You have now asked Seba (founded in 1997) to assist the UvA in evaluating the past four years of the policy on diversity and inclusion. You wish to gain insight into what is actually happening and recommendation on any matters that may have been omitted or are in need of refinement.

To that end, many interviews were conducted involving 42 people and multiple documents (such as annual reports) were submitted. This yielded a notable wealth of information. Furthermore, a considerable number of the interview subjects made use of the occasion to call attention to aspects they themselves feel are important with regard to diversity and inclusion at UvA. These comments and suggestions have been recorded separately as building blocks for improvement and new policy.

The current document is our evaluation report, which has been structured as follows. First, it contains a general description and a corresponding impression of the culture. Culture is an elusive yet (to our minds) vital factor if we are achieve progress with regard to diversity and inclusion policy at the UvA. Next, we classified the recommendations as follows:

- Continue working toward implementation based on the current existing frameworks
- Draft a new Policy Document later on, parallel to the new Strategic Plan
- Focus on implementation of previously developed themes via programmes
    - Recruitment and selection
    - Social safety
    - International classroom
    - Learning & development
    - Building accessibility
    - Studying or working with a disability (still calls for attention at a structural level)
- Ensure the structure is geared toward cooperation and realisation
- Be mindful of grassroots efforts and communities
- Strive to measure and monitor inclusion
- Six dilemmas emerged from the dialogue with interviewees. These recommendations set out a vision for addressing five of these dilemmas; the sixth will require decisions at the organisational level.

And lastly: there is more being done within the faculties, staff and service departments than this advisory report suggests. This document is therefore not an evaluation of the decentralised policy: the faculties, staff and service departments have great ideas of their own!

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Staying the course

Evaluation of the UvA Diversity Policy Document 2019-2023

General overview

The theme of Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) is receiving much more attention at the UvA than it did a few years ago. Today, D&I has been embedded in the university's Strategic Plan and incorporated into other policies as well. Interviewees identified strongly with the objectives and principles established in 2019 and feel it is important to hold onto them. They especially recommend more targeted actions and monitoring based on those objectives and principles.

Objectives and guiding principles of the 2019 Diversity Policy Document

In summary, we have translated our diversity and inclusion ambitions into the **following strategic objectives**:
1. guaranteeing an inclusive culture;
2. strengthening our core tasks (education, research and valorisation) by increasing diversity;
3. improving accessibility of rooms/physical spaces, support and facilities;
4. striving towards more diverse student and staff populations in all units of our organisation.

Basic principles regarding culture and organisation
Knowledge and expertise in the field of diversity is vital, as 'common sense' does not provide a sufficient basis for concrete measures. Due in part to the lively debates taking place within society, there is a major risk of dominant opinions and bias, even at the UvA. Action and initiatives to boost diversity and inclusion must be evidence-based and evidence-informed. In accordance with research results:
• we will strive to attain a *broad basis of support* for and ownership of the process of boosting diversity, first and foremost among supervisors;
• decision-making must be *transparent* and every supervisor must be accountable for the implementation;
• we will promote *cooperation* within diverse groups and teams;
• we do not deny that (increasing) diversity may pose certain challenges, but we discuss these, set boundaries wherever necessary and we focus on opportunities;
• we select the most *practically applicable* diversity initiatives or training courses.
• we focus heavily on *changes in organisational standards and values* and not changes in personal attitudes and convictions.

A few examples of how evidence-based or evidence-informed principles have been successfully applied:
- The Recruitment & Selection training course has been developed in collaboration with users: 'Striving to attain a broad basis of support', 'choosing applicable initiatives'.
- Based on reports that women were less likely to receive the designation of 'cum laude', an investigation into the matter was commissioned and the resulting reports have been published: 'Transparent decision making', 'not denying that increased

diversity also presents certain challenges, but creating an open atmosphere in which these problems can be discussed'.

- These principles permeate the entire structure which supports social safety: 'Striving to attain a broad basis of support', 'transparent decision making', 'not denying that increased diversity also presents certain challenges, but creating an open atmosphere in which these problems can be discussed' and 'focusing heavily on changes in organisational standards and values and not changes in personal attitudes and convictions'.
- The Central Diversity Officer (CDO) and the Faculty Diversity Officers (FDOs) are the driving force behind the exchange of best practices: 'Striving to attain a broad basis of support', 'focusing on opportunities', 'applicable diversity initiatives or training programmes'.

There is virtually no discussion surrounding the usefulness and necessity of D&I: the UvA has moved past *why* to focus on *how*. Activities are being organised in all kinds of places. While this is warmly encouraged, it does feel a bit disorganised. In an effort to bring control and structure, a Status overview (see separate appendix) has been created to accompany the Diversity Policy Document. This overview shows in how many areas progress has been made with regard to central UvA policy! We will outline a few of the key points here as well.

In order to support first-generation students and students with a migration background, programmes like Summer Courses, Get Ready and Meet your Mentor have been set up and are working well. Work is being done to increase the online and English-language accessibility of these programmes. The Student Disability Platform, which was run by volunteers, has been further developed into IDEAs (Inclusivity, Disability, Equity, Accessibility for and by students, a part of Student Services) and now works with several student assistants to facilitate findability, proper referrals, accessibility, identification and advice for students with a disability. The Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) supports lecturers in creating an inclusive learning environment by offering training programmes and masterclasses and by sharing best practices. The International Classroom methodology is now a permanent component of the University Teaching Qualification, as is an inclusive, safe and welcoming learning climate.

The UvA has also invested heavily in social safety, a vital basis for a successful D&I policy. These efforts included everything from appointing an ombudsperson and a central confidential adviser and establishing procedures for observed signs, reports and complaints, to workshops aimed at increasing expertise on the work floor and communication campaigns so that students and staff know where to turn for help.

Also notable were the efforts in terms of recruitment and selection, which encompassed a wide range of activities: from targets for the gender ratio among full professors to the establishment of committees, training programmes, advice, mentoring and a toolkit that is available to all.

Figuring out how to embed D&I into the structure of the UvA was a bit of a puzzle. The policy is drafted at the central level, to be implemented in decentral fashion by the faculties – but then it's decided that it would be better to do this centrally after all, and where does the CDO come in, exactly? After a pioneering stage, this resulted in the establishment of the DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) Programme Team, in which the various policy departments of the central executive staff coordinate with the CDO. This structure, in combination with the appointment of DEI policy officers, provides a lasting foundation on which the university can continue to build and expand in the coming years.

The activities mentioned most often during the interviews were those involving recruitment & selection, accessible buildings, UTQ/TLC and social safety. Criticism was expressed as well, demonstrating both the ambition and the perfectionism of the UvA community. It's never good enough and more could always be done, but what the UvA has achieved over the last few years in connection with these activities absolutely deserves to be celebrated! Notably, interviewees had many ideas for zooming in on specific 'groups'; numerous individuals expressed a desire for research into D&I, as well as compensation for D&I-related hours/efforts. This, too, shows that the UvA is fully in the 'how' stage.

In terms of monitoring, the UvA is currently limited in its efforts to diversity: the goal is to be data-driven and this works best for the gender ratio. Quantifying the number of people with a migration background remains problematic due to the ongoing discussions about definitions (both at UvA and nationally). Other characteristics (such as LGBTIQ+ or having a disability) are not monitored, as that would require requesting this information from individual staff or students. And if you did, it would go along with the expected discussions concerning registration. There is broad support for increasing investment in qualitative measurement: how inclusive do people perceive the UvA to be? But this initiative is still in its infancy.

Culture

As important as the actions set out in the status overview are, the momentum that has been created is equally vital. This is because thinking in terms of D&I – rather than in terms of uniformity – is a cultural change. Diversity is becoming more commonplace at the UvA, whereas inclusion often remains a struggle. Interviewees said the fact that students are asking for it is a positive driving factor.

At the UvA, there is a strong desire to do things well, even perfectly. With regard to policymaking, this means an issue is first carefully thought-out from any and all possible angles before action is taken (or before the matter is brought back to the table). The road to implementation can therefore be a long one – as was the case with the D&I policy, according to many interviewees. In addition, 'well done' and 'perfectly done' are not objective quality criteria. Multiple interviewees described a culture in which you have to involve the right people and do things in a certain way. They perceive a lack of appreciation for those who are different or act differently and say that is one of the reasons international colleagues leave the UvA. Diversity also brings uncertainty for supervisors and other colleagues, as inclusion ('being yourself and belonging') is to some extent subjective. Coping with this uncertainty is

difficult in a culture where people want to be sure they are doing things right. This is especially true when they do not have much in the way of D&I-related experience or skills. Often, it is still assumed that treating everyone equally ('one size fits all') is the same thing as providing equal opportunities. Even when those opportunities are not equal. This starts with conditions and facilities. For example, there is still no official policy giving pregnant PhD candidates a four-month extension on their track. Having a baby is something that women in science 'just do on the side', naturally while achieving just as much as their male counterparts. That is truly remarkable, from an outsider's perspective. It is laudable that the UvA is committed to finding solutions of its own in instances when the CAO offers no solution. With regard to accessibility, too, numerous examples were mentioned: from the case of a blind student where no one realised until their second year that the required laboratory work would prevent them completing the programme, to the student who uses a wheelchair and noted that the disabled toilet on the 6th floor is kept locked... and the key must be picked up on the 2nd floor. In this climate, the UvA's obligation to hire 245 employees who fall under the Participation Act poses a particular challenge. It is also quite positive when an individual director recognises the importance and complexity and therefore takes action and/or may act within the UvA structure, simply by appointing a coordinator to ensure compliance with the Participation Act.

Students are expected to be assertive. Those who show initiative will find their way. Quality is recognised. It is important to look out for yourself, to be self-reliant: if you formulate your request for help effectively, we will be able to assist. But with the increasing diversity, both national and international, assertiveness and self-reliance cannot always be assumed. Some interviewees shared a fundamentally different perspective. Facilities are not a 'perk', but a right. Why should an individual who needs something have to arrange it themselves? Why are extra demands being placed on someone who is already dealing with a disability? Where one individual sees equal treatment as just, another may view it as unjust: this is a thorny issue in the UvA environment, which is also a competitive one.

Within the hierarchical relationships, there does not seem to be enough realisation that achieving inclusivity will require additional skills, such as sensitivity (including cultural), empathy, inclusive leadership, respect for those who are different, and ensuring that young, newly appointed colleagues and those from other countries feel they are being taken seriously. During the interviews, quite a few inappropriate remarks and/or unfunny 'jokes' were mentioned. There were also slight misunderstandings due to differences in expectations and communication styles. In and of itself, this is not unusual and is not unique to the UvA: it happens everywhere now that the diversity in organisations is increasing. What is worth noting, however, is that (based on the interviews) it seems more likely to result in debates, a defensive posture and negative judgements about others than in asking questions and adopting a respectful and inquisitive attitude.

Recommendations from Seba

Continue working toward implementation based on the current Diversity Policy Document

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Stick with the objectives and principles set out in the Diversity Policy Document. Avoid being overeager to innovate or reopen discussion of the policy; instead, work to further implement and embed the current policy in the organisation first. The energy to take action is certainly present. The existing Policy Document contains enough starting points to keep you busy in the coming years. Stay the course and move persistently forward.

It would be better to draft a new Policy Document during preparations for the next Strategic Plan. The involvement within various UvA areas is so strong that initiatives could be developed in part through meetings or brainstorming sessions and additional implementers could be assigned. There is a widespread desire to include measurable results for the short, middle and long term, or to link D&I to the existing areas of responsibility, the corresponding KPIs and evaluation cycles for planning and performance –with people who will take responsibility for this in exchange for appreciation and payment. By doing so, the UvA can show that it takes D&I seriously, strives to work more systematically and take control, transparency, knowing where you're at and what is still to be done, and therefore also measuring and adjusting course.

Focus on implementing previously developed themes via programmes
Focus on themes that have already been picked up and turn them into programmes with objectives and results, plus accountable owners who are tasked with the implementation. Support these efforts with communication and research (communication has been frequently used in recent years but research is still lagging behind). The themes could include:

- Recruitment & selection: this is a current theme in many areas of the UvA and offers good opportunities for expansion now there are important instruments in hand, such as the jointly developed training programme and the D&I toolkit. The existing idea of a recruitment team with expertise concerning recruitment, selection and the job market is an appealing one. Other ideas include scrutinising the concept of the 'best candidate' because, all too often, this ends up being someone who already resembles the other current employees and the criterion of 'best' is evaluated at the individual rather than the team level. The interviews also revealed that the UvA sometimes adopts an overly passive attitude in recruiting for D&I. In a competitive and often fragmented job market, there are probably sources the UvA has yet to tap into. Last but not least: formalise D&I-related insight and skills as a requirement for new appointments.

- Social safety: this too, is receiving lots of attention, and what has already been set up is much appreciated. Social safety is a prerequisite for D&I, so the first recommendation is: keep doing what you're doing! Further development is possible in the following areas:
  - The programme has been set up in order to easily identify risks and risk groups; to work to minimise obstacles to reporting for members of these groups; and to ensure a connection to other D&I activities (including the training programmes listed below) so that this knowledge and experience may be properly utilised within the UvA;

- Make diversity (gender, LGBTIQ+, cultural diversity, those who study or work with a disability, etc.) an integral part of the composition of the team of confidential advisers and the content/methods of the social safety workshops.
- The social safety of students has not been formally embedded in policy: this needs to happen. The response to transgressive behaviour from students must be anchored in policy as well.

- <u>International Classroom</u>: this TLC programme promotes inclusivity in courses and curriculum and focuses on developing a variety of perspectives, methods and didactic skills in an international and intercultural setting. It received high praise from the interviewees. Along with the UTQ, it is good and important to offer this to all current employees because it directly links the necessary sensitivity and empathy to skills from professional practice.

- <u>Learning & Development</u>: in addition to the aforementioned R&S training, all training programmes (Including 'Leadership and Cooperation in diversity' have been added to the schedule. These should be implemented via the method in keeping with the principles of the Diversity Policy Document, as was done with R&S. It is likely that elements of the International Classroom training programme will also be useful in training programmes aimed at management skills and cooperation, certainly as a training result.[1] According to TLC:
  Afterwards participants will be able to…
    - *Develop a sophisticated perspective on what they should and want to bring to their teaching for intercultural (groups of) students*
    - *Obtain concrete insight into their own existing teaching identity, skills and resources in an intercultural context, and added awareness of how to employ these*
    - *Identify which further skills and professional development would assist with this (and find "quick wins" among these)*

This is very much in keeping with the problems described in the last paragraph, under 'Culture'. With this type of training programme, the risk is that it will lead to debates on freedom of speech and academic freedom – whereas, as the TLC shows, the issues at hand are about professional attitude and skills. It is urgent that this be developed in order to achieve inclusivity at the UvA, although the University already has most of the relevant knowledge in house.

- <u>Building accessibility</u>: The UvA has adopted the ITS (integral accessibility standard) quality mark as a criterion and much has already been achieved. Still, many interviewees mentioned a need for improvement. This has to do with multiple factors: the fact that students or employees with a disability consistently have to arrange things for themselves (and are not being involved from the start of the process, for instance when a building entrance is being modified), which negatively impacts the results; there is a defensive attitude among responsible parties when a problem is pointed out; it is possible that the expectations about what can and cannot be arranged are too high. The recommendation is to strive for an 'owner' or 'director' to

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[1] https://tlc.uva.nl/en/article/teaching-intercultural-classroom/

take on this type of questions and complaints, in order to get a better idea of which problems are structural and which incidental; improvement may be achieved through communication, through a change in employees' attitudes, by paying more attention at the start of construction processes or by other means.

- Studying and working with a disability: the Student Disability Platform has been further developed into IDEAs (Inclusivity, Disability, Equity, Accessibility for and by students, a part of Student Services) and has been focusing mainly on findability, proper referrals, accessibility, identification and advice. There is also a Knowledge Platform on Accessibility for students with a disability and/or chronic illness and a Digital accessibility working group. Facility Services also recently appointed a Participation Act coordinator because the UvA must create 245 participation job positions in 2023-2024. The next step will deal primarily with creating structure in order to make the quality of the approach even better and to ensure that policy and its implementation can be examined/evaluated separately:
  - o Student Services is tasked with implementing this for students with a disability or chronic illness. For employees working with a disability and/or chronic illness, HRM is the logical place to assign implementation because the 245 jobs under the Participation Act will need to be realised across the entire UvA and because HR aspects of implementation also apply to UvA employees who do not fall under the participation policy.
  - o A central point of knowledge is needed, potentially as further iteration of the existing Knowledge Platform. In terms of substantive knowledge, it is advantageous to bundle this into a single resource for both studying and working with a disability or chronic illness. In that scenario, then, the question, 'I have a student who is blind, what now?' will be directed to the same place as 'I want to hire an employee who is blind, what now?' and 'I'm blind, what now?'. The same goes for chronic illnesses, neurodiversity, etc.
  - o Who is the point of contact for these or who makes the policy? The logical answer is Academic Affairs for students and HRM for staff, with these being able to tap into that same central knowledge point.

A structure geared toward cooperation and realisation
The UvA has now created a DE&I programme team with members from HRM (chair), Academic Affairs and the CDO. This programme team is eminently capable of managing the programmes and proposals listed above. At the faculty level, people still seem to be trying to find the best way to organise the work. 'Right now, we have lots of highly motivated individuals who lack the proper knowledge or network, when what we need is strong teams', one interviewee said. The FDOs work together but do not have final say and cannot be certain they will find support among the supervisors at the faculty. The interviews showed that investment varies from one faculty to the next and, when it comes to D&I, each of them is trying to reinvent the wheel on their own. Give faculties opportunities to connect with the central programme structure; develop a format that makes this as easy as possible. Make it appealing with a learning network or specific D&I training courses for implementation teams

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or because there are joint workshops with the goal of realising a concrete product or action. 'It doesn't happen in the meeting room', one interviewee sighed. So rather than attending meetings, start creating together. You also have the option to deploy students. The Faculty EB has had positive experiences with student-led projects about D&I, which can yield useful insights when they take place within an effective structure, including rewards. Ideally, this connection of structure and working method will be further strengthened in the next two years, so that it can serve as a basis for the new Diversity Document.

Be mindful of grassroots efforts and communities

There is a need for individual communities at the UvA and for interaction and encounters between those communities: multicultural, multifaith, Pride and so on. In the coming years, the CDO wants to – in addition to other activities – develop and support recognisable networks and therefore a sense of belonging among students. This is undoubtedly of vital importance. An inclusive UvA cannot only be achieved via the managerial route: sharing lived experiences is often what makes the difference. It is precisely the personal encounters and stories that are exchanged that can make it clear what the goal is and inspire people to get started. There is a common perception that the supervisor is the deciding factor in this, and that they have broad discretion to work on D&I or not. The recommendation is not only to bring together the individual communities but also to actively promote contact between members of those communities and supervisors in a casual, approachable way that does not take up a great deal of time. For instance, a one-hour group discussion in a supervisor's office or in an MT. Some very good experiences with this have already been gained in other organisations.

A few highly successful projects for students (Get Ready, Meet your Mentor) will probably be transferred to Student Services. Here, too, attention should be paid to deploying employees with lived experiences of their own: a project leader plus experiential expert in one. This will help students feel seen and build a bridge, as it were, to the UvA culture.

Strive to measure and monitor inclusion

Strive to measure and monitor inclusion at the UvA There appear to be three instruments available for this: the Employee Monitor, the UvA panel and exit interviews. More quantitative measurement can yield useful data on the perception of inclusion: the proper balance between being yourself and being part of a group.

It might be possible to combine this with diversity-related data (such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, LGBTIQ+ identity, disability, age) without creating problems in connection with registration. Like reports concerning social safety, certain risks emerge here that will help us learn about D&I at the UvA.

Dilemmas

A number of dilemmas were mentioned. These recommendations set out a vision for addressing five of these dilemmas; the sixth will require decisions at the organisational level.

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1. Why aren't training programmes mandatory? As it is, the people who need them, don't attend them!

The first principle is based on support and ownership. It might seem like a 'quick win' to simply require people to take part, but this is unsupported by scientific evidence. For the best chance of long-term effects, people must learn to recognise the added value for themselves.

2. Supervisors are already so busy; can't responsibility for D&I be delegated somewhere else?

The facilitating role of the supervisor, their function as culture-bearer and as the person who ensures proper handling of reports are all vital. The supervisor is certainly not the only person who can do something, because inclusion – in particular – requires everyone's participation. That being said: if the supervisor's general attitude is that there is no time or money for this kind of thing, if they tend to appoint or reward those who are similar to themselves or if the supervisor has a habit of making inappropriate remarks, the D&I initiatives will unfortunately fail. It is worth recommending that supervisors be provided personalised 'service' wherever possible and that options be built in – this is because workload is a very real issue and no one benefits when participants burn out. On the other hand, it doesn't help a supervisor, either, to be playing catch-up all the time. Because D&I is becoming increasingly relevant, it is in their own interest to promote it.

3. *Are we choosing integral policy or all those different subgroups?*
Not a single organisation out there has managed to solve this dilemma yet. It may be that there comes a time that diversity is so common and natural that we include people regardless of their background, etc. Until that day, though, we must try and find what works best.

4. *Should we be organising everything top-down?*
From the top down, the idea is to manage in such a way that you create not only impact but momentum. Guard the line from above while providing space for many flowers to bloom.

5. *How often do people really say offensive things? Is this not being blown out of proportion?*
Along with diversity come uncertainty about what the standard is. The key question is not 'How do I avoid a misstep?' but 'How do I resolve this?' Unresolved incidents often have a negative impact on both individuals and groups, and therefore on the climate or reputation of the organisation as a whole. This cannot be prevented by claiming it's a rare occurrence. Learn to resolve things.

6. *How do we value contributions to D&I?*
Interviewees noted that actions that are rewarded also tend to be more highly valued, and that rewards are a way to show you take a subject seriously. That you use resources to encourage faculties and departments to rise to the next level of D&I and meet the policy targets from your Diversity Document. This is true, of course, but it is also a dilemma because resources are not infinite. The advice is to look at this and think about what is possible and what is desirable. Which forms of rewards and recognition can be deployed? What clear guidelines can be put in place so that everyone isn't just off struggling on their own? What will the central organisation offer and what can people expect from the decentralised units?
The interviews revealed a vast, likely incomplete, wish list of things that call for rewards or other forms of recognition:
- Compensation for helping students with a disability, such as by making visual adjustments to a website.
- Homework hub (e.g. awarding credits)
- Compensation for providing help and advice to D&I-related HR initiatives
- FDO hours
- Hours for chairs of D&I committees within faculties
- Hours for Pride board members
- Education reform in relation to D&I
- Research in relation to D&I
- Ensure efforts to promote D&I do not come at the expense of one's promotion, and that no one regrets becoming an FDO or joining a D&I committee – let it count towards the doctoral research.
- Budget, such as that allocated to FDOs, to achieve change from the bottom up and by doing so, to more effectively reach the broad base of support.
- Provide resources for workshops for students
- Provide resources for advertising UvA vacancies in other countries