



# **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

## *The Young Academy Vision Document*

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Diversity & Inclusion Working Group  
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## Key points of The Young Academy's vision regarding diversity and inclusion

- 1) Diversity and inclusion are a prerequisite for true meritocracy. Meritocracy requires, after all, that talent be valued without discrimination or bias.
- 2) Diversity and inclusion cover a wide range of grounds for exclusion, in particular gender, race/ethnicity and religion, age, social class, sexuality, and health/disability.
- 3) Effective diversity policy requires three types of measures, aimed, respectively, at:
  - A) numbers (composition of staff and students);
  - B) institutions (academic organisation and culture); and
  - C) knowledge (content of teaching and research).
- 4) Responsibility for implementing diversity measures must be assigned not only to diversity professionals but also to executive boards and administrators at other levels, such as deans and chairs of department.
- 5) Diversity policy should be firmly grounded in scientific knowledge, which should be collected and shared through a national knowledge centre.

### 1. The importance of diversity and inclusion policy in science and scholarship

Diversity and inclusion mean first and foremost the fair distribution of opportunities for everyone in the field of science and scholarship. That field should be a place where talent is valued and rewarded. Many scientific studies show, however, that gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality result in unequal opportunities for researchers (Britton, 2017; Bhopal 2017; Ellis, 2009; Naezer et al. 2019). Studies have also shown that diversity can generate various benefits for universities, including creative solutions, knowledge, and innovations (Buitendijk et al. 2019). "The best breeding ground for excellence is an environment that is diverse and inclusive; an environment that values a wide and diverse spectrum of perspectives" (Nature, 2014). Diversity in subjects, ideas and perspectives can enrich science and lead to new insights (see also Lancet 2019).

The fact that diversity and inclusion are becoming ever more important is also demonstrated by the increasing attention paid to them in the Netherlands. In 2017, for example, a hundred additional female professors were appointed with Westerdijk funding, while a National Action Plan on Diversity was launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in 2020. These and other initiatives are intended to eventually lead to greater diversity and inclusion at universities. The Young Academy supports this effort to promote, investigate, and facilitate diversity and inclusion in science and scholarship, so that everyone's talent can be fully appreciated and utilised.

### 2. What do we actually mean by diversity and inclusion?

We start from a broad definition of diversity; it concerns sex/gender, race/ethnicity and religion, age, social class, sexuality, and health/disability. This does not mean that we should focus only on minority groups. An inclusive university also specifically involves the majority in diversity initiatives (Jansen, Otten & Van der Zee, 2015). The basic premise is that gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, or disabilities are inextricably connected ("intersectionality"): the daughter of highly educated Iranian refugees and the son of Moroccan migrant workers are both likely to encounter obstacles at a Dutch university, but not exactly the same ones (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2013; Harcourt, Icaza & Vargas, 2016).

This concerns diversity and inclusion as regards students, academic staff, and support staff. The Young Academy's focus is on academic staff and researchers, as well as the position of support staff. In



collaboration with the Comenius Network, the Inclusion Working Group is focusing explicitly on education.

### 3. Based on our vision and scientific research, what measures do we support?

Despite the many scientific studies of forms of exclusion in higher education, relatively little is known about effective measures. The effectiveness of measures is not always easy to determine, and not all measures are effective in the same context or for the same social group (Kalev & Dobbin 2016). This makes it difficult to transform empirical case studies into abstract theoretical insights that are broadly applicable. There are, however, some very useful studies and overviews of general design principles (Moss-Racusin, Van der Toorn et al. 2014; Benschop et al. 2015; Vinkenburg 2017; Buitendijk et al. 2019): measures should be based on scientific knowledge and should make use of interactive learning methods. They should also avoid assigning blame, promote communication, and include a plan for rigorous, ongoing evaluation. In other words, the approach must be a systematic one.

Three different types of measures are distinguished in the literature, aimed at changing (1) numbers, (2) institutions, and (3) knowledge (Schiebinger & Schraudner, 2011). Diversity policies can only be effective if these three approaches are adopted simultaneously: increasing the diversity of students and staff will not be successful without restructuring institutions and without taking account of diversity in the curriculum and in knowledge generation.

#### 3.1 Diversity among researchers

The term “diversity” is often utilised in research to refer to the (numerical) representation and inclusion of historically underrepresented groups. Although diversity is more than just a matter of numbers that need to be evened up and is primarily about inclusive institutions and knowledge (Schiebinger & Schraudner, 2011), numerically measuring diversity is an important basis for further research (Griffin & Hart, 2016). It makes it possible to understand who has access to higher education, and at what levels (student, support staff, academic staff). Measures are:

- *Diagnosis*: In the Netherlands, there are still few reports on the various aspects of diversity, due to privacy legislation and regulations. As a result, there is a lack of insight into the numbers and experiences of certain social groups, such as people who identify as LGBTQ+ or people with disabilities (including physical disabilities). Particularly when it comes to describing ethnicity/race, categories and data are lacking with which to carefully identify and quantify processes of exclusion in higher education. The Young Academy intends contributing to discussion and development of methods for collecting such data in a manner that suits the Dutch context, while respecting ethical standards regarding privacy in particular.
- *Incentives*: For example the Aspasia Prize, Westerdijk professorships, the Mosaic programme, tenure tracks for underrepresented groups (Rosalind Franklin Fellowships), and a special recruitment policy such as at Eindhoven University of Technology. The Young Academy is also taking a good look at its own recruitment policy. The positive impact of such incentives is that they are an effective means of increasing participation by underrepresented groups. With sufficiently high numbers, a tipping point can be reached where negative stereotyping and other exclusionary dynamics are eliminated (see Kanter 1977). The disadvantages can be that stereotypes are confirmed (see also Derks 2016) and that measures meet resistance (including legal resistance) when they are considered unfair (Benschop & Van den Brink 2014).
- *Representation*: Which scientists are placed in the spotlight with awards, grants, fellowships, committee memberships, or lectures? When The Young Academy is permitted to nominate candidates, it must ensure that there is sufficient diversity among those it nominates.



### 3.2 Diversity in scientific institutions

A more diverse make-up of the academic staff alone is not enough to create a safe and inclusive working environment. Measures to change numbers are important, but they are ineffective if the structure and culture of the academic organisation are not also addressed (Buitendijk et al. 2019, Tauber, 2019). A “revolving door” effect then kicks in: universities manage to attract underrepresented groups, but then fail to retain them. To do so means ensuring an inclusive climate and structure for *all* employees.

- *An inclusive climate and culture (how we treat one another)*: The academic world is – in general – characterised by an individualistic, hierarchical, and competitive culture, which can produce a chilly climate (Maranto & Griffin 2011). This has been shown to lead to the exclusion/isolation of groups, discrimination, and improper conduct (Naezer et al. 2019, Sian 2019). The image of the “ideal scientist” – white, male, energetic and passionate, always available, healthy and without care tasks – has not helped contribute to an inclusive culture and to equal opportunities for different groups of scientists and scholars (Bleijenbergh et al. 2013; Herschberg et al. 2018; Van den Brink & Benschop 2012). Studies have revealed the existence of implicit bias in evaluations of both research and teaching, which can have a material impact on promotion opportunities (Boring 2017; Van der Lee & Ellemers 2015; Moss-Racusin 2018).
- *Inclusive structures*: University structures can also lead to inequality between different groups. A recent study by Van Veelen and Derks (2019) shows that there are remuneration differences between male and female scientists in the Netherlands too (see also De Goede, Van Veelen & Derks 2016). There are small but significant and systematic differences between male and female scientists as regards the distribution of work tasks, the availability of resources, and the outcome of negotiations on terms and conditions of employment. These may only be small differences, but accumulated over an entire career they can lead to major inequalities. Other concerns regarding structure are a lack of transparency in recruitment and selection; the division of duties (overrepresentation of women in teaching and academic services); temporary contracts (overrepresentation of women); embedding guarantees; the physical environment (whose pictures are on the wall, who are the buildings named after, see Athena’s Angels); options for maternity and parental leave).

### 3.3 Diversity in scientific knowledge and expertise

Scientific studies also point to the exclusion of groups and perspectives in the actual content of research. Studies have shown, for example, that costly mistakes can be made if gender differences are ignored when designing and performing research.<sup>1</sup> For example, cardiovascular diseases are the number one cause of death among women in Europe, but for years they were only studied in men (Maas et al. 2011; Den Ruijter et al. 2015). Historians have also assumed that women were not *really* politically active in the seventeenth century and have thus portrayed the history of espionage as if women played no role at all. Nadine Akkerman’s book *Invisible Agents* (2018) has shown that that portrayal is totally false. In his *Keti Koti* lecture (2020), Karwan Fatah-Black shows that Dutch historians have always regarded the end of slavery as the result of benevolent enlightenment thinking among Europeans, ignoring the crucial role played by black people who resisted slavery. Narrowing the field of inquiry necessarily limits the answers produced.

When social groups have systematically limited access to science and scholarship, it affects the generation of knowledge. Every research field needs to consider how its own knowledge generation has been affected by such exclusionary processes. All kinds of organisations can play a role in facilitating and publishing such reflection, for example by means of seminars or special numbers of professional journals. Ideally, such reflection should also result in publications that familiarise students with the history of their own field.

As regards diversity in education, The Young Academy is collaborating with the Comenius Network.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research\\_and\\_innovation/strategy\\_on\\_research\\_and\\_innovation/documents/ki0320108enn\\_final.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research_and_innovation/strategy_on_research_and_innovation/documents/ki0320108enn_final.pdf)



#### **4. Implementing diversity policy**

Almost all Dutch universities have now formulated policy on diversity and inclusion and have appointed diversity officers. Nevertheless, research conducted on behalf of The Young Academy in 2020 shows that there is room for improvement in how that policy is implemented (Bonjour et al. 2020).

Diversity memoranda and policy plans often fail to state clearly who should do what, when, and with what intended result. That makes monitoring difficult. Dutch universities therefore still only evaluate the implementation and impact of their diversity policy to a limited extent.

Responsibility for implementing diversity measures is often allocated entirely to diversity officers, who work hard but can only exert limited influence. To effectuate real change, responsibility must be placed elsewhere, namely with executive boards and above all with deans and chairs of department. It is precisely these university administrators who, after all, play a decisive role in shaping personnel policy and programmes for teaching and research.

Universities currently often work on diversity and inclusion in isolation from one another, rather than acting together and sharing knowledge as to effective policies. It would be far more effective to share research and expertise on diversity and inclusion within a national knowledge centre, so as to ensure that diversity policy is firmly embedded in scientific knowledge and that each university does not have to reinvent the wheel.

#### **5. Cooperating partners**

When working on diversity work, it is essential to create alliances. There are various parties with which The Young Academy can cooperate, for example the Comenius Network; the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (input for the National Action Plan on Diversity 2020); LanDO (National Consultation Body for Diversity Officers); the Dutch Network of Women Professors (LNVH); the Royal Academy (input regarding social safety); the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU); and the Dutch Research Council (NWO).



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