



**University
of Antwerp**

UAntwerp Diversity and Inclusion Policy Plan (2025–2030)

Diversity as an asset, inclusion as a norm

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Introduction: Diversity as an asset, inclusion as a norm

Where do we want to go?

Diversity is a reality: in society, in the city of Antwerp and increasingly reflected at our globally engaged university. There is more and more diversity among students and staff at Flemish institutions of higher education, including our university, (Hemelseoet, 2021; Jacobs & De Jong, 2021). This growing diversity is complex and changeable, and is neither easily defined nor measured (Geldof, 2015; Schrooten, Emmers & Pulinx, 2021). In addition, our university is deeply rooted within a society and a world in which **inequality and exclusionary mechanisms** are present.

Diversity involves recognising and acknowledging **differences, both visible and invisible** (Djaït, 2021), with a specific focus on differences associated with particular mechanisms of inequality. Within the university's diversity and inclusion policy, we focus primarily – but not exclusively – on gender, ethnicity, disability, ideology, sexual orientation, nationality and socio-economic background, as well as on the associated exclusionary (or other) mechanisms. We consider the possibility that combinations of background characteristics may influence each other.

With an awareness of institutional barriers and the opportunities and challenges associated with diversity, we aim to create an inclusive organisation in which every student and staff member can feel welcome and receive maximum, equal opportunities for development. To this end, UAntwerp is making targeted efforts to improve the recruitment, study progress and graduation of minoritised students and staff. In both our local and international collaborations, we take responsibility for promoting a more inclusive environment, centred on equal partnerships and mutual learning, with a strong focus on addressing shared challenges, both global and local.

Why do we want to go there?

As stated in its mission statement,¹ UAntwerp is resolutely committed to the further development of a sustainable world and a democratic, inclusive society founded on human rights. UAntwerp therefore takes responsibility for its students, staff members and partners, as well as for its own position within society to create an **inclusive climate**. This means removing as many barriers as possible that prevent any individuals from further developing their potential, whether in terms of education, research, services or valorisation.

Commitment to diversity and inclusion is a matter of **justice and fundamental human rights**, as outlined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, this deliberate choice by UAntwerp is in line with the decree-based obligation to ensure the accessibility of higher education.² The pursuit of

¹ [Mission and vision | University of Antwerp](#)

² Higher Education Code. Art. II.276.

§ 1. Students shall be treated equally.

positive change and addressing shared global and local challenges (as articulated in the SDGs) drives UAntwerp in its pioneering research, inclusive academic education and active community engagement.

In addition to being committed to equity, a university that is committed to diversity and inclusion can also contribute to **quality education**, if properly addressed. An inclusive and diversity-responsive university promotes the advancement of the skills, participation, well-being and academic performance of both minoritised and non-minoritised students (De Leersnyder & Meeussen, 2023; Celeste et al., 2019). Under certain conditions, **excellent research** also goes hand in hand with an inclusive approach. The quality and impact of the knowledge we generate increase when it is representative of the diversity in our society and the world (AlShebli et al., 2018; Freeman & Huang, 2014). In addition, a commitment to a diverse workforce and an inclusive university environment can lead to **more innovation** (Ahmad et al., 2019; Hewlett, 2016; Hofstra et al., 2020; Levine, 2021) and **more productivity** (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020), provided that diversity within teams is well managed. In this way, it becomes clear that UAntwerp's commitment to **quality and excellence** is inextricably linked to the pursuit of inclusion and increasing diversity.

How will we pursue this?

As shown in the literature, the ways in which universities cope with diversity can make the difference in achieving inclusion (Birnbaum et al., 2021). In striving to maximise our objective of 'diversity as an asset, inclusion as a norm', we therefore place several **basic principles** at the heart of our approach.

A diversity-responsive approach directs positive attention to the skills, knowledge and experiences of minoritised individuals, and it regards diversity as enriching the development of all students and staff members. Similar to an active pluralist approach (see below), this focuses on providing and engaging in dialogue about different perspectives. Mechanisms of inequality and exclusion are recognised, and responsibility for addressing these mechanisms is not placed primarily on the individual, but on the system or organisation (Pulinx, et al., 2021). This is in contrast to a 'neutral' or colour-blind approach, which dismisses differences as irrelevant and gives no recognition to the diversity that is present. Moreover, it is not based on an assimilation or deficiency approach, in which background characteristics of a minoritised person are regarded as limitations.

An **inclusive approach** involves creating a context within which all people feel at home and are recognised because of who they are. An inclusive approach takes into account and actively counters structural inequalities, exclusionary mechanisms and discrimination, including socio-economic exclusion, racism, sexism, LGBT-phobia, transphobia and stereotyping. It critically questions who is excluded or unequally treated by the current approach, and it actively acts to eliminate such injustices. In this regard, an inclusive approach primarily considers the responsibility of a system or organisation.

§ 2. Boards take measures, either jointly or individually, to ensure the accessibility of higher education in material and immaterial terms to students from objectively definable population groups whose participation in higher education is significantly lower than that of other population groups. To this end, boards have the ability to adopt or maintain measures of corrective inequality, to the extent that these measures:

- 1° are temporary and disappear when the objective set out in the first provision has been achieved, and
- 2° do not unduly restrict the rights of others.

§ 3. Students with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodations.

This may involve actions aligned with the principle of **Universal Design**,³ where we aim for an approach that works for everyone, without requiring an individual approach. Although this is applicable in many cases, specific approaches will occasionally be needed to remove existing barriers and bring out the added value of diversity. We use **Universal Design where possible, customisation where necessary**.

This transformation towards an inclusive university is not linear, and it is a quest that can be accompanied by **discomfort and resistance**. This transformation requires both individuals and the institution to be resilient and willing to accept the 'discomfort' that arises when confronting diverse perspectives and viewpoints.

This leads us to the third basic principle characterising the UAntwerp Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) policy: **active pluralism**, which is distinct from strict neutrality and passive pluralism. We believe that the enriching power of diversity comes from the dialogue between people with diverse, differing or even conflicting experiences, views, ideologies or ideological and political preferences. There should be room for free and open dialogue, in which people have the courage to think outside traditional boxes, in which they dare to integrate alternative and controversial views critically, and in which uncomfortable conversations are seen as a catalyst for intellectual growth. Coping with minoritised – at times conflicting – views and questioning dominant or controversial opinions require a range of skills, including resilience, empathy and tolerance. Within our institution, we aspire to realise *braver spaces* where, within a safe space, there is room for the discomfort that such dialogue can entail. In doing so, we pay particular attention to the voices that have fewer opportunities or that experience more barriers to being heard. Dialogue about everything should be possible, and it can and should be done with mutual respect, and without hateful and discriminatory statements. There is no place for discrimination, human rights violations or similar matters; UAntwerp takes a stance against all such cases and guards against them within its institution.

In coping with diversity and inclusion, we also take a consciously **intersectional** approach, recognising that each of us is unique but, at the same time, connected to different social groups – including, but certainly not limited to, gender, ethnicity, functional disability, ideology, sexual orientation, nationality and socio-economic background. Given that each individual navigates at the intersection of different communities and identities (Crenshaw, 1989), we also consider the complexities associated with intersectionality. We consider the possibility that combinations of background characteristics may influence each other. We recognise the importance of social identities without defining individuals based on any single diversity characteristic, which could potentially result in stereotyping, stigmatisation and/or exclusion.

Finally, any form of exclusion or inequality involves a form of **power**. Who defines knowledge? Who defines competences? Who takes decisions, and how have decision structures been constructed through history? These questions for reflection are relevant at all levels of our society and, consequently, within our university as well. In addition to its relevance for internal collaborations within UAntwerp, we apply this line of thought more broadly to collaborations with actors outside our institution. In particular, it is a point of focus for cooperation with actors in the Global South.⁴ We go beyond a 'happy diversity' policy and engage in uncomfortable conversations (Withaekx, 2021). We

³ Vision text: UAntwerp Universal Design (insert link)

⁴ [Strategic Framework for Global Engagement](#)

aim for a climate in which critical self-reflection and questions about inequality, Eurocentrism, injustice rooted in power and similar issues are not avoided.

Governance

The UAntwerp diversity and inclusion policy is led by the **Vice-rector for Social Engagement and International Policy**, who chairs the **Board of Services to the University and the Community**. The **Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee** (SGD&I) co-directs diversity policy based on academic (and other) expertise and reports to the Board of Services to the University and the Community. Day-to-day coordination and implementation are the responsibility of **Diversity and Inclusion Team**, which is part of the **University and Community Department**. As a centre of expertise, the Diversity and Inclusion Team is responsible for the development, implementation and evaluation of the Diversity and Inclusion Policy Plan. They do this in close cooperation with the **faculties, central services** and other actors within the university, with the Diversity and Inclusion Team assuming a coordinating and supportive role.

Through the **Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee**, bridges are being built with relevant academic experts. The Steering Committee co-directs and supports the Diversity and Inclusion Team in coordinating, implementing and updating the UAntwerp diversity and inclusion policy.

The **Interfaculty Diversity Consultation** (IOD) is the link between faculties and central D&I policy. The IOD is organised by the D&I Team and is composed by representation from each faculty (diversity anchors). Challenges and opportunities are exchanged, and common initiatives are aligned. Through temporary **project groups** (see SD1, OD1, Action 6), concrete collaboration is taking place around joint initiatives. The **diversity anchors** identify and advise central policy so that it can be aligned with challenges and opportunities at the faculty level. Conversely, they ensure that the central D&I policy is not merely rolled out from the top down, but that it actually becomes embedded within the day-to-day functioning and culture of the faculty.

The university is part of the **YUFE** alliance (Young Universities for the Future of Europe). The Diversity & Inclusion Team is represented in YUFE Work Package 9 Equity, Diversity & Inclusivity. The diversity and inclusion policy and good practices of YUFE and its partner institutions serve as a source of inspiration and a benchmark for the policy at our university.

An **annual evaluation and planning meeting** is held with the main central actors who bear partial responsibility for implementing the UAntwerp diversity and inclusion policy to discuss the progress, any adjustments and future plans for the UAntwerp diversity and inclusion policy.

The UAntwerp Diversity and Inclusion Policy Plan

With this policy plan, the University of Antwerp is further committed to **structurally anchoring diversity and inclusion (D&I) within the organisation**, consistent with the line of strength ‘diversity as an asset, inclusion as a norm’, as well as with the university’s broad vision and long-term goals, as described in the 2025–2028 policy memorandum. This policy plan translates this vision into concrete actions in the areas of organisation, teaching, research, human resources and student activities, with objectives and responsibilities. In this plan, we bundle **new and revised ambitions and actions related to diversity and inclusion**. It builds on the many efforts relating to Diversity and Inclusion that have

already been made in previous years. **For a non-exhaustive overview of current and past efforts, please refer to the UAntwerp [website on Diversity & Inclusion](#).**

This policy plan translates our university's ambition for diversity and inclusion at three levels:

- **Strategic objectives** outline what we, as a university, will strive to achieve within the key areas of the university.
- **Operational objectives** indicate the sub-aspects and ways in which action will be taken to achieve the strategic objectives.
- **Actions** indicate the concrete areas on which we will work and how we intend to achieve our operational objectives. These actions will be updated periodically with new and modified actions, based on current trends and priorities (e.g. the increasing importance of AI). This takes into account recent needs and opportunities within the institution. This policy plan focuses primarily on the actions to which we aspire, but it does not provide a detailed overview of exactly how the action will be realised. The *how* will be worked out during the implementation phase, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders.

The actions are always based on recent scientific insights, **policy advice and commitments** made by our university,⁵ as well as on **legal and supra-governmental expectations**⁶ and **knowledge and experience** gained in practice within our own and other higher education institutions. This plan reflects a dynamic, ongoing exercise to promote the diversity and inclusiveness of our institution.

The actions came about through discussions with all faculties, relevant services and departments of the University of Antwerp. **The actions will be implemented by the relevant departments and services over a five-year period.** This will always be in close cooperation with the Diversity and Inclusion Team and in coordination with faculties, as needed. The responsible services or departments and the concrete timing for each action have not been included in this policy plan, but they are part of an internal planning document for the next five years.

Faculties take their own actions and initiatives, which have been customised to their own faculties and supported by the Diversity and Inclusion Team (see also SD1: Inclusive university, OD1), in line with the UAntwerp vision and the strategic and operational objectives of this policy plan.

UAntwerp asks everyone – staff and students – to respect, co-monitor and, where possible, actively promote these efforts and the importance the university attaches to diversity and inclusion. In this way, we are working together to build a diverse and inclusive university, thereby increasing equity, quality, innovation and excellence.

Let's shape the future!

⁵ VLOR Commitment Statement on Diversity, Equal Opportunities and Inclusion in Higher Education (2025); YUFE Equity, Diversity & Inclusivity policy (2024); VLIR-JA Commitment Statement: For the further promotion of ethno-cultural diversity and inclusion at Flemish universities (2023); UAntwerp Strategic Framework for Global Engagement (2020); VLIR-JA Gender Charter (2019); VLIR Charter on Transgressive Behaviour (2018)

⁶ Decree on transgressive behaviour in higher education (2023); Decree on study efficiency and study progress (2023); Decree on gender balance in governing bodies (2013); Horizon Europe (2020); Higher Education Code: Right to reasonable accommodation (2014); Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to education and that higher education shall be open to everyone who is gifted to do so (1948).

Reading guide

In what follows, we explain the strategic and operational objectives, along with their associated actions:

- SD1. Inclusive university
- SD2. Inclusive recruitment and graduation
- SD3. Inclusive student well-being (study progress)
- SD4. Inclusive teaching (study progress)
- SD5. Inclusive research
- SD6. Inclusive human resources policy
- SD7. Monitoring diversity and inclusion

Both the strategic objectives (including student well-being and inclusive teaching) involve operational objectives and actions concerning study progress. By including study progress in both strategic objectives, we emphasise its importance and the fact that both strategic objectives are mutually reinforcing.

The words in italics throughout the policy plan are listed in the [Diversity and Inclusion Glossary](#). It can be accessed on the Diversity and Inclusion website.

The various sources used throughout the UAntwerp Diversity and Inclusion Policy Plan have been compiled at the end of the bibliography.

SD1. Inclusive university

UAntwerp will create an inclusive online and offline environment and identity in which everyone within the UAntwerp community can optimally participate, and feel both safe and at home.

OD1. Specific diversity and inclusion actions to promote an inclusive university.

Actions:

1. A strong **governance structure** concerning diversity and inclusion will be deployed to maximise mainstreaming and impact (see also the Introduction). This will be take place through the following and other actions:
 - 1.1. **The Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee**, by order of the Board of Services to the University and the Community.
 - 1.2. **The Interfaculty Diversity Consultation**, with faculty representation, organised by the Diversity and Inclusion Team.
 - 1.3. **A faculty consultation group on diversity and inclusion**, organised by the faculty, with a link to the Interfaculty Diversity Consultation.
 - 1.4. An evaluation and planning meeting with each central service or department involved, at the initiative of the D&I Team.
 - 1.5. Annual reporting and adjustment of actions within the UAntwerp Diversity and Inclusion Policy Plan.
2. Each year, we will organise the **UAntwerp Diversity and Inclusion Policy Day**. We will investigate the possibility of organising this event every two years in cooperation with partners from the Antwerp University Association (AUHA).
3. The **framework for diversity questions** will be further publicised to answer concrete questions concerning diversity and inclusion in a high-quality, structured and broad-based manner.
4. The **UAntwerp Diversity and Inclusion Policy** and related actions will be **communicated transparently** to staff, students and external parties. Information will be made available through the website, Pintra and the student portal. To promote mainstreaming, we will also communicate actively through existing communication channels.
5. **Targeted communications or campaigns on specific D&I themes** will be deployed each year to increase the visibility of and engagement with diversity within our institution. This can be thematically linked to certain international days that are related to D&I, or it can address D&I in the broadest sense in connection with specific internal and/or external initiatives.
6. We are experimenting with faculties using clearly defined **project groups** to bring together and elaborate good practices around a common challenge. These project groups will be coordinated by the D&I Team.
7. Through an **open D&I call**, budgets will be made available to smaller bottom-up initiatives that contribute to the UAntwerp D&I Policy. These initiatives can be from either students or staff

members. They can also include one-off activities or efforts to support more sustainable activities and networks.

8. More concrete **consideration will be devoted to how certain values and principles** (e.g. academic freedom, freedom of expression, tolerance and active pluralism) **relate to the pursuit of a more inclusive and increasingly diverse university**. In this regard, we will explore potential areas of tension that may also touch on legal boundaries, human rights and internal UAntwerp values.

OD2. Accessible and inclusive infrastructure

Accessible and inclusive campuses play an important role in achieving an inclusive **learning and living environment** for students and an **inclusive workplace** for staff members. Beyond the legal obligations surrounding this issue, studies have also indicated that accessible and inclusive campuses have a major impact on the well-being, sense of belonging and feeling of safety of students and staff from minoritised groups (e.g. McGuire, Anderson & Michaels, 2022; Kumar & Dwivedi, 2024; Kirby et al., 2020). One important consequence of an accessible and inclusive campus is that it can increase the likelihood of greater social and academic integration amongst students (Kirby et al., 2020; Master et al., 2016; Murphy et al., 2007; McGuire et al., 2022; Kumar & Dwivedi, 2024).

According to interviews with all faculties and contacts with the various target groups, there is a demand for more lactation rooms (including sanitary facilities); spaces for reflection and meeting; more learning and working spaces with longer opening hours; and campuses that are physically accessible. We go beyond the legal obligations in this regard. We will ensure a **forward-looking approach and aim to maximise the principle of self-reliance and autonomy, in line with our own ambition for an inclusive university**. Our consultations have also highlighted the need for a sticky campus⁷ and the opportunity to use spaces in a more multifunctional manner. Taking spatial and budgetary constraints into account, the following actions will be advanced to address these concerns.

We limit this operational objective to arranging and assigning certain functions to campuses, buildings and spaces within them. The further policy plan will include actions addressing a broader interpretation of accessible and inclusive campuses (e.g. digital accessibility).

Actions:

1. UAntwerp will further its commitment to a more **inclusive infrastructure** by expanding its focus on integral accessibility in major renovations and new construction projects, as well as through adjustments to signage. This action will start with an **inclusion check of the management processes** of major renovations and construction projects. We will do this according to a broad definition of diversity, and we will not limit ourselves solely to physical accessibility.
2. UAntwerp will provide **information in both Dutch and English concerning the accessibility** of our buildings (including lifts) and classrooms, with a view to enhancing autonomy for people with disabilities.

⁷ A sticky campus is a concept in higher education that refers to a physical and social learning environment that invites and encourages students to stay on campus longer, even outside compulsory class times. The idea is to create an attractive, supportive and interactive environment in which students want to study, collaborate, network and relax.

3. UAntwerp will further implement **gender-inclusive signage** for existing publicly accessible sanitary facilities and related supporting measures. In new construction and renovations to publicly accessible sanitary facilities, UAntwerp will explore the possibility of gender-inclusive sanitary facilities, in consultation with the Diversity and Inclusion Team.
4. UAntwerp aims to ensure the availability of sufficient (in terms of capacity and layout), high-quality reflection spaces where individuals can practice their own **ideologies, meditate or retreat from over-stimulation**.
5. UAntwerp will provide sufficient well-equipped and accessible **lactation rooms** for both students and staff on each campus.
6. UAntwerp will assess the distribution of menstrual products to combat **menstrual poverty**. Based on the assessment, the current policy will be adjusted if necessary.

OD3. Accessible online applications and inclusive communication.

Inclusive communication is essential to achieving an environment within which the UAntwerp community in all its diversity can interact in an inclusive manner. By communicating in a diversity-responsive and inclusive manner, we take into account diverse and multifaceted backgrounds, perspectives and experiences, thus leading to valuable interactions that are free of stereotypes and discrimination-free, and in which everyone is seen, engaged and recognised in an authentic manner. Various elements of inclusive communication (e.g. language use, representation, accessibility and interaction) have an impact on both social and academic integration, which subsequently leads to increased participation (Voogt & Roblin, 2010).

Inclusive communication relates to the **broader UAntwerp community**, including students, staff, prospective students, alumni and society as a whole. By communicating inclusively, we will strengthen our community's attachment to UAntwerp and grow our university by contributing to our inclusive image. This operational objective is thus woven into all areas in which we are working, and it provides a means of achieving our goals.

In this operational objective, we limit ourselves to actions that cross several strategic objectives. Actions on inclusive communication that are specific to particular strategic objectives are listed under the strategic objective in question.

Actions:

1. UAntwerp will **always profile itself as an inclusive university**, consistent with its mission statement. We will do this by:
 - 1.1. **participating in events and connecting with specific partner organisations** that promote our 'diversity as added value, inclusion as the norm' line of strength (previous collaborations include: Antwerp Pride, International Day of Women and Girls in Science, Black History Month). We will investigate how and with which partners/events this can best be undertaken.
 - 1.2. We will also profile ourselves as an inclusive university in places where D&I is not the main theme.
2. UAntwerp will further its commitment to representative and intersectional **imagery and accessibility**, in which a broad target group can recognise itself. We will screen our existing communication material for more inclusive elements. In this regard, we will assign primary

consideration to accessibility (e.g. UX design, Annysurfer, NL/ENG) and the ability of individuals from minoritised groups to recognise themselves in our institution.

3. UAntwerp will anchor inclusive communication that includes a focus on accessibility, imaging, interfaces (online and offline) and word usage within its supporting **processes and procedures for communication and marketing**:

- 3.1. We will conduct an **inclusion check of various scripts and manuals** (particularly for organising lectures or activities, reserving premises, the manuals for web and Pintra editors, and ordering catering, the process library), in addition to providing organisers with *ad hoc* support on accessibility.

- 3.2. We will develop a **range of training courses relating to more diversity-responsive and inclusive communication** for individuals working in communications, marketing and front-line services at UAntwerp.

SD2. Inclusive recruitment and graduation

The University of Antwerp will promote the recruitment and graduation of students from minoritised groups.

Although diversity is a reality in society, it has yet to be reflected within institutions of higher education in Flanders (Jacobs & de Jong, 2021). Studies have indicated that students with *underrepresented background characteristics* continue to experience **barriers relating to both recruitment and graduation** in higher education (VLIR, 2022). The likelihood of a young person to grow up in educational poverty is significantly higher in the City of Antwerp than it is in the rest of Flanders. This may make the transition to university more challenging for prospective students from minoritised groups (University of Antwerp, 2021). Although diversity in student intake at UAntwerp has generally increased over the past five years, we note that we are still far from reflecting society. Monitoring these developments will therefore continue to be of great importance in determining concrete actions (see SD7: Monitoring).

UAntwerp will work to develop equal opportunities for recruitment and graduation, thus striving to achieve a **representative student population**. Moreover, the realisation of the knowledge society will require higher education to produce more people with a high level of education. The recruitment and, by extension, the study progress and graduation of students from minoritised communities in higher education is therefore a particularly important issue (VLOR, 2023). The University of Antwerp therefore considers it important to remove these barriers for prospective students, and particularly underrepresented students, in order to offer them maximum opportunities for development and study success. To this end, UAntwerp will devote attention to the specific needs of students from minoritised groups with different and/or fewer resources by focusing on an **inclusive recruitment policy, with adapted recruitment and an inclusive welcome policy**. In addition, there are many barriers for incoming international students (Newton, 2021). In line with its Global Engagement, UAntwerp aims to achieve an **inclusive internationalisation policy** that also offers international students with fewer resources the opportunity to enrol. By doing so, we aim to reach international students with a greater diversity of backgrounds and countries of origin.

The final step in the study pathways of students is transition to the job market. Despite a higher education degree, the step from higher education to employment is more precarious for students from minoritised groups (De Schepper et al., 2023). Studies have indicated that a higher education degree is often insufficient in the current job market (Bathmaker et al., 2013). The employment rate among graduates with minoritised characteristics is lower than that for other graduates (VLIR, 2023). Students are expected to mobilise various forms of *resources* to enhance their employability in the job market. In this regard, UAntwerp can play a supporting role in the transition to the job market by **informing students about and guiding them towards inclusive companies** that seek to promote and attract diverse talent (VLIR, 2023).

Specific actions relating to study progress will be included in SD3: Inclusive student well-being and SD4: Inclusive teaching.

OD1. Inclusive recruitment: A more representative student population.

The fact that underrepresented groups are less familiar with the world of education and receive less customised guidance in secondary education contributes to incorrect study choices, which can hamper study progress and graduation in higher education (Bossaerts et al., 2007). Responding to the general or specific information needs of prospective students contributes to the development of an increased level of choice competences (Baert & Vyncke, 2011).⁸ Previous studies have indicated that students from underrepresented groups have less access to this information (Pickering, 2021). Students use this information to help determine whether further study is something they aspire to do (Smith, 2011). It is therefore also important to provide information on experiences that others have gained in higher education. Informal contacts (e.g. role models) are very important in this regard (Simões & Soares, 2010).

An inclusive recruitment policy consists primarily of **proactive and early interaction** with young people (and those around them) with a view to increasing enrolment in higher education. This interaction involves encouraging young people to entertain the notion that higher education could also be possible for them. This is because, prior to the decision to enrol at university, prospective students go through a process of choosing a programme. This process includes exploring and gathering information about the higher education landscape, specific fields of study and life as a university student (Demulder et al., 2023). An informed process of choosing a study programme has a positive effect on the subsequent study success of students (De Clercq et al., 2017). Students from underrepresented groups often have less access to these resources, and they experience a lack of suitable study choice guidance counselling in secondary education. It is therefore important for them to develop familiarity with the education system. The university plays a crucial role as a reliable information provider in this process of choosing a study programme. A second pillar is inclusive communication, which aims to appeal to different groups and uses diversified channels to reach potential students (VLIR-JA Commitment Statement, 2023).

Based on the vision of Global Engagement, the university's internationalisation policy devotes special attention to students from countries and communities that have less access to our university. This group often has fewer or different resources, resulting in specific thresholds and needs that must be considered.

Actions:

1. We will further develop the **UAmbassadors** role-model programme, which acts as an initiative to inform, inspire and motivate prospective students from minoritised groups through students with diversity skills from similar backgrounds who have already experienced successful study progress.
2. Through the **Tutoraat**, we will continuously work to enhance the learning and development opportunities of secondary students in Antwerp, many of whom are prospective students who experience barriers in the transition to higher education. Volunteer tutors (students from the Antwerp University Association) do this by focusing on catching up on academic knowledge

⁸ A good example of this is the Tabieb2B initiative, which is intended to increase the chances of people recruited from lower socio-economic positions and migration backgrounds to pass the entrance examination in medicine.

gapsusing subject-related tutoring and inspirational coaching in relation to study methods/study motivation.

3. The **StudyChat** module, which is aimed at students who are at a greater distance from higher education, will gradually be expanded (e.g. by bringing UAmbassadors to school visits), and the other basic StudyChat modules will undergo an inclusiveness test.
4. Consistent with its mission statement, UAntwerp will **profile itself to prospective students as an inclusive university** (see also SD1: Inclusive university, OD3: Inclusive communication).
 - 4.1. We will investigate **specific channels or occasions** that we could target to reach prospective students who are experiencing barriers.
 - 4.2. We will conduct an **inclusion check** on the communication material as we go along, targeting all prospective students.
 - 4.3. We will strengthen the inclusiveness of **events** for prospective students (e.g. SID-in fair, open days) and interaction with schools in terms of accessibility, inclusive communication and representative contact points (e.g. diversity competence of various informants and the use of role models).
 - 4.4. We will strengthen communication about the existence of UAntwerp's **inclusive range of support services** to prospective students, such that we not only say, but also demonstrate specifically what we do and what students can expect (e.g. support during a transition, Mentoraat, tutoring, Honours programmes, affordable study, reflection spaces, ideological facilities, student associations focusing on minoritised students).

OD2. Inclusive graduation: Equal opportunities in the transition to the job market, with the continued involvement of a diverse group of alumni.

More and more students, especially those from minoritised groups, have fewer or different resources as well as other obstacles. For example, they might be less familiar with the expectations of the job market and the unspoken rules of this new environment (Bathmaker et al., 2013; De Schepper et al., 2024). We have a responsibility to prepare these students for the transition to work. UAntwerp can provide students with access to more resources and certain networks. We are thus an important catalyst for reducing structural barriers for students from minoritised groups by cultivating the aforementioned resources, to which students would otherwise not have access. In this regard, studies have highlighted the importance of **curricular and extracurricular activities** related to the work environment and civic engagement (Dickinson et al., 2021; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2022), including internships, industry projects, honours programmes, professional networking activities and paid employment. In addition to broadening the networks of graduates, these activities provide valuable insights into their future careers and make them more attractive to employers.

It is imperative for the university to bring the importance of these activities to the attention of students. Expecting students to participate in extra-curricular activities without embedding them in the curriculum may perpetuate social inequalities, however, as students from minoritised groups must often balance their academic endeavours with other commitments, such as caring for a family (Naseem, 2019; Thompson et al., 2013). For this reason, these **'extra-curricular' activities should ideally be incorporated into our curricula**. This emphasises the importance of working with employers

and the business community to design and offer career-related activities that meet the needs of students. It is essential to address these activities early in students' educational pathways. Students often do not start thinking about their next step until the end of their studies or after graduation, thereby greatly reducing their opportunities for preparation (De Schepper et al., 2024).

Actions:

1. We aim for network awareness, and we will expand the **network** of students through institutional channels (e.g. job fairs, company visits, the Alumni Office). We will fine-tune the strategy (e.g. Moving Forward, alumni activities) and **encourage more inclusive opportunities in the university's existing graduation initiatives** (e.g. the Career Center, Compass).
2. We will encourage inclusive employability and offer curricular workshops around **study programme counselling**. Where possible, this will be integrated into the master programmes.
3. We also aim to **incorporate inclusive work experiences** (e.g. internships, community service learning, etc.) into the curricula, along with employability and entrepreneurial competences (e.g. job counselling) as much as possible, in order to strengthen resources relating to graduation (see also SD4: Inclusive education, OD2).
4. UAntwerp will chart and identify the consequences of discrimination on the job market for its students and alumni – especially, but not exclusively with regard to ideological characteristics.
7. Within the **alumni strategy**, we will address the **diversity of profiles** and the inclusiveness of our communication and offerings. We will direct particular attention to alumni from the Global South. A strong Alumni Office can strengthen initiatives relating to recruitment, study progress and graduation, not least by ensuring the visibility of these role models active in the workplace.

SD3. Inclusive student well-being (study progress)

UAntwerp will offer an inclusive living environment that devotes attention to the well-being of every student and that contributes to equal opportunities for study progress.

Student well-being is an essential part of university life, and it forms the foundation for a successful academic experience. In addition to supporting the mental and physical health of students, good student well-being promotes emotional and social development. Within an academic environment in which they feel valued and supported, students can perform at their best and achieve their full potential (Pittman & Richmond, 2007). The well-being of students plays an important role in their academic success. Studies have indicated that students who feel mentally and physically healthy are better able to concentrate, study more effectively and achieve higher academic performance (Kotzé & Kleynhans, 2013; Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013). Conversely, stress, anxiety, depression and other problems relating to well-being can have a negative effect on the learning process and academic outcomes. A lack of adequate support can lead to reduced motivation and higher rates of attrition, and it is reflected in lower rates of study progress amongst students. In this policy plan, actions relating to graduation are included not only in this strategic objective for student well-being, but also in Strategic Objective 4 (Inclusive teaching), as study progress can be affected by factors within both strategic objectives.

The University of Antwerp takes an inclusive approach to student well-being. This means we must direct attention to the diverse needs and backgrounds of our student population. An inclusive approach ensures that all students, regardless of background, have **equal access to the resources and support that they need to be successful, in addition to ensuring that additional attention is devoted to providing support to minoritised groups**. By paying attention to the voices of young people and creating student-led initiatives, we can ensure the openness, accessibility and effectiveness of support for well-being (Walker, 2022). The University of Antwerp sees student well-being as a fundamental part of the academic and personal development of students.

An inclusive supportive environment is primarily one in which there is a strong sense of belonging. **‘A sense of belonging’** is a basic human need, which refers to emotional attachment and acceptance within a group or community (Dost & Mazzoli Smith, 2023). For students, this means feeling accepted, valued and understood within the university environment without losing their authenticity (Jansen et al., 2014). This sense of belonging contributes to the self-confidence, motivation and general well-being of students, which in turn has a positive effect on their academic performance and personal development (Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Agirdag & De Leersnyder, 2024). Students from minoritised groups often experience a weaker sense of belonging within the university community, research cites several causes for this. **Discrimination and prejudice**, both explicit and implicit, can undermine feelings of acceptance and belonging (Ingram & Wallace, 2019). Furthermore, a **lack of visible role models and representation** in staff and student groups can also contribute to feelings of isolation (Zirkel, 2002). **Financial difficulties and the pressure to perform** can also limit participation in social and academic

activities, thereby having a negative effect on a sense of belonging. To foster a strong sense of belonging for all students, it is important for universities to take proactive steps to ensure inclusiveness. In this regard, studies cite the importance of **social support and interactions**, such as strengthening peer interactions (Yubero et al., 2018) and **student involvement** (Bowman et al., 2015; Nolen et al., 2020), as well as by working for **diversity and inclusion in teaching practices** (Castillo-Montoya & Ives, 2021), the implementation of an **anti-discrimination policy** (Celeste et al., 2019) and increasing the inclusiveness of general **student facilities** (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Eyoun & Martin, 2017).

OD1. The University of Antwerp will provide an inclusive living environment in which all students can be themselves, feel at home and feel psychologically safe, and in which a diverse range of facilities is available.

The University of Antwerp aims to create an inclusive living environment in which all students can be themselves, feel accepted and experience psychological safety. With this operational objective, we aim to strengthen the sense of belonging of all students, and particularly minoritised students.

Actions:

1. We will conduct an **inclusion test of the onboarding programme** (e.g. U stArt, orientation days, welcome days).
2. We will actively pursue **professional development and awareness-raising on diversity and inclusion for front-line actors** (e.g. student psychologists, study programme counsellors, lecturers, faculty mentors within the mentorship programme) in counselling services for students.
3. In the **recruitment and selection of staff members** who will come into frequent contact with students (e.g. student administration, ombudspersons, student psychologists, study programme counsellors), we will consider competences, knowledge of and affinity with working with diverse groups and experience with challenges related to diversity and inclusion (see also SD 5: Inclusive human resources policy).
4. **Students will be actively and preventively sensitised about transgressive behaviour**, with attention paid to all forms of discrimination and micro-aggressions. These efforts will be linked to the UAntwerp Code of Conduct, in which inclusiveness and respect are of central importance.
5. The Decree of 8/1/2024 on transgressive behaviour in higher education obliged UAntwerp to make some adjustments to its approach to transgressive behaviour. We will provide **accessible, low-threshold and professionalised reporting channels for transgressive behaviour**, especially for those students who are particularly vulnerable due to their minoritised position within the university. Channels should also be accessible, approachable and professionalised for them in terms of the specific needs and requirements of these minoritised groups.
6. In case of **gender transition**, we will provide a smooth administrative procedure for the adjustment of all unofficial and/or official documents and communications.
7. We will provide sufficient good quality **spaces** for practising religion, reflection and retreating from over-stimulation (see also SD1, OD2: Inclusive infrastructure)
8. We will continue to provide substantive and financial support for **inclusive and diverse student associations and initiatives** that seek to reach minoritised students on a customised basis (e.g. the

D&I open call and the Student open call [VLIRUOS Global Minds]) (see also SD1: Inclusive university, OD1)

9. We will provide **D&I training courses to the organisers of student associations**, with the aim of promoting a more inclusive climate, attracting more diverse student intake and encouraging more inclusive offerings.
10. We will direct explicit attention to the well-being of **international students**, with a specific focus on students from countries and communities that have less access to our university, explicitly including the focus on international students in actions already mentioned:
 - 10.1. Providing support concerning **accommodation**.
 - 10.2. Making existing **buddy systems** inclusive for international students or set up new buddy initiatives.
 - 10.3. Encouraging **activities that bring together** international and local students.
 - 10.4. Expanding professional development and a specific range of individual and/or collective **support**, paying attention to the needs of international students.
 - 10.5. Encouraging inclusive and diverse **student associations** and initiatives for international students.
 - 10.6. Making an overview of student associations and ClubKiezer available in **English**.
11. All **evaluations of the university-wide and faculty support offerings** (e.g. Study Advice and Student Counselling Services, Mentoraat op Maat, mentorship and monitoring services in faculties) will consider inclusiveness and accessibility (see also S7: Monitoring)
12. We will **monitor developments in** student well-being, with a focus on specific needs of minoritised groups (e.g. through focus-group discussions and the FIT tool) (see also SD7: Monitoring).

OD2. The student learning environment will be inclusive, and all barriers (whether incidental or structural) associated with background characteristics will be eliminated.

The background characteristics of students have a greater impact on academic performance in the Flemish Education system than they do in other OECD countries (OECD, 2015; 2018). This inequality also has an effect in higher education (Heath et al., 2008), in the form of greater likelihood of attrition and lower academic outcomes (Bunce et al., 2019). As noted in the general introduction, we will adopt the principle of Universal Design in the learning environment, in which we aim for an approach that works for everyone without requiring an individual approach. We will do this without losing sight of the students who would benefit from a specific approach (University of Antwerp, 2022).

Actions:

1. **Inclusive mentoring services** within faculties will pursue good academic and social integration of all incoming students, with a continued focus on attainment and the specific needs of minoritised students.
2. We will investigate the possibility of **opening faculty mentoring services to international students**, in order to ensure proper academic and social integration for these students as well.
3. We will provide a clear **application procedure for ideological facilities**, to avoid being assessed on legally recognised ideological holidays.

4. We are committed to a **Universal Design for the digital learning environment** (e.g. by providing teaching and examination facilities in an inclusive manner).
5. Communication to all students – with a particular focus on international students – about **inclusive and special facilities** and offers will be further optimised and customised.
6. The **range of support services for academic English** (ACE) offered by Linguapolis and the Monitoraat op Maat's customised **academic Dutch** for domestic and international students will be monitored and strengthened.
7. We are committed to raising awareness amongst lecturers and communicating clearly to students regarding the **study costs of the programme**, focusing on the essential costs of materials, study trips, etc, as opposed to costs that should be seen as optional.

OD3. The University of Antwerp will ensure that participation in policy by students, regardless of their background characteristics, will become self-evident.

The University of Antwerp aims to maximise the participation of students in policy, regardless of their background characteristics. **The active involvement of students in policy bodies has benefits for both the institution and the students themselves.** Studies have indicated that participation in policy bodies and demonstrations of institutional commitment (e.g. involvement in student associations and other forms of student participation) are often associated with an enhanced sense of identity, increased social and academic integration, and better academic performance (Baik et al., 2019; Bowman et al., 2015; Nolen et al., 2020). These forms of participation allow students to connect with their peers, to make their voices heard and to make an active contribution to the development of the university. This enhances their personal and academic growth and strengthens their sense of belonging within the university community.

Despite the importance of involving students from minoritised groups in the shaping of inclusive policies, we must avoid placing this responsibility solely on their shoulders. There is a risk of disproportionately burdening these students with the task of promoting inclusion, whereas this is a responsibility that should be borne by the entire university community. Moreover, it is important to ensure that minoritised students are involved not only in issues relating to diversity and inclusion, but also in other policy issues affecting the university (VLIR & Young Academy, 2023).

The University of Antwerp is therefore committed to **ensuring balanced participation**, in which the input of all students, regardless of background, is recognised and regarded as valuable. By encouraging and supporting the participation of students from minoritised groups in policy bodies, the university aims to contribute to a more representative and inclusive policy process. This approach will contribute to a university community in which diversity in participation is not only recognised, but actively promoted.

Actions:

1. Enable access to policy participation, including for those studying here for only a short time (e.g. international students).

2. **Enable access to policy participation, including for those with little or no command of Dutch.**
Explore options to enable participation in two languages (Dutch and English).
3. We will organise moments and opportunities for students to contribute to inclusion policy actively and from the bottom up (e.g. focus groups, D&I Policy Day) (see also SD 1: Inclusive university, OD 1 and SD7: Monitoring).
4. We will explore ways of better recognising the **engagement of students (and especially minoritised students)**, and we will consider where it might be possible and desirable to pay these students. In many EU countries, it is quite normal to recognise student participation by providing compensation. Minoritised and underrepresented students are often over-burdened with these mentally demanding tasks. Payment recognises the amount of work required by these tasks. Moreover, compensation lowers barriers for students who, out of necessity, are pursuing student jobs alongside their studies (VLIR & Young Academy, 2023).
5. The participation of minoritised students in policy bodies will be charted (see also SD7: Monitoring).

SD4. Inclusive teaching (study progress)

UAntwerp will offer an inclusive educational learning environment in which every student feels at home and has equal opportunities for study progress.

Like the broader society, universities, universities of applied sciences and arts, and other knowledge institutions are not immune to structural inequalities. Anyone who conforms less or not at all to the norms of the dominant community or who does not embody the stereotype of 'the scientist' is more likely to face implicit bias and barriers in academia (see e.g. www.wetenschapismvx.be). Background characteristics of students have a high predictive value on rates of study progress in the Flemish Education system. **The Flemish Education system, unlike those of Belgium's neighbours, reproduces greater inequality based on the social and cultural background of students** (OECD, 2015; 2018). This inequality also has an effect in higher education (Heath et al., 2008), in the form of greater likelihood of attrition and lower academic outcomes (Bunce et al., 2019).

A wide range of factors (e.g. psychological, sociological, economic) and contexts (e.g. school, family, friends, the neighbourhood, the broader political, socio-economic and legal context) influence the educational careers of young people (McLaughlin et al., 2001; Feinstein et al., 2004; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Although we are aware of this, within the strategic objective of teaching, we focus on factors and actors playing a central role within UAntwerp in achieving a safe and inclusive learning environment.

In a **safe and inclusive** educational learning environment, first and foremost, **lecturers** eliminate as many barriers as possible for students, so that every student has an equal opportunity to achieve successful study progress in higher education. At UAntwerp, we consider it important for students to be able to belong somewhere, to feel at home and to be recognised for who they are. In addition to being a basic psychological need, this can increase the likelihood of achieving learning and performance and avoiding attrition. In a high-quality educational learning environment, this involves (1) **a range of support services for lecturers and teaching staff**, (2) **curricula** consisting of as many scientifically based diverse perspectives within the discipline, society and global context as possible, and (3) **diversity competences** for all students in preparation for a super-diverse job market and society (VLIR-JA Charter, 2023).

Within the teaching domain, we are committed to a diversity-friendly approach. This approach manifests itself in several areas: 'Attitude', 'content' and 'teaching style' (Vanhoof et al., 2019), with '**content**' relating to the curriculum and subject matter and involving a shared responsibility that is often drawn out beyond the lecture hall, and '**attitude**' and '**teaching style**' relating to the actual inclusive interactions of lecturers with their students. Finally, at the intersection of attitude and teaching style is the conviction that all groups of students are capable of performing well and the extent to which lecturers succeed in conveying this conviction to their students (Banks, 2015).

OD1. UAntwerp will provide a structural range of support services to help lecturers and teaching staff develop diversity-responsive attitudes and organise and teach in an inclusive manner.

Studies have systematically established that a **diversity-responsive approach** in teaching – especially if propagated by the lecturer – has a positive impact on several outcome measures, ranging from daily engagement in tasks to study outcomes, as well as mental and physical well-being (De Leersnyder & Meeussen, 2023; Celeste et al, 2019). Students who perceive their lecturers as expressing diversity-responsive views experience fewer misunderstandings and higher levels of belonging and psychological safety. In contrast, lecturers with a deficient or neutral approach perpetuate misunderstandings, along with their negative consequences. Moreover, a diversity-responsive approach benefits not only minoritised students, but the entire student community (De Leersnyder et al., 2022).

The **attitudes and teaching styles** of lecturers play a crucial role in creating a **safe and inclusive educational learning environment**. It helps to pay attention to such aspects as teacher expectation bias (Rubie-Davies et al., 2006; Van den Bergh et al., 2010), the sense of belonging on the part of minoritised students (Agirdag, 2020; Denessen et al., 2020; Jussim et al, 2009; Lorenz, 2021; Marksteiner et al., 2019), the growth mindset (Dweck, 2000, 2007) and discrimination (D’Hondt, et al. 2015, Colak, 2024). In study programmes where internships comprise a significant part of the curriculum, it is important to ensure that internship placements are inclusive, given that studies have indicated that minoritised students continue to face discrimination and racism in the job market, as well as in finding internship placements (Unia, 2022).

Actions:

1. We aim to achieve a **supported consensus** on what we mean by a ‘diversity-responsive attitude, inclusive teaching style and organisation of teaching’, as well as on their concrete translation into practice. This consensus will initially be clarified at the central level (Department of Training and Education Sciences and the D&I Team), after which it will be tested in the other services, departments and faculties.
2. We will conduct an inclusion check in existing and upcoming policy (and other) documents, tools and websites, with a focus on **broad diversity**, and more specifically on working students and students with special arrangements as well. Examples include:
 - 2.1. The **protocol for Education Committee** chairs, which supports the six-year quality assurance cycles of study programmes.
 - 2.2. Screening the strategic **policy theme of ‘Diversity and participation’ within the context of activating, student-centred and competence-based teaching** and embedding therein elements of the [‘D&I in Higher Education’](#) campaign.
 - 2.3. In the initial **call for the UFOO projects**, D&I will be addressed either as part of all themes or as a separate theme. In their UFOO projects, faculties indicate whether there are links to D&I. Although UFOO projects are not required to include links to D&I in order to be awarded, we do encourage explicit reflection on D&I in the application.
3. We will devote attention to D&I within the context of educational innovation when designing a powerful learning environment. To this end, we will examine the extent to which D&I is included in **properly equipped teaching spaces and facilities, as well as in the digital learning environment**.

Relevant questions include whether allowances are being made (e.g. for students with disabilities, with regard to digital accessibility, inclusive sanitary facilities, quiet rooms).

4. We will develop a **structurally anchored range of support services** for teaching staff and educational support staff whose responsibilities include quality assurance. This will involve elements including tools, tips, study programmes, training courses and training courses.
 - 4.1. Structural anchoring of diversity and inclusion within training courses for teaching staff:
 - 4.1.1. D&I as a criterion in **targeted competences** in the recruitment, selection, supervision, professional development, assessment, appraisal and promotion of lecturers and all staff members involved in education (see also SD6: Inclusive human resources policy, OD1).
 - 4.1.2. Embedding D&I as a common thread throughout **teacher training**, both within the basic modules and within the advanced elective modules. This is done with reference to the DNA of the institution: the competence profile of graduates, which include D&I (see also SD6: Inclusive human resources policy, OD3).
 - 4.1.3. Referring to the staff **code of conduct**, which includes D&I in the promotion of the range of support services offered (see also SD6: Inclusive human resources policy, OD2).
 - 4.2. In addition to basic information, we will also offer **targeted support** (and related tools) for deeper professional development. Examples include peer-support sessions given by skilled professionals (internal or external to UAntwerp) within a given theme. We will also support initiatives complementary to the central range of services offered (e.g. substantive, practical, financial), within our capabilities and conditions.
 - 4.3. We will devote additional effort to **reaching participants** (e.g. by making the range of support services offered more widely known during education policy days, through the general and faculty-specific communication channels).
5. The D&I Team and the Department of Training and Education Sciences will collaborate on **analysing the recruitment, study progress and graduation** of students with various background characteristics (see also SD7: Monitoring):
 - 5.1. Each year, we will prepare an institution-wide internal report on the study progress of students from minoritised or underrepresented groups, in line with the VLIR report on the recruitment of students from disadvantaged groups. We will track developments over several years through trend reports. In doing so, we will direct more specific attention to the consequences and impact of the Decree of 15 July 2022.⁹
 - 5.2. We will encourage and support the efforts of faculties and study programmes to use Power BI reports (e.g. course scans, point reports) as a means of monitoring recruitment, study progress and graduation, as well as the commitment to increase the study progress of students from minoritised or underrepresented groups within their study programmes.
6. When monitoring the recruitment, study progress and graduation of students, we will consider how we can refer lecturers and teaching staff to the range of support services for more inclusive

⁹ The Decree of 15 July 2022 on the recruitment and optimisation of study efficiency in higher education and other organisational aspects of higher education introduces several measures for improving study efficiency in the Flemish system of higher education.

teaching, including through the course scan.¹⁰ For example, in response to the Decree of 15 July 2022, in terms of study progress, it is important to offer a clear framework to teaching staff (e.g. study programme counsellors), so that they will have sufficient knowledge and tools to guide students – and, more specifically, students from minoritised groups – in their study programmes.

7. We are committed to safe, inclusive and accessible **internship placements** (e.g. on disability and specific needs, philosophical markers and transgressive behaviour at internship sites).

OD2. UAntwerp aims for students to graduate with competences that enable them to act and think in a diversity-responsive manner and as critical global citizens.

Strengthening diversity competences (including global citizenship competences) in students is important for the following reasons:

- They are part of or strongly intertwined with the **generic competences**¹¹ that institutions of higher education prioritise. These generic competences include the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to function effectively in a rapidly changing world, to develop oneself and to learn (Kirschner & Stoyanov, 2020). It goes without saying that this world is characterised by super-diverse societies where diversity skills are of key importance (Geldof 2013; Vertovec 2007).
- They enable students to cope with diversity issues and global challenges in a conscious, appropriate and responsive manner in their future professional field and within the super-diverse, globalised society (Geldof 2014).
- The extent to which students interact and relate to each other in a diversity-responsive manner will contribute to a **safe and inclusive teaching and learning environment** for all students (Baysu & Phalet, 2012).

Actions:

1. We aim to achieve a **university-wide consensus** on exactly what diversity skills and competences are.
2. We will screen the **institution-wide competence profile** (DNA of the institution) to further its optimisation. In doing so, we are committed to a broad definition of D&I in the institution-wide final competences, and we will include the study programmes in this exercise.
3. We will screen the **core competences** of study programmes through consultation with Education Committees, and we will include diversity competences where appropriate. We will encourage faculties/study programmes to include D&I in the curriculum once it has been included in the core

¹⁰ A course scan is a thorough and automatic analysis of data concerning the success rates of first-time students, taking various background characteristics into account. The course scan compares the results for each programme component of students with certain background characteristics to the results of the entire student group.

¹¹ Generic competences are competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) that transcend disciplines and that can be applied in a broad spectrum of predictable and unpredictable situations and professional settings. Examples of such competences include collaboration, creative thinking, entrepreneurial mindset, strategic thinking, communication skills, language skills, information skills and digital literacy (Voogt & Roblin, 2012).

competences of study programmes (e.g. in programme components, assignments, bachelor and master dissertations or a learning trajectory on diversity and inclusion).

4. We will assess employability competences for aspects relating to D&I. We will conduct an inclusion check in the employability brochure that the Department of Training and Education Sciences has developed for faculties concerning how to incorporate employability into study programmes by taking into account diversity in the broadest sense. We will direct explicit attention to diversity and inclusion (e.g. representation, substantive topics) in the **advisory groups** set up by study programmes, in which alumni and the professional field are represented.
5. We will investigate the possibility of always assigning **inclusive measures** in line with the final competences of a particular study programme. Once a relevant policy has been established, we will focus on raising awareness, particularly about both the final competences required and the possibilities for attaining them.
6. **Benchmarking tests, starting tests and admissions examinations**, along with the associated compulsory remedial activities will become increasingly common in study programmes. We will track the extent to which these benchmarking tests have a discouraging rather than motivating effect, in addition to tracking their impact on the recruitment of students from minoritised groups. We also examine whether the remediation offered is accessible and of good quality. Although we have limited influence as an institution, this inclusive analysis can make a positive contribution to further development of the benchmarking tests, starting tests and admissions examinations.
7. We will place more emphasis on **authentic forms of learning** – teaching and learning activities that are as close as possible to reality and linked to the real world (e.g. Community Service Learning, internships, buddy work), through which students acquire diversity-responsive competences.
8. We will focus on **inclusive mobility and internationalisation at home**. Student mobility is often not an obvious choice for students with minoritised background characteristics:
 - 8.1. We will increase awareness of Internationalisation@home and clarify its possibilities and added values.
 - 8.2. We will promote the intercultural competences of both incoming and outgoing students.

OD3. A curriculum will consist of as many scientifically based diverse perspectives as possible. A range of support services that study programmes can use themselves will be structurally anchored.

In the education literature, Banks (2015) and others have demonstrated the **various positive outcomes of a diverse, accessible and inclusive curriculum**. Inclusive curricula make education **accessible** through structural inclusive measures (e.g. teaching methods, assessment methods) that promote inclusion based on Universal Design by reducing potential barriers and providing optimal learning opportunities for all students, without individual adjustments (SIHO, 2024). A curriculum that is diverse, accessible and inclusive can increase the **critical thinking and creativity** of all students, including those from dominant groups. Specifically for minoritised students, such a curriculum also increases **self-esteem and study progress, which translate into better study results** (Dee & Penner, 2017; Wells et al., 2016). Studies have indicated that – like their peers – minoritised students who perceive greater diversity in their curriculum feel that their university is inclusive. This sense of inclusion provides a buffer against study stress and ensures better study results (perceived or actual).

In contrast, with low curriculum diversity, there is a gap between the minoritised and other students (De Leersnyder & Gündemir, 2023). In addition, studies have also demonstrated that course descriptions mentioning diversity as a benefit have similar positive effects (Good et al., 2020).

Both research and critical responses from students and staff within Flemish universities have indicated that the system of higher education still strongly adheres to **colonial and Eurocentric thinking frameworks**, which hamper the quality of education and increase dissatisfaction amongst many students. For example, academic curricula often still exclude non-normative and critical voices (e.g. Wekker et al., 2016; Maclsaac, 2018). This is reflected in **teaching content, bibliographies** (authors from marginalised groups and countries) and the **composition of the teaching staff**.

Non-diverse curricula, teaching materials and teaching staff have **many implications** (Cohn & Mullenix, 2007; de Jong, 2014; Emejulu, 2019; Le Grange, 2016; Sciame-Giesecke et al, 2009; Subedi 2013; Saini & Begum, 2020):

- They hinder students from minoritised groups from identifying with the content of lessons, thereby leading to (i) feelings of detachment, exclusion and isolation; and (ii) under-stimulation, low student satisfaction and an increase in school attrition.
- They reinforce stereotypes, one-sided interpretations and the generalisation of Eurocentric views. Selective and distorted knowledge hinders the development of inclusive, diverse and critical perspectives.
- The promotion of a single system of knowledge production leads to (i) the exclusion and invisibility of underrepresented knowledge systems, perspectives and voices; (ii) the belief that this knowledge is superior and universally applicable; and (iii) reproduction through knowledge of historical and societal power inequalities and exclusion.

Actions:

1. **We will provide a framework and range of support services** in which the curriculum is developed. Amongst other things, we will develop a set of guiding questions to assess whether a curriculum is inclusive.
2. We aim to include diversity, inclusion and Global Engagement as much as possible as a structural part of the **course information** for programme components. The Education Committee will ensure that the study programme's core D&I competences are translated into the curriculum, focusing on general inclusion and accessibility (inclusive measures), as well as diversity-responsive thinking and action.
3. We will encourage the activation of students in educational practice; tools and/or training on this can be provided within the range of support services offered (see OD1).
4. We aim for **more inclusive surveys** (see also SD7: Monitoring):
 - 4.1. We will anchor diversity and inclusion as a core value in student surveys (e.g. in the institution-wide programme assessment every three years). The D&I Team, Department of Training and Education Sciences and the Units for Innovation and Quality Assurance in Education (CIKOs) will jointly discuss student feedback and consider how we can move forward.
 - 4.2. We aim for inclusive peer reviews by encouraging peer-review teams with a diverse and inclusive composition.

SD5. Inclusive research

The University of Antwerp will promote inclusive, ethical, responsible and globally engaged research practices.

For several decades, an extensive body of scientific literature has indicated that attention to diversity and inclusion in research – referring to both research teams (‘who’) and research content (‘what’ and ‘how’) – **can promote innovation and excellence in research outcomes** (AlShebli et al, 2018; Schiebinger, 2021; Hunt et al., 2022). For example, studies have indicated that, if properly supervised, diverse teams work more innovatively and creatively (Wang et al., 2019; Paulus & van der Zee, 2015), and that such research teams can generate higher levels of trust amongst research populations (Sierra-Mercado & Lázaro-Muñoz, 2018).

In addition to this ‘business case’ for diversity and inclusion, a second relevant approach focuses instead on the pursuit of greater social justice. With regard to research content (e.g. choice of research question, research methods and populations, reporting), it is clear that a diversity-responsive approach can increase research quality, thereby saving resources and, in some specific cases, saving additional human lives¹² (Schiebinger & Schraudner, 2011; Roth et al., 2014; Tannenbaum et al., 2019). Because the research outcomes of diversity-sensitive studies can have greater validity for wider society, they contribute incrementally to creating a more just society, rather than perpetuating existing inequalities (e.g. in healthcare, security, urban planning, impact of climate change) (European Commission, 2020). Important concerns in this regard include avoiding the instrumentalisation or exploitation of minoritised groups in the research process, distributing the outcomes of the research fairly amongst all stakeholders, and valuing minoritised epistemologies and conceptual frameworks.

The following operational objectives and concrete actions build on the policy plans of the Research Board, the Innovation Boards and the Board of the Antwerp Doctoral School. The European Commission’s guidelines regarding mandatory Gender Equality Plans for research institutions have also been included to achieve an integrated whole.

OD1. UAntwerp will incorporate the ability to identify, evaluate and recognise diversity and inclusion in research.

In order to include diversity and inclusion (including Global Engagement) at all stages of the research process, it is recommended to incorporate reflection on D&I into existing procedures and tools. International good practices (e.g. Canada Research Coordinating Committee, 2024; Maastricht University, 2021; and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, 2024) have proven the value of such an integrated approach, even more so when it is applied uniformly throughout the organisation. The fact that the European Commission includes the diversity and gender test in the

¹² For example, an analysis of national car crash data from the United States between 1998 and 2008 indicated that a female driver wearing a seatbelt was 47% more likely to suffer serious injuries than a male driver wearing a seatbelt in a comparative crash, after adjusting for weight and body mass (Bose et al., 2011).

research design when evaluating certain project proposals is an additional incentive to take up this issue.

Actions:

1. The university will provide **tools relating to diversity and inclusion** for all research applications to ensure further support for ethics committees (e.g. through checklists or manuals).
2. We will engage in dialogue on how to anchor **critical reflection concerning diversity and inclusion** (where relevant) as much as possible, without raising barriers and increasing the administrative burden for researchers.
3. We will explore ways to incorporate diversity and inclusion into the **measurement, monitoring and surveillance of research performance**.
4. The university will promote diversity and inclusion wherever possible through the **funding channels** over which it has influence. We will explore ways to leverage our own funding channels.

OD2. UAntwerp will support research leaders in their efforts to achieve a diverse composition of research teams, research consortia and other relevant stakeholders.

In order to conduct innovative research, it is advantageous to consider a wide range of perspectives, views and life experiences (AlShebli et al., 2018; Freeman & Huang, 2014). It is therefore best to consider the diversity present in society as much as possible in the way research is carried out in practice. In addition to its benefits for the validity of research, this can also help to promote societal trust in scientific research. The literature on this point emphasises the role of **team composition** and the **responsibility of research leaders** (Mar, 2020; Sierra-Mercado & Lázaro-Muñoz, 2018). The fact that the European Commission includes the diversity and gender test in the research design when evaluating certain project proposals is an additional incentive to take up this issue. This operational objective is also strongly linked to Strategic Objective 6: Inclusive human resources policy.

Actions:

1. The university aims to achieve a balanced and socially representative composition of research teams and research juries by, as a first step, focusing on **measuring, monitoring and encouraging a diverse composition of research teams and research juries**, building on existing procedures. In doing so, specific attention will be directed to:
 - 1.1. **Socially representative diversity** beyond the dimension of gender (e.g. discipline, age, nationality).
 - 1.2. Where relevant, we will consider the possibility of reflecting on the positionality of researchers towards the study population.
 - 1.3. Where relevant, we aim for an **intercultural composition** of research teams, with specific attention to the input of expertise and epistemology from the Global South.

2. **Training for PhD supervisors** will address diversity-related risk factors, including the risks of collaborating with individuals from the Global South, which may play into the well-being of research teams with a diverse composition.

OD3. UAntwerp will pursue excellence in research by also being mindful of non-dominant discourse and epistemologies.

According to the scientific literature, an inclusive research culture and greater awareness of bias and positionality in research practices can lead to more innovative and excellent research (Ahmad et al., 2019; Hewlett, 2016; Levine, 2021). Various aspects of research practice are covered in this regard, for example, draft research problems and questions, participant selection, data collection and analysis, word choice and citation practices.

Actions:

1. If required, the university will cooperate at the level of the VLIR to **expand the update of Mind the GAP** (compulsory training for young researchers) to assign a more prominent place to positionality, bias and Eurocentrism in 'good academic practices'.
2. The university will offer a variety of training courses and tools on inclusion in research, not only to young researchers, but also to senior researchers and research managers (e.g. through inspiration sessions and opportunities for exchanging good practices). Possible themes:
 - Basic training on D&I
 - Inclusive research practices
 - Inclusive leadership
 - Positionality and bias in research
 - Epistemology, Eurocentrism and decolonisation of knowledge
 - Launching international research partnerships, with a focus on power dynamics and specific attention to partners in the Global South
 - Training on ethical dilemmas in international research partnerships

OD4. UAntwerp aims for equal partnerships with all research stakeholders (both internal and external).

Research partnerships (both internal and external) can be characterised by a certain disparity between partners in terms of hypothesis formulation, team composition, budget distribution, ownership of results, ranking of publication authors and extraction of data. This need not always be negative for the collaboration, but it may also be the result of underlying power imbalances that can have negative consequences for the collaboration as a whole, or one of the partners. Such inequality may be more present in international collaborations between the Global North and the Global South (Fourie, 2018; Hartman, 2016; Karim-Haji et al., 2016; Strier, 2010). **The university recognises historical and current power inequalities and, in line with the Strategic Framework for Global Engagement, it aims to ensure the equity of these collaborations** by critically reflecting on the distribution of benefits and

agenda-setting, control over the research and its results, the participation of relevant communities, power dynamics and biases, and the sustainability of collaboration.

Actions:

1. Global challenges require **input from minoritised voices and, possibly, other epistemologies**. In its aim to address global challenges and SDGs, the university will specifically foster partnerships with the Global South. We wish to explore the possibility of expanding and anchoring the specific focus of the Global Minds programme on these issues (small research projects, global south research scholarship, IUCs, seed money) within the university, independently of future Global Minds funding.
2. The critical **ethical issues surrounding equal international partnerships**, as addressed in the Ethics Advisory Committee for Social and Human Sciences (EASHW), will be extended to other science domains where relevant.

OD5. UAntwerp aims for inclusive science communication and valorisation.

Aside from the importance of the research itself, the thoughtful and inclusive science communication about both the scientific method and results is of great importance. According to the literature, many science communication initiatives reach only a limited target group: people with a higher level of education and limited ethno-cultural diversity. In addition, science communication can potentially reinforce certain *biases* (DiCenzo et al., 2021; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2013). **Attention to inclusion in science communication and valorisation is essential in informing and inspiring a wider segment of the population about science.** It also touches on the societal **need for reliable information**, including in the fight against fake news, ignorance and suspicion towards science.

Actions:

1. The **research design** will include critical reflection on the participation of the communities to be studied in the valorisation and communication of the research findings (e.g. in the project applications, when describing how the research findings will be disseminated).
2. In its science communication and valorisation, the university will devote **specific attention to minoritised communities and groups that are more difficult to reach**.
3. In its science communication, the university will **continue to address more inclusive communication practices** (e.g. accessibility – including in terms of the digital divide, imaging, language use, channel, audience, format) (see also SD1: Inclusive university, OD3: Inclusive communication).
4. We will look for ways to **include the voices of researchers with diverse identities** in our science communications. In doing so, we will offer several options in terms of involvement, ranging from ‘designing only’ to ‘executing only’.
5. We will expand **inspiration and training initiatives** around science communication (e.g. internal Teams channel) that explicitly address diversity and inclusion.

6. Beginning with the **preparatory phase** of activities and prizes for science communication and valorisation, attention will be directed to diversity, including in terms of outreach, accessibility and communication (see also SD1: Inclusive university, OD3: Inclusive communication)
7. Consideration will be given to areas in which additional attention to diversity and inclusion could be included as one of the criteria in the awarding of prizes for science communication and valorisation (e.g. the Paul Panda Farnana Prize).

SD6. Inclusive human resources policy

The UAntwerp human resources policy aims to be an increasingly inclusive policy for recruitment, selection, and progression, as well as an inclusive working environment.

In addition to being an institution where more than 20,000 students take university courses, UAntwerp is an employer for some 6,000 staff members with a highly diverse range of jobs – from lab assistant to plumber, from accountant to policy officer, from PhD researcher¹³ to dean.

UAntwerp aims to be an inclusive organisation that welcomes all talents and that provides equal opportunities to achieve a diverse workforce in all statutes and grades. UAntwerp is committed to providing a working environment in which all employees feel accepted and valued. By assigning central importance to the **well-being** of its **employees**, UAntwerp aims to ensure that they **can be themselves and that they can develop professionally**. In supporting the professional development of our staff, we will focus on a variety of career paths within and outside academia, at home or abroad. In doing so, UAntwerp will work to provide an inclusive living and working environment, as well as to provide support for staff members wishing to refine and apply their diversity competences in their daily interactions with students and colleagues.

A diverse academic workforce is associated with better academic outcomes amongst students (Pittman & Richmond, 2007), and diversity in teams of scientists is related to more innovation, provided that an inclusive environment is present (AlShebli et al, 2018; Schiebinger, 2021; Hunt et al., 2022). Moreover, external reviews of teaching and research are increasingly highlighting the importance of a diverse workforce to the quality, productivity, impact and sustainability of research and teaching. Equity and excellence thus go hand in hand.

The risk of a **superficial diversity policy** in which commitments are named, but not put into practice is that it can have **undesirable effects** on the inclusion of minoritised groups (Andreassen, 2021; Dumas-Hines et al., 2001; Van Laer et al, 2020). It could thus contribute to more discrimination experienced by minoritised groups on a day-to-day basis (Al Ariss et al., 2018; Bourabain, 2022). Studies have confirmed that good communication about diversity policy can attract more staff from minoritised target groups (e.g. Rau & Hyland, 2003). The rate of attrition amongst this group tends to be higher, however, if they experience diversity policies as a smokescreen during their further working careers (Carnes et al., 2019; Manoharan et al., 2021).

Consequently, one of the most important causes of policy ineffectiveness is the mismatch between perceived policy objectives and their actual elaboration at staff level (Bourabain, 2022). It is clear that a diversity policy limited to increasing the recruitment of people with minoritised personal characteristics is not sustainable in itself: as an institution, it is necessary to dig deeper to address the underlying historical exclusionary dynamics that characterise universities, if the diversity that characterises recruitment is to be maintained through the channels of progression (Withaecx, 2021).

¹³ Doctoral researchers are included in this D&I policy plan within the strategic objective on Inclusive human resources policy.

OD1. UAntwerp will continue to build an inclusive policy for recruitment, selection and progression, in which everyone's talents are recognised and valued.

Scientific research has indicated that there are often unintentional hidden barriers in recruitment processes that result in particular disadvantages to specific target groups. **The underrepresentation of minoritised voices, especially in the higher ranks, places UAntwerp at risk of reproducing implicit values and norms, unconscious and/or unwanted thresholds, and exclusionary mechanisms.** As a public institution, we are thus missing opportunities to fulfil our social duty and to provide growth opportunities to all talents. As a knowledge institution, we are missing opportunities to recruit high-level talent, and thus to realise our ambitions of excellence.

UAntwerp is therefore constantly adjusting and improving its policy for recruitment and progression. In previous policy cycles, we have tinkered with job postings, recruitment procedures, support and training for those involved in recruitment, the onboarding of new colleagues, promotion policies and similar matters. For all these actions, in the next few years, we will continue to focus strongly on supporting the efforts of staff members and supervisors to interpret this policy in the best way possible in practice. In this way, we will contribute to our knowledge institution's ambitions of excellence by avoiding missing out on high-level talent with varied profiles.

Actions:

In addition to the permanent focus on improving recruitment and selection processes and procedures, UAntwerp will prioritise the following actions during the next policy period:

1. We will strengthen the branding of UAntwerp as an inclusive employer, in order to make interested candidates aware that everyone is welcome at UAntwerp and that, as an inclusive university, we aim to meet the needs of everyone.
2. Neuro-divergent candidates or candidates with an (invisible) disability continue to be reluctant to express their needs during the selection procedure or shortly after appointment (LeFevre-Levy et al, 2023; S.C. Jones, 2023). For this reason, UAntwerp intends to make **examples of reasonable accommodations granted** available on its website and relax the procedure for requesting reasonable accommodations during the selection procedure. We will provide supervisors with support in recruiting candidates with disabilities or specific needs.
3. We are committed to targeted communication on the **toolkit for inclusive recruitment and selection, and an expanded range of support services and professional development** for members of committees that take decisions on recruitment, appointment/re-appointment or promotion. This toolkit and accompanying webinar and training courses are important levers for recruiting a more diverse workforce.
4. UAntwerp will support entities seeking to promote the representation of underrepresented target groups through **affirmative action or targeted candidate searches**. In particular, we aim to achieve this in order to attract more diverse profiles in the various first-line services and reporting channels for transgressive behaviour (e.g. ombudspersons, student psychologists, study counsellors, confidential advisors), as well as in the senior academic staff (ZAP).

5. UAntwerp will make further investments in a new **competency model** for academic and non-academic staff. Using this competence model, we will clarify what UAntwerp means and expects from its staff members (e.g. in terms of inclusive action and communication) in each position. We will ensure that these aspects can be discussed transparently and we will link these competences to the development perspectives and training needs of staff members.
6. We will investigate opportunities to collect qualitative and/or quantitative **data** on the background characteristics of candidates during **recruitment processes** to analyse whether candidates with diversity characteristics have an equal chance of being selected (link to SD6: Monitoring).

OD2. UAntwerp will provide all its staff members with an inclusive working environment in which they can feel recognised and valued for who they are. To this end, UAntwerp will anchor inclusion in its supporting processes and procedures.

The **well-being** of our staff members is one of UAntwerp's lines of strength. This will require greater attention to the **relational aspects** of academic (and other) work (L. Sai et al, 2024). We will strengthen the capacity of the institution and its supervisors to recognise, acknowledge and accommodate the individual needs of staff members, such that all staff can feel recognised and valued. In recent years, we have devoted considerable effort to the cooperation between central entities and services, whereby important steps have already been taken towards a more caring organisation (e.g. the bystander training courses which are being rolled out throughout the university and the creation of a code of conduct). During the next policy period, we will continue along this path, intensifying the connection with the initiatives and needs of decentralised entities.

Actions:

1. Under the Decree of 8 January 2024 on **transgressive behaviour** in higher education, UAntwerp is obligated to make certain adjustments to its approach to inappropriate behaviour. We will further refine the roles and responsibilities support staff and stakeholders in the reporting chain for transgressive behaviour to structure their roles (new or revised) in an inclusive manner. UAntwerp has also drafted a **code of conduct**, which focuses on inclusive and respectful behaviour. We will highlight this code of desirable behaviour through communication campaigns, and we will provide practical guidance to employees concerning what inclusive behaviour means by incorporating these behavioural expectations in existing and future training courses from the broader range of training courses offered (see further under OD3).
2. We will strengthen communication on **Individual Customisation** (the replacement for the former Flemish Support Allowance to support staff members with occupational disabilities) and provide examples of good practices so that staff members will experience a lower threshold to request *Individual Customisation* or other reasonable accommodations. We will inform supervisors about the benefits and possibilities of Individual Customisation and reasonable accommodations.
3. Through the organisation of the annual UAntwerp Diversity and Inclusion Policy Day, the support of initiatives through a D&I open call (see SD1, OD1) and other measures, we will offer staff members the opportunity to expand their **personal networks** within UAntwerp. This will allow

colleagues to connect with others based on common minoritised personal characteristics or an academic interest in diversity and inclusion. These contacts could strengthen colleagues in their self-care and the necessary caring for and with others (L. Sai et al., 2024), as well as in their connection with our institution.

4. We will strengthen the focus on diversity and inclusion in **qualitative and quantitative tools** (e.g. the well-being survey) that analyse the composition of our workforce and measure the well-being of colleagues (see also SD 7: Monitoring).
5. We will gradually expand the range of **empowering training courses** for staff members with minoritised personal characteristics. Several studies have indicated that staff members with minoritised personal characteristics experience more stress at work. Such training courses empower these staff members, if they wish, to engage with their colleagues and supervisors concerning their experiences and their needs.
6. We will explore ways to improve our **recognition of the commitment and contributions of minoritised (and other) staff members** who make their expertise (including experiential expertise) available to the UAntwerp diversity policy.

OD3. UAntwerp will support its staff members in their efforts to be diversity-responsive, both in their relationships with colleagues and students and in performing their own duties.

Adjustments to the policy will not be felt and noticed in the workplace unless UAntwerp supports, coaches and trains its staff (and particularly supervisors), so that they can adjust their behaviour and their daily practices. Through training courses and support, UAntwerp will provide its staff and supervisors with the opportunity to strengthen their professional competences. This will allow them to achieve their results and manage their teams in a manner consistent with the values of UAntwerp.

As an inclusive university, we attach great importance to the competences of our staff and supervisors to address sensitive issues, face challenges and have uncomfortable conversations in a respectful and caring manner in the collaborations in which they are engaged. For this reason, everyone will know how to behave according to the **code of conduct**. We will prioritise the following actions during the next policy period.

Actions:

1. UAntwerp will continue to be committed to training courses that strengthen the diversity competences of staff and supervisors. This will involve a rich mix of awareness-raising, training, *ad hoc* support and peer review on issues including implicit bias, micro-aggressions, fear to act and its impact on one's own functioning. A few examples:
 - 1.1. We will develop a **basic training course, 'D&I@UAntwerp'**, for all new (and existing) colleagues.
 - 1.2. We will develop training on 'Responding to transgressive behaviour as an active bystander'.
 - 1.3. We will work on **training programmes for new (and existing) supervisors** to strengthen the inclusive management skills of these colleagues, so that they will be able to get more out of their teams (Homan, Gündemir, Buengeler en Van Kleef, 2020).

- 1.4. We will offer an **ongoing range of D&I training courses** that will allow staff members to maintain and establish their professional relationships with greater attention to inclusion. For example, we will provide training courses on connecting communication, inclusive meetings, how to cope with 'hot moments' during class, working with neuro-divergent colleagues, intercultural competences and communication.
- 1.5. We will work with a list of criteria as a **quality check for external providers**.
- 1.6. We will develop a system in which potential **external providers** can be easily found **according to specific themes**.
- 1.7. We will develop **assessment templates** for evaluating the range of training courses offered:
 - a separate assessment template for D&I training courses organised by the D&I Team;
 - a D&I section in existing assessment templates.
2. The range of non-academic training courses for UAntwerp executives and staff is currently spread across several platforms. This is a problem, especially for training courses focusing on inclusion, as these courses are harder for our staff to find. UAntwerp is exploring ways to **communicate** the entire range of non-academic staff-training courses **to its staff members in a more targeted manner to its staff**, in addition to unifying the administrative follow-up for these courses.
3. We will support **academic staff** in their efforts to be **diversity-responsive** in their teaching and research roles. Additional information on this point is presented under SD3: Inclusive teaching, and SD5: Inclusive research.

SD7. Monitoring diversity and inclusion policy

The University of Antwerp will optimise the use of qualitative and quantitative data to improve our ability to identify the impact of our own policies on underrepresented or minoritised groups of students, PhD students and staff members.

Like other educational actors, UAntwerp records certain background characteristics about students and staff members.¹⁴ Central and decentralised entities are already setting up or organising qualitative surveys (e.g. focus groups) to assess the impact of their own services on specific target groups and to identify gaps in their own policy. The wealth of qualitative and quantitative information available to us is nevertheless often under-used in the design, implementation and assessment of our own policies.

- We would like to provide the UAntwerp's central and decentralised services and departments with tools they can use to perform their own inclusion checks.
- We will ensure that minoritised or underrepresented groups at different levels (students, PhD students and staff) will be an automatic focus in the analysis and assessment of policy measures.
- We will explore opportunities to encourage **academic research on unintended and unconscious exclusionary mechanisms** that prevent the recruitment, study progress and graduation of underrepresented or minoritised groups at UAntwerp.
- We will explore opportunities to expand the **registration** of background characteristics where necessary and possible.

OD1. Develop tools and guidelines that enable central and decentralised entities to implement data-driven D&I policies.

UAntwerp will develop tools to help **central and decentralised services and departments to conduct independent inclusion checks** as they deem necessary and desirable: to use available information sources in a more targeted manner, to produce new data or even to conduct a more targeted assessment of policy measures.

Actions:

1. **Set up a platform** for sharing knowledge on monitoring and exchanging good practices between central and decentralised entities. With at least:
 - 1.1. Information that will enable entities to use and interpret D&I-related quantitative data correctly (e.g. Power BI, course scan, point reports).
 - 1.2. Guidance on how to introduce diversity dimensions in surveys and other tools, including shared definitions to facilitate comparison across faculties.

¹⁴ VLIR score reports on diversity and social policy: <https://vlir.be/beleidsdomeinen/diversiteit-en-sociaal-beleid/>

- 1.3. A protocol for conducting qualitative surveys (including focus groups) with underrepresented or minoritised groups, in which we will also provide tips on how to reach and encourage them to participate in focus groups.
2. Conduct an **inclusion check** and incorporate a diversity dimension into a number of **central surveys** with the following priorities:
 - Staff well-being surveys
 - Student surveys by the Student Council
 - Student teaching surveys
 - Inclusion check on existing BI reports
3. Conduct an **inclusion check** and incorporate a diversity dimension into **quality systems**, including the following:
 - Teaching programme assessment: see SD4
 - External teaching reviews: see SD5
 - Peer teaching review: see SD4

OD2. Internal and external reporting on developments and insights regarding Diversity and Inclusion at our institution.

UAntwerp will use **qualitative and quantitative data** to identify desired/undesired effects of its own operations and policies on underrepresented or minoritised groups.

- We will **identify undesirable exclusionary mechanisms** and bring them to the attention of relevant services, departments and faculties.
- We will develop qualitative analyses (e.g. focus groups) to **identify the impact of policy measures on underrepresented or minoritised groups**.
- To the extent possible, we will communicate **externally** on available qualitative and quantitative data.

Actions:

1. **We will compile a report on developments and insights regarding D&I** amongst students and staff **at our institution**, based on available data, in order to monitor the impact of the D&I (and other) policy.
2. We will set up **qualitative monitoring initiatives** that can further deepen and assess quantitative figures and existing policy initiatives. All of these actions will address the faculty dimension, thereby also enabling decentralised entities to work in a targeted manner with the figures provided.
3. **Externally accessible reporting** will be extended to include other diversity characteristics that go beyond the current focus on gender.

OD3. Explore opportunities to encourage academic research on the recruitment, study progress and graduation of underrepresented or minoritised groups of students, PhD students and staff at UAntwerp.

UAntwerp will encourage academics to make use of quantitative and qualitative data and information sources with a view to investigating explanations for the unequal recruitment, study progress and graduation of students, PhD researchers or staff members from underrepresented or minoritised groups.

Actions:

1. We will develop **guidelines and clarify the terms and conditions** for using data on diversity and inclusion at UAntwerp in scientific research.
2. We will **identify interesting research questions** and open them up to relevant academics and students.
3. We will **aggregate and communicate** (internally) about such research.

OD4. We will explore opportunities to update or expand the recording of data related to D&I.

UAntwerp will explore possibilities and opportunities to adjust or expand the **registration of background characteristics** of students, PhD students or staff according to evolving needs and scientific insights. The aim will always be to make more sophisticated analyses on exclusionary mechanisms that affect the recruitment, study progress and graduation of underrepresented or minoritised groups at UAntwerp.

Actions:

1. We will monitor developments in terms of **new scientific insights**.
2. We will monitor developments in terms of requests for **analyses** that are at play in faculties and departments.
3. We will agree internally on **standards** concerning the recording and use of existing and additional background data of staff and students.

Conclusion

The Diversity and Inclusion policy plan of the University of Antwerp reflects our deep rooted belief that diversity is an undeniable added value for both the university and broader society. UAntwerp's mission, as also described in the policy note 2025-2028, is resolutely committed to the further development of a sustainable world and a democratic and inclusive society founded on human rights. In this way, we strive to create a positive impact, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It is not only our statutory obligation to guarantee accessibility to higher education; commitment to diversity and inclusion also contributes to high-quality education and goes hand in hand with excellent research.

Diversity is a powerful driver of innovation and progress. When people with different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives come together, a richer breeding ground for creativity and innovation emerges. By truly being open to other views, we broaden our own perspective and discover solutions that might otherwise have been overlooked.

Diversity challenges teams to look beyond the beaten path. By collaborating from different perspectives, we not only enhance the quality of our work but also strengthen its societal relevance. In short, diversity is not an obstacle to be overcome but a source of inspiration that helps us to be more creative, resilient and future-proof.

While critically taking into account institutional barriers, opportunities, and the challenges that come with diversity, this policy plan wishes to foster an inclusive environment where every student and employee feels welcome and receive maximum, equal opportunity to develop. UAntwerp is committed to improving the recruitment, study progress, and graduation of minoritised students and staff, and committed to taking a diversity-responsive and inclusive approach to the core tasks of teaching, research, service to society and valorization.

By putting forward inclusion as a norm, we create a university where everyone can reach their full potential, regardless of background, identity, or beliefs. We have already achieved a lot as a university, but the road to inclusion is an ongoing process in which we need to remain in constant dialogue, reflect critically, and continue to foster a culture of respect and equality.

In developing this policy plan, we engaged with all faculties, departments, and services. We noticed the need to pay attention to these issues, but also an enthusiasm to take action on these initiatives.

In times of increasing polarization, framing diversity as an added value is more important than ever. By actively listening to each other and engaging in dialogue, we build bridges instead of walls. At the University of Antwerp, we believe that collaboration, based on respect and openness, is the key to positive change. Only by doing so can we develop innovative solutions to the complex (global) challenges facing society.

This plan is an invitation to every student, every staff member, and the wider UAntwerp community to continue to actively join us in building a future that is more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable. Let us join forces and strengthen each other's ideas. I personally look forward to helping roll out this comprehensive policy plan in the coming years and shaping it more concretely every day.

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Vice Rector for Societal Engagement and International Policy

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