

An inclusive university of applied sciences



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Diversity & Inclusion Task Force
2021

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An inclusive university of applied sciences

Cooperation for inclusive education and research

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Date

26 November 2021

Type of project

Vision Document

Version

1.0

Status

Adopted by the Executive Board (21-12-2021)

Preamble

The diversity of experiences, identities, backgrounds, views and options of people is a crucial factor within society as well as in higher education. Research and the urgency of inclusion issues clearly show that the education system in the Netherlands is not yet sufficiently geared towards this. However, an inclusive approach for education and research cannot yet be guaranteed as part of the everyday work at our university. The implementation of an inclusive culture is crucial, because every student is unique, is entitled to equal opportunities, and when attending higher education, must be given the opportunity to acquire a better place in society.

Diversity and inclusion provide significant added value and also enhance our education and research. This means that we create a learning and working environment that recognises diversity, enables participation from every student and staff member, minimises physical and psychological restrictions as much as possible, and is aligned with learning needs and preferences. By signing the Diversity Charter in December 2018, and setting up the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force in 2019, we emphasise the importance of a comprehensive approach towards achieving more diversity and inclusion at THUAS. The university focuses on attracting, retaining and developing a varied and international workforce, and focuses on the awareness of diversity within teams and the embedding of diversity and inclusion in education and research, and in the mutual relationships between students and staff members.

Since different social categories such as gender, ethnicity, functional impairment, age, sexual orientation and social class are inextricably linked, an intersectional viewpoint is required to enable a comprehensive approach towards inclusion¹. This Vision Document containing clear objectives, an action plan and proposals for a solid infrastructure and adequate resources, forms the basis for achieving this.

¹ A Gender Equality Plan has been compiled based on the guidelines from the European Commission

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Introduction

The Hague University of Applied Sciences focuses on an inclusive learning and working environment for students and staff members based on the principle that within our metropolitan context, diversity of experiences, identities, backgrounds, beliefs and possibilities of people are crucial, and based on the belief that diversity and inclusion are enhancements of our education and research, because these, when combined, are prerequisites for quality and innovation. Countless similarities and differences exist in relation to the members of our university community. We are located in a unique region, a unique city that traditionally attracts many groups. Our learning and working environment reflects this multi-diversity. As a regional knowledge institution surrounded by this diversity, we focus on ensuring that our own talents and those of others, are utilised to their full potential. Within our community, diversity and inclusion provide added value: everyone has something to offer, and every talent counts. It is also essential that during discussions with each other, our students and our professionals are open and curious about each other's backgrounds and preferences. If our students and staff members are made to feel welcome and at home, then this will result in more satisfaction being derived from work and studying, and enhanced work and study performance .

At countless areas within THUAS, in terms of inclusion, there is scope for, and attention must be paid to diversity. However, we are sometimes also confronted with unconscious or conscious incompetence in this field, and this also presents a structural and common challenge.. It is essential to continually focus attention on the importance of diversity and inclusion when fulfilling our social role. This also includes providing scope for pluriformity of perspectives, provided that these are not racist or otherwise discriminatory and do not dehumanise people. Only then is there scope to learn from each other, to take more account of each other, in order to gain new insights and to implement improved and innovative practices. In this respect, the point of departure is that inclusion is standardised within the university, and forms part of our identity, is reflected in our policy, everyday behaviour, and our representation. This Vision Document is based on and includes texts from the previous documents: Vision for dealing with diversity (2013) and the diversity Action Framework (2013).

Vision for diversity and inclusion

Diversity and inclusion are at the top of the agenda in higher education, and also require our explicit attention within The Hague University of Applied Sciences. This means that we standardise diversity and inclusion by actively, intentionally embedding these in our education, research and in our mutual relationships. With regard to our vision for diversity and inclusion, we use five points of departure²:

1. We regard diversity as a crucial factor with a broad, layered and multidimensional diversity of people with potential added value;
2. In the dialogue with each other, we choose the unique person as a departure point;
3. We use professional and functional quality criteria to evaluate to what extent wishes and needs (also those which are culturally and religiously-motivated) from staff members and students can be accommodated;
4. We recognise the solidarity and loyalty that people can experience in their own groups. At the same time, we expect a balance in professional proximity and distance;
5. We think and act in an inclusive manner.

An inclusive university is an environment that offers equal opportunities to everyone, attaches high priority to equality and thus guarantees physical, social, cultural, educational- and work-related accessibility for students and staff members from different backgrounds. Such an environment is closely monitored to prevent impediments or forms of exclusion and discrimination. In this regard, there is a joint responsibility for everyone in the university. In the event of exclusion or discrimination, a response takes place in a timely manner, with the appropriate sense of urgency and sensitivity, so that we jointly minimise forms of exclusion and discrimination, and guarantee inclusion. In this respect, it is important for the (infra)structure of THUAS to facilitate participation, having a say, and co-creation. The implementation of an inclusive climate can only take place under the right conditions, with adequate regard for preconditions such as time, space, people, resources, knowledge and competence.

In other words: the intention is to transform our university into a location where everyone feels welcome, safe and appreciated. We want to achieve this by making use of the following three principles that serve as guidelines for our (organisational) actions:

1. Principle of antidiscrimination
2. Principle of inclusive forms of interaction
3. Principle of inclusive governance

²This is an adaptation of the vision and points of departure derived from the vision for dealing with diversity from 2013.

Principle of antidiscrimination

The first principle is the principle of anti-discrimination; a principle that has an ethnical-legal nature and thus serves as an essential building block for our thinking and acting as a school. Students and staff members feel welcome, safe and appreciated at our university, and do not experience discrimination or other forms of exclusion. This principle includes the prevention and combatting of exclusion. Various studies consistently show that persons experience exclusion and discrimination because of their disability/illness, sex, colour, religion, sexual preference and ethnical background.. Social inequality can occur in everyday social interaction.

Access to our university (and thus access to education) is guaranteed as much as possible. Faculties and departments implement the required measures to eliminate barriers, and are always critical in relation to implicit and explicit criteria, regulations and procedures that (unintentionally) result in exclusion and discrimination. The university monitors and quickly takes corrective measures if policy principles and frameworks, procedures, work instructions and (unintended) practices foster exclusion and discrimination.

In order to speak about inclusion as an organisation, and in order to implement this, the basics must be in order. It is a fundamental right, regardless of who you are, to be able to expect equal treatment, equal opportunities and additional commitment from the university for removing possible obstacles for certain groups of students and staff members. Our university fosters recognised diversity, equality and encourages collective embracing of these values.

In order to ensure that staff members and students of The Hague University of Applied Sciences can be sure that they will not be excluded and/or are not confronted by discrimination, THUAS has actively taken action at various levels in order to guarantee this. The reporting procedure for discrimination and racism has been firmly established, and fast and adequate follow-up of these reports takes place. The parties involved in the complaints structure are, in relation to reports of discrimination and racism, clearly identifiable and accessible, and take appropriate action using the requisite expertise and the required sense of urgency.

The combatting of exclusion and discrimination is also the responsibility of each member of staff and each student. The responsibility is collectively felt and borne by means of appropriation of explicit anti-discriminatory and anti-racist forms of social contact and a methodology based on respect for diversity. The principle of anti-discrimination and anti-racism is the only way to combat discrimination and racism. Anti-discrimination is more than non-discrimination. We request our students, lecturers, managers and other staff members to refrain from discriminatory behaviour and utterances (non-discrimination). The request to our members of the THUAS community is to appropriate an actively responsible role in our collective effort to eradicate discrimination and racism. This is because

inclusion is a collective process. Simply adequately reacting to a bad “joke” towards a (co-)student, lecturer or colleague is relevant when standardising inclusion. Not reacting implies partly agreeing with non-inclusive forms of social contact.

It is a major task for (training) teams to clearly demonstrate that everyone (lecturers, other staff members and managers) has a responsibility to prevent racism and discrimination, and to quickly and correctly act if racism or discrimination occurs. Training courses tell students what to do if exclusion and discrimination, and improper behaviour occur in general. In this respect, training courses emphasise that the THUAS community has a joint responsibility to ensure that an opportunity for exclusion and discrimination does not occur. If they themselves are confronted, or see that someone else is confronted with exclusion or discrimination, students are requested to quickly inform their lecturer or career counsellor. In addition to the lecturer or the career counsellor, the confidential counsellor can also be approached in case of improper behaviour. In addition, the communication emphasises that THUAS continues its ongoing work to combat diversity and inclusion by, for example, deploying the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force, and later, the Inclusion Office. By and large, (suspicions of) discrimination and racism are actively pursued and combatted in order to eradicate them. A collective commitment for a zero-tolerance approach.

Principle of inclusive forms of interaction

The second principle is mainly relational in nature, and relates to the everyday forms of social contact. This principle relates to the extent to which attention exists for diversity and inclusion in the mutual forms of social contact between students, lecturers and other staff members. Diversity is a crucial factor for this. In an inclusive environment, a safe basis exists for the diversity linked to experiences, identities, backgrounds, beliefs and options of people because this is regarded as added value. The question is whether adequate attention is paid to this diversity; to what extent mutual differences are regarded as an invitation to use this in an inclusive (pedagogically-responsible) manner. Openness and appreciation for differences in insights and perspectives exist. Of course, within the ethical-legal frameworks of anti-discrimination and the combatting of exclusion.

Attention is paid to the entire person, and their (constantly changing) experiences, identities, backgrounds, beliefs and options. In educational policy and practice, the student and the member of staff are the central figures. People bring their cultural and religious backgrounds, self-identifications, life experiences, support needs and aspirations along with them. By paying more attention to this, recognition and the added value of diversity become evident. This means: taking account of the fact that people derive their identity from different and overlapping identity characteristics in different contexts and this is constantly changing. This requires an open and curious approach when entering social contact with each other. In addition, the following is desirable: not reducing someone to a category, and not using someone's own identification for abusive purposes in order to explain their opinion or actions.

In the case of inclusive forms of social contact, the willingness to meet the 'other' party, any other party, is desirable in order to really learn about each other. A well-known phenomenon is that individuals identify themselves with people because they think that they resemble them. This (implicitly) results in a we-they classification with often undesirable consequences for members of the "they-group". Inclusion notably requires work from the dominant groups in order to foster openness, and to thus combat the own (often unintentional) dominance. In our organisation, we are well aware of this, and we show a willingness to meet each other. Meeting means that we want to know who the person is who fulfils the role of 'student' or 'member of staff' or has a randomly-chosen other (prescribed) identity.

This contact breaks through parochialism. The student does not exist. In the same way, the lecturer or the member of staff also cease to exist. Every effort to reduce persons to a single identity can sound efficient, but often results in misunderstanding and (unintentional) exclusion. The determination and the capability to recognise the diversity among students and staff members, prevents preconceptions and possible adverse consequences for the person in question. Our education is therefore designed to take account of differences in terms of social and cultural background, gender, educational

background, learning preference, experience and function impairment and recognition and acknowledgement of talent and ambition is applied. In an inclusive working and learning environment, talents and aspirations are optimally used to their full potential.

The encouragement of inclusive forms of social contact depends on adequate attention being paid to inclusion as a theme. Our University of applied sciences offers a permanent podium for inspiring meetings about inclusion by means of lectures, workshops and dialogue sessions. Inclusion training is made available in order to professionalise lecturers, managers and other professionals. In addition, in existing professionalising programs, such as BDB, SDB and leadership programs, more attention will be paid to diversity and inclusion. Training courses are being adapted to include inclusive education by means of inclusive didactics and by means of inclusive curriculums. Teams facilitate and regularly provide guidance for mutual interaction relating to inclusion and exclusion and other behavioural aspects pertaining to inclusion.

Principle of inclusive governance

The last principle, the principle of inclusive governance, relates to the managerial-organisational domain. Inclusion can be found in policy frameworks, regulations and procedures, instruments, spaces and activities. Inclusion and the principles as drawn up in this Vision Document, are applicable in relation to, for example, education and research, HRM, accommodation, marketing & communications, etc. When developing new policies, explicit attention will be given to aspects of diversity and inclusion and, if necessary, consultation will take place with the Inclusion Office (to be established).

The principle of inclusive governance depends on the effort made by our university to promote participation by students and lecturers. Students, lecturers, managers and other staff members jointly decide which issues are relevant and have a joint remit to implement an inclusive educational environment. The participation of students in particular, is an important means of eliminating blind spots within our own organisation and to implement an inclusive learning environment. The participation option contributes to student engagement; students are recognised, listened to, and feel that they have been included. They may participate (become involved in discussions, cooperate, and jointly make decisions) in relation to improving and innovating the educational policy as well as the practical aspects. More say is given to curriculum renewal, forms of work, and didactics.

Where this relates to improvements made to educational policy and the practical aspects, The Hague University of Applied Sciences promotes and facilitates active participation by all members of the university community. Possible underrepresentation is closely monitored in relation to groups in forums intended for participation. Special attention is paid to persons and groups with underprivileged diversity characteristics. From a social point of view, some groups are now confronted with social inequality and discrimination. Recruitment will take place in a manner that takes account of unbiased social positions.

Representation provides members of the THUAS community with the opportunity to secure recognition in the organisation, to accept decisions made, and to publicise them. Teams within The Hague University of Applied Sciences always know how to adopt a critical point of view when compiling various forums. We aim to achieve maximum representation, regardless of whether this relates to the compilation of the team or the compilation of an (external) committee, services, faculties and other departments. Arguments such as ‘but they have not yet arrived’ or ‘they have not registered’ do not automatically result in a ‘fait accompli’. The Hague University of Applied Sciences also encourages and supports various networks that can fulfil an important role in relation to their own perspectives and interests in the building of an inclusive working and learning environment.

In this respect, regular research is conducted and monitored in order to gain an insight. Research regularly conducted among students and staff members is more specifically focused on diversity and inclusion. The results of this research are transmitted transparently both internally (and externally) in a timely manner. Which objectives relating to diversity and inclusion have been attained, and which objectives have not.? Internal and external communication channels, policy plans and accountability documents pay attention to diversity and inclusion.

Conclusion

The Hague University of Applied Sciences offers a home for everyone, a learning and working environment that eradicates obstacles and is optimally geared to the wide variety of wishes and needs of students and staff members. Moreover, our university is convinced that the welfare of students and staff members is, to a great extent, determined by their sense of belonging.

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