

University of Antwerp Diversity and Inclusion Policy Plan (2025-2030)

Diversity as an Asset, Inclusion as the Norm

Executive Summary

Diversity is a given, in society and at the University of Antwerp as well. Diversity involves recognising and acknowledging both **visible and invisible differences**, paying specific attention to differences linked to certain mechanisms of inequality.

In its **mission statement**, the University of Antwerp expresses a firm commitment to the further development of a sustainable world and a democratic and inclusive society based on **human rights**. This aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the legal obligation to ensure access to higher education. The university views diversity as something that can enrich the lives of individuals and benefit the world as a whole. Investing in diversity and inclusion contributes to **high-quality teaching** and goes hand in hand with **excellent research**. When properly managed, a diverse workforce and an inclusive university environment can lead to greater **productivity and innovation**.

Taking institutional barriers and the opportunities and challenges associated with diversity into account, this policy plan aims to foster an **inclusive organisation** where every student and staff member feels welcome and has **equal opportunities** for development. The University of Antwerp commits to improving the **recruitment, study progress and graduation** of underrepresented students and staff while adopting a **diversity-responsive and inclusive approach to its core tasks** of teaching, research, service to society and valorisation.

Basic Principles

A number of basic principles are crucial to achieving our vision of inclusion. Firstly, a **diversity-responsive approach** values the skills, knowledge and experiences of underrepresented individuals and sees diversity as an added value, while an **inclusive approach** creates a context in which everyone feels at home and is recognised for who they are. Both approaches actively counter structural inequality, exclusion mechanisms and discrimination, placing primary responsibility on the system or organisation. Our approach follows the principle of **‘Universal Design where possible, tailor-made solutions where necessary’**.

Secondly, we believe in **active pluralism**, meaning that the enriching power of diversity arises through dialogue among people with diverse, differing and even opposing experiences, perspectives, worldviews, and ideological and political preferences. However, this requires skills such as resilience, empathy and tolerance, and the creation of ‘braver spaces’ – safe spaces in which the discomfort caused by such dialogue can be constructively addressed. We strive for an environment in which critical self-reflection and discussions about inequality, Eurocentrism and **power-related injustice** are welcome.

Governance

As a centre of expertise, **the Diversity & Inclusion Team** (part of the University & Community department) is responsible for the development, implementation and evaluation of the Diversity and Inclusion policy plan. This will be achieved in close collaboration with the university’s academic **faculties, central administrative departments** and other university stakeholders (such as the Pieter Gillis Centre and the student council). The role of the Diversity & Inclusion Team will be to coordinate and provide support.

By means of this policy plan, the University of Antwerp aims to further embed diversity and inclusion (D&I) **structurally within the organisation**, in line with the guiding principle of ‘diversity as an added value, inclusion

as the norm' and the university's broader vision statement and long-term goals described in the 2025-2028 policy memorandum. This policy plan translates the vision statement into specific actions linked to the organisation itself, student recruitment and graduation, student wellbeing, teaching, research, human resources and monitoring. The ambitions are described at three levels:

- **Strategic objectives (SOs)**
- **Operational objectives (OOs)**
- **Actions**, which describe the specific steps to be taken. **These actions are to be carried out by the appropriate departments in collaboration with the D&I team over a five-year period** and will be updated regularly in response to relevant trends and priorities.

Strategic Objectives, Operational Objectives and Actions

SD1 'Inclusive University' focuses on creating an inclusive online and offline environment and organisational identity in which everyone in the University of Antwerp community can participate fully, feel at home and feel safe. To achieve this, several **D&I-specific actions (OO1)** will be implemented, such as establishing a strong governance structure to maximise mainstreaming and impact and setting up clearly defined project groups with the faculties to develop best practices around a common challenge. Additionally, efforts will be made to ensure **accessible and inclusive infrastructure (OO2)**, for example by distributing information about accessibility in both Dutch and English. In addition, we will work on **accessible online applications of inclusive communication (OO3)**, for example by improving accessibility and representative, intersectional imagery so that a broad audience can relate to it.

SD2 'Inclusive Entry and Graduation' aims to achieve a **representative student population (OO1)** that reflects the diversity in our society by addressing the specific information needs of young prospective students proactively and in an early stage, ensuring they can make well-informed choices about their studies. Actions such as tutoring, UAmbassadors (role-model programmes) and StudyChat can contribute to this. Additionally, SD2 highlights the importance of **equal opportunities in labour market transition while maintaining engagement with a diverse group of alumni (OO2)**. This includes expanding **networks** and providing **inclusive career guidance** through curricular and extra-curricular activities, ideally integrated into the curriculum. The **alumni strategy** aims to take diverse profiles into account and ensure the inclusivity of our communication and the activities on offer.

SD3 'Inclusive Student Well-being' (Study Progress) focuses on providing an inclusive living and learning environment which prioritises the well-being of every student and equal opportunities to progress through higher education. Under **OO1**, actions are centred around fostering a **sense of belonging** by creating an **inclusive living environment** with a diverse range of facilities. Key actions include the professional development of frontline actors with regard to D&I, raising student awareness about inappropriate behaviour, promoting a more inclusive climate in student organisations, and conducting an inclusion assessment of university-wide and faculty support services. Additionally, **OO2** focuses on an **inclusive learning environment** by eliminating barriers linked to certain background characteristics through, for example, inclusive mentoring, Universal Design in face-to-face and digital learning environments, and clear communication about the costs of study programmes. To ensure policy is as tailored to students as possible, it is essential that **students of all backgrounds participate in decision-making bodies**. **OO3** aims to support this by enabling policy participation for short-term students (e.g. international students) and those with limited proficiency in Dutch.

SD4 'Inclusive Teaching' (Study Progress) aims to create an inclusive teaching and learning environment in which every student feels at home and has equal opportunities for academic progression. **OO1 provides for a structured support framework** for lecturers and teaching staff to cultivate a diversity-responsive attitude and implement inclusive teaching methods. It is not only teaching staff who require D&I competencies, but also **students (OO2)** who can benefit from acquiring these **skills to engage with diversity challenges** and global issues

both now and in the future. To foster these competencies, it is crucial that the **curriculum** incorporates as many scientifically substantiated **diverse perspectives** as possible (**OO3**). This can be encouraged by developing a structured **support framework** that study programmes can use independently.

SD5 'Inclusive Research' promotes inclusive, ethical, responsible and globally engaged research practices. The University of Antwerp aims to make it possible to **identify, evaluate and recognise D&I in research (OO1)**. A key action is to encourage critical reflection on D&I throughout all stages of the research process. **OO2** emphasises the importance of **diversity in research teams, research consortia and other stakeholder groups**. Actions focus on monitoring the composition of research teams and incorporating D&I competencies into training for supervisors. In **OO3**, the University of Antwerp strives for research excellence by critically **examining dominant norms and epistemologies** and providing alternatives through training and tools. **OO4** focuses on **equitable partnerships** with all internal and external research stakeholders, particularly partners from the Global South. Finally, **OO5** prioritises the dissemination of research findings through **inclusive science communication and valorisation**.

SD6 'Inclusive Human Resources Policy' aims for an increasingly **inclusive recruitment, selection and career development policy (OO1)** and an **inclusive working environment** in which all employees feel recognised and valued for who they are (**OO2**). To achieve this, the university will further embed inclusion within its support processes and procedures. For example, it will further refine the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the reporting chain for inappropriate behaviour and support staff and managers in fulfilling their roles inclusively. The university also aims to assist employees in adopting **diversity-responsive behaviour** in their interactions with colleagues and students and in their professional tasks through awareness-raising and in-depth training (**OO3**).

SD7 'Monitoring of the Diversity and Inclusion Policy' will optimise the use of qualitative and quantitative data to better assess the impact of our policy on underrepresented or marginalised groups of students, PhD students and staff. Firstly, **tools and guidelines** will be developed to enable both the central and decentralised entities to implement **data-driven D&I policies (OO1)**. Secondly, we will focus on expanding **internal and external reporting** on D&I developments and insights within our institution (**OO2**). Thirdly, we will explore the possibility of stimulating academic research into the **recruitment, study progress and graduation** of underrepresented or marginalised groups at the university (**OO3**). Finally, the **registration of D&I-related data** will be reviewed and modified or expanded where necessary (**OO4**).

The University of Antwerp calls on all staff and students to respect, safeguard and actively promote these efforts, reinforcing the importance that the university places on diversity and inclusion. In doing so, we can build a diverse and inclusive university together, leading to more justice, more quality, more innovation and more excellence.

Let's shape the future!