

Plan of Action on Equality 2019-2021

1. INTRODUCTION: STARTING POINTS AND WORKING METHOD

1.1 Context

The VUB is a progressive humanistic institute in Brussels and as such, it takes a pioneering role in the promotion of **equality and inclusion**. A Diversity Plan aimed at staff and students was developed as long ago as 2005. It was followed in 2014 by the Gender Action Plan, which focused on gender equality in the ranks of the professors. Rector Caroline Pauwels recently took the initiative of including diversity as a transversal policy line in the VUB General Strategic Plan 2030 (in 2018) with Professor Karen Celis as the Rector's advisor. **The VUB places the principle of equality, one of the university's core values, at the centre of the diversity plan.**

The GAP (Plan of Action on Equality) meets the requisites of the **transversal policy line 'Radically Diverse: united in diversity and equality'** that was included in the **General Strategic Plan 2030** (ASP 2030). It responded to the explicit ambition to implement a transversal equality policy, the central aspirations of which include the achievement of equal opportunities, inclusion and participation.

The GAP implements the **goals related to equality** which are highlighted in the ASP 2030 diversity policy line:

- The **safeguarding of equality** for all students and members of staff;
- The **equal use of** each individual's **talent and experience**;
- A sustainable **change** in the **culture** of both students and staff, in all services, and across; faculties in the areas of education, research, services, outreach and community.

It also covers the three areas highlighted for action in the ASP 2030:

- **Monitoring**;
- **Safeguarding** equal opportunities and whilst recognising and **facilitating** difference;
- **Raising awareness and knowledge building**.

The GAP is explicitly committed to the following **strategic goals** (SD):

- SD1 We will continue to develop a range of educational provision which prepares students for future social and scientific challenges;
- SD3 We will continue to build on the development of an international, interdisciplinary and excellent research environment;
- SD5 We will further improve the well-being of staff and students;

- SD6 We will continue to build a diverse and open academic community for students and staff.

Equally, the GAP is in concert with many **operational goals** in the Policy Plans between 2018-2021, covering the academic policy areas of education and student policy. It is additionally consistent with the research policies in the policy plan Mens & Organisatie 2018-2021. Finally, GAP also resonates with our ambition to focus on **Brussels**, to reinforce our bond with the **ULB**, whilst also collaborating with our alliance partners where possible and relevant.

1.2. Starting points

Diversity: As determined by the ASP 2030, the GAP 2019-2020 focuses on gender and ethnicity. However, the GAP also takes into consideration other forms of intersectional inequality and structural disadvantage: age, disability, sexual orientation, creed and social class.

Mainstreaming and anchoring: We are committed to cultural **change in our organisation**. The GAP is committed to existing and planned policy pathways and initiatives and involves the entire VUB community: staff (ZAP and ATP) and students.

Visibility and support: The GAP makes existing initiatives around diversity internally and externally visible, and supports new bottom-up initiatives that contribute to knowledge building about equality and diversity in the institution.

1.3 Realisation of GAP (Plan of Action for Equality)

- The institute was **reviewed** with the assistance of diversity coaches from **Actiris**. The **analysis** is included as an appendix in the GAP.
- **A consultation is planned with a group of VUB experts** consisting of AP, ATP staff and students with expertise in the subject, academics, policy specialists and/or professional practitioners, the Council of Deans (informal body) and a number of external actors.
- **Screening VUB partial policies plans** ASP 2030 and reviewing existing initiatives.
- **Bilateral and collective consultations** with key policy actors and students.

The GAP ambitions listed above are embedded in ongoing processes. Within its life of two years, the GAP will focus on **10 priority actions**, implemented by the Equality Team who will monitor current initiatives, respond to issues and opportunities that arise, and work on anchoring the successes for both the long term, and for follow-up phases. The GAP consists of **10 feasible actions**, prioritised according to predetermined starting points. These feasible, but far-reaching, actions will be implemented and evaluated in the coming two years.

1.4 Implementation of GAP

- The GAP will be implemented in consultation and close collaboration with relevant VUB services, students, experts, external parties and other responsible parties. Experts from all areas/faculties

will be involved. A number of actions will be jointly carried out with the ULB and where possible, with an alliance partner.

- Implementation will be carried out by the **Equality Team**, consisting of Professor Karen Celis (0.2 FTE), appointed as academic coordinator (AR 19/11/2018), Lisa Wouters (0.5 FTE), policy officer for gender, diversity and sustainability, and reinforced by an HR consultant for equality, who will work on Actions 1, 2, 3 and 5 from within the Mens & Organisatie service.

2. ACTORS

<p>Support structure</p>	<p>Chair: Karen Celis Academic Coordinator for Equality Secretary: Lisa Wouters Policy officer for Gender, Diversity and Sustainability</p> <p>Patrick Stouthuysen - Advisor to the Rector on academic policy Raf Devos - Director of Mens & Organisatie Tania Stadsbader - Representative of ACV Sofie Stevens - Secretary of Faculty of Physical Education and Kinesiology Ricanay Ciriaco - Staff member of Mens & Organisatie, VTO-Welfare-Recruitment Jo Coulier - Chief delegate ABBV-ACOD, member of Works Council and CPBW Tim Van de Voorde - Representative of ACLVB-VSOA</p>
<p>Experts group</p>	<p>Chair: Karen Celis - Academic Coordinator for Equality Secretary: Lisa Wouters - Policy officer for Gender, Diversity and Sustainability</p> <p>Ricanay Ciriaco - Staff member of Mens & Organisatie, VTO-Welfare-Recruitment Sofie Withaecx - Professor of Gender and Diversity, coordinator of RHEA Gily Coene - Professor of Ethics, co-chair of RHEA Kevin Smets - Professor of Communication Sciences, Jonge Academie Floriano Tori - Coordinator of international policy of the Student Council Muslim Kasumov - MixOmnia, law student Khalil El Mabrouk - Auxilio! Mieke Gijsemans - Head of Services Research Policy, R&D Stefaan Smis - Professor of International Law and Human Rights Ilke Adam - Professor of Migration and Diversity, IES Iman Lechkar - Professor of Anthropology, Fatima Mernissi Chair Gert Sonck - Head of Services Study Guidance, Deputy OWSB Johanna Jacobs - university psychologist, Study Counselling, PhD student Els Robbrecht - Head of Services, Student Matters, OWSB Dimokritos Kavadias - Professor of Political Science, coordinator BRIO and Brutus Els Consuegra - Professor of Education and Diversity, deputy Sebastiano Cincinnato - PhD student, IDLO</p>
<p>Roles and positions of Support Structure and Experts Group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quantitative and qualitative analysis - Input from expertise (also academic) and experience - Setting up and following up on plan of action in two years - Ambassador for diversity and equality both within and without the organisation - Evaluation of the plan every two years.

3. **ACTIONS**

1. For every ZAP vacancy, we aim to have a maximum of two thirds of candidates from the over-represented gender on the shortlist of those being seriously considered.

Context: There is a significant and well documented problem in both the inflow and the subsequent career trajectories of female professors (see the scissor graph in Point 7). This persistent gender imbalance among professors, known as the leaky pipeline, is caused by a combination of complex factors. Amongst these are, *inter alia*: facets of organisational culture; issues relating to work-life balance; the unconscious gender bias in HR processes; the lack of role models and mentors. Research is currently being undertaken by the VLIR High Level Task Force Gender, which monitors the gender policy of the universities, into the possible barriers experienced by post-doctoral researchers (M/F) in the furthering of an academic career. Further research is likely to reveal more nuanced causes of the leaky pipeline.

Goal: To stimulate the inflow of female ZAP, to generate gender parity (50/50) in new recruitments per faculty over the next three years, beginning with the lower limit of 33% female (strictly) ZAP by 2021. The level was 29% in 2018, with significant differences between faculties.

In concrete terms: Faculties will adhere closely to the gender ratios in the nominations of candidates for ZAP positions. They aim to include at least one of the under-represented gender, for every three candidates on the shortlist. The faculties will be supported in this by the HR consultant for equality. They will report on this annually to the Academic Council, providing analysis, and where necessary, establishing remedial actions. Together with the HR consultant for equality, possible causes will be explored and strategies for resolving issues developed. The following preconditions can be taken into consideration in analysis and remediation: the gender ratio of the student population, of the PhD students, and of the doctorates produced in the relevant professional fields.

2. To evaluate, and where necessary, expand recruitment channels in order to attract more diverse candidates.

Context: The VUB is at the heart of the diverse and urban city of Brussels and the University needs to reflect that diversity. Greater diversity and collaboration with Brussels based organisations, and partners with a focus on target groups, will be beneficial for the university and the city.

Goal: To achieve the objectives in Action 1, we: 1. ensure our workforce (AP and ATP) reflects our city, by attracting greater levels of diversity in those who apply to join us. 2. Appeal to the broad distribution of competences in Brussels by proactive scouting (internal and external).

In concrete terms: Create an inventory of the current recruitment channels, methods for AP and ATP, and evaluate them in the context of vacancies and remediation. The faculties will be supported by the HR consultant for equality.

Possible partners: Actiris Select, VDAB, BXL Formation, Topo handicap, Agentschap Inburgering en Integratie, GRIP, Minderhedenforum, Kif Kif, DiversiCom, professional associations and academic networks (will differ by appointment).

3. To encourage diverse target groups to apply (AP and ATP), inclusive texts for vacancy notices will be composed.

Context: Increasing diversity is possible with sensitive composition of vacancy notices. The way in which preconditions, such as, types of diploma, requisite competences, is presented, and job specific information is formulated, can be crucial in ensuring the widest possible levels of response.

Goal: To remove unnecessary barriers from vacancy notices by developing inclusive and diversity sensitive modes of communication. To make diverse target groups (in Brussels) feel they are being invited to apply. To achieve the objectives formulated in Actions 1 and 2.

In concrete terms: Review the template for AP and ATP. Develop guidelines with advice for drafting inclusive and diversity-sensitive vacancy notices, in particular for ZAP. Faculties will be supported by the HR consultant for equality.

Possible partners: Instituut voor de Gelijkheid van Vrouwen en Mannen, UNIA, SD Worx, Minderhedenforum.

4. The drafting of a vision statement regarding diversity and anti-discrimination.

Context: The values of diversity and equality, central to the VUB as an institution, need to be made more explicit. This can be achieved by developing commitments in existing documents and refining current vision statements (for example, Equality Manifesto 2017, Nota studentenleven en antidiscriminatie 2018).

Goal: To present a clear and well-defined vision statement reflecting the VUB commitment to diversity, equality and anti-discrimination (gender, LGTBI+, ethnicity, disability, age, class) that acts as a compass for everyone who studies or works at the VUB.

In concrete terms: We will draft a vision statement for staff and students which is supported and validated by the university. The statement will be integrated into the welcome pack for new staff and students.

Possible partners: RHEA Expertisecentrum gender, diversity and intersectionality, for example MixOmnia, Auxilio!, Spectrum...

5. A commitment to training to enhance knowledge building and cultural change.

Context: Selection and promotion committees, amongst others, play a crucial role in exemplifying the values of the VUB. Continued professional development and knowledge building is necessary to reinforce best practice with regard to diversity and anti-discrimination.

Goal: To raise awareness of equality and diversity issues, especially within recruitment and promotion procedures where those taking maternity/paternity/care leave may face discrimination. To support faculties in achieving the objectives in Actions 1 and 2. To expand inclusivity where respect is a basic value and colleagues are positively supported in the development of their academic careers.

In concrete terms: We will integrate gender and diversity awareness into existing study and professionalisation processes. In addition, the HR consultant for equality will develop and organise

training courses and mentoring about: gender bias, anti-discrimination laws, transgressive behaviour, intercultural competences, work-life balance and parental rights, for the specific target groups (for example, evaluation and promotion committees, managers, beginning ZAP).

Possible partners: Unia, Instituut voor de Gelijkheid van Vrouwen en Mannen, VUB teacher training.

6. Monitoring and reporting on the diversity policy.

Context: We need efficient and transparent communication of the policies implemented, progress made, and initiatives planned. Annual monitoring, with a view to implementing an informed policy, requires open and thorough evaluation and effective strategies of remediation

Goal: To ensure that the VUB's staff and students are informed of current policy directives and that systems of support are in place to communicate the necessary information.

In concrete terms: There will be annual internal quantitative report for the attention of the administrative bodies of all concerned and a public event which informs the VUB community (possibly during the annual Gender Week).

7. Raising awareness of diversity issues in the VUB community.

Context: Creating greater levels of diversity within the institute will depend on continued cultural change.

Goal: To acknowledge the needs of the community we must ensure that diversity issues remain visible in the form of ongoing actions and campaigns. To increase awareness and support for diversity in the VUB community.

In concrete terms: A number of annual events will be organised: for example, the Gender Week; participation by the VUB and ULB in Belgian Pride; and a campaign against undesirable transgressive behaviour. In addition, *ad-hoc* campaigns and projects to promote inclusion and diversity will be established in conjunction with VUB services and internal and external actors. For example, dialogue tables with refugees, digital story telling in collaboration with Maks vzw (Media actie Kuregem), the accessibility of the campus, and a study day in collaboration with the ULB about LGBT+ policy in our respective institutions. We will also monitor the diversity of our suppliers and service contractors.

Possible partners: The aim is to achieve optimal collaboration with both internal services and groups and external actors (in Brussels). Those might *inter alia*: the ULB; the Brussels Binder; ICOR; CAW; professional organisations; and student associations.

8. A website will ensure wider visibility and accessibility to the diversity initiatives and provide necessary support information and points of contact.

Context: Initiatives relating to diversity, equality and antidiscrimination at the VUB are less well publicised than we would like. Equally, authorised services and/or points of contact for specific questions concerning diversity, are not easily available. The information available about the efforts being made needs to be given a higher profile.

Goal: To significantly enhance the visibility of diversity, equality and antidiscrimination issues at the VUB, for staff, students and visitors. To provide information about existing and planned initiatives, and to ensure that the contact points for questions about diversity are known.

In concrete terms: A website that will be listed when the search terms 'VUB', 'diversity', 'equality' and 'antidiscrimination' are searched for. The website will be a standalone presence but embedded within the VUB website.

9. Launching a call to action on equality and inclusion for all students.

Context: The VUB has an increasingly diverse student population, yet there is some evidence of tension between student groups. In addition, the successful progression of students with a migration background from the university to the world of work and further academic studies, is less pronounced than their peers. We need to nurture a sense of belonging, on the basis of the things that unite our community, rather than divide it.

Goal: To encourage students to develop, and implement, projects that celebrate diversity and promote inclusion, based on the results of focus groups. To support bottom-up initiatives in which students will take ownership, such as showcase events or tutoring projects.

In concrete terms: A call to action will be launched in which students and their associations can sign up. Projects selected will be given financial support, monitored and publicised by the university. The projects will be selected by a collaboration between the university, and a delegation of students and appropriate staff members, from the support structure and the experts group.

Possible partners: Student associations, Student Council, International Student Platform, 'Engage', the digital VUB platform.

10. Assessing diversity in the curriculum

Context: The suitability of the curriculum to an increasingly diverse student population is a subject of heightened concern to many institutions who are engaged in the decolonisation of their provision. How diverse, both in content and delivery, are our curricula? Do they reflect the heterogeneity of the discipline as well as our student body?

Goal: To set up a pilot project to stimulate reflection and dialogue on diversity in the curriculum.

In concrete terms: A curriculum scan will be undertaken on a part of the curriculum. Based on the results, recommendations will be published in a brochure.

Possible partners: Vice Rectorate Education and Student Policy