



EQUALITY ACTION PLAN

2021-2024

“VUB strives to be an agent of change, correcting inequalities, offering opportunities, influencing new generations, and steering towards increased gender equality and appreciation of diversity. With this action plan we take that commitment.”

Caroline Pauwels, Rector of Vrije Universiteit Brussel

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to be 'C. Pauwels'.

Equality Action Plan 2021-2024

Introductory remarks: pathway to equality at the VUB

- [Diversity plan 2005-2006](#)
- [Gender Action Plan 2014-2016](#), at the request of the government and followed by VLIR (ASP2)
- [Equality Action Plan 2019-2021](#) / GAPI (ASP3), submitted to Actiris in order to obtain a diversity label, as ULB did
- Equality Action Plan 2021-2024 / GAPII (ASP4)

Equality Action Plan 2019-2021 (GAPI) evaluation: where are we after 2 years of hard work?

Both the [Equality Action Plan with the 10 actions](#) and the Equality Team were given shape in the past policy cycle, in implementation of the transversal policy axis 'Radically Diverse' in the ASP3. In a difficult covid context, much was achieved and concrete steps were taken, for example on urgent topics such as ethnicity and anti-racism.

Successful action points:

- Start bias education and training for staff
- Curriculum scan on diversity in education
- Data monitoring ([and reporting](#))
- Events & visibility, external and internal through [own website](#), email address and events
- Clear vision with linked code of conduct
 - [Vision text 'Equality in Diversity'](#)
 - [Code of Conduct 'Being Equal in Diversity'](#)
- Towards the **Actiris Diversity Label** (May 2021)

Less successful: minimum 1/3 women in the ZAP & further closing of the leaky pipeline.

The Equality Team: the engine of equality policy

The Equality Team is a small interdisciplinary team (total of 2 FTEs) that is broadly anchored in the organisation (M&O, OS, STBE) and connected to academic centres (RHEA, BIRMM) and projects (Eutopia, DWHJN). The Equality Team creates maximum synergy between the Equality Policy (flanking policy, pilots, etc.) and other VUB actors, with a view to embedding equality structurally in the operation.

- Karen Celis: Academic Coordinator for Equality, WP5 Diversity & Inclusion Coordinator Eutopia, Coordinator PEOPLE section in DWHJN (0.2 FTE)
- Nellie Konijnendijk: HR Equality Advisor M&O (0.8 FTE)
- Lisa Van der Schueren: Diversity policy officer OS (0.1 FTE)
- Cheyma Al Mehraj: Project officer EUTOPIA WP 5 and VUB Equality Network (0.6 FTE)
- Lisa Wouters: Transversals policy officer STBE (0.3 FTE)
- Christil Asamoah: Project researcher Curriculum Scan (1 FTE for the period Oct. 2019- Oct. 2020)

Future: where are we going with the Equality Action Plan 2021-2024 (GAPII)?

GAP 2021-2024 (GAPII) is the elaboration of the **transversal policy axis "Radically Diverse" in the ASP4**. The plan builds on the insights and achievements of GAPI, the discussions with the Young Academy and the VUB community on racism (July 2020) and the various Equality Ateliers that took place in November 2020 in collaboration with MarCom (in connection with the DWHJN).

Our mission

Establishing a clear and progressive equality & inclusion policy that is promoted throughout the organisation.

The vision

- VUB is a fair and inclusive university that promotes diversity and rejects inequality.
- VUB is an 'agent of change', correcting inequalities, providing opportunities, forming new generations and therefore also guiding the future towards more equality and appreciation of diversity in society.
- Inclusion and equality are promoted throughout the organisation and spearheaded in policy.
- Equality policy is supported and nurtured both top-down and bottom-up.
- The VUB community is urban-engaged and connected to Brussels and Europe.

The principles and working method

- **Transversal cooperation** with partners throughout the organisation. We aim for maximum synergy with Vice-Chancellors, services, faculties and the connection with the other transversal policy axes (sustainability and welfare); in other words, we engage in dialogue and co-creation with a view to a sustainable embedding of equality throughout the institution. This is a work in progress. The present GAP consists of actions in which the Equality Team takes the lead and of actions taken up by Vice-Chancellors, services and faculties and implemented as such in their policy plans, and in which the Equality Team advises and supports.

- We consider VUB to be a community where students, staff and content of education and research form a whole (Whole Institution & Community Approach).
- We work WITH the target groups to shape the policies that affect them. We do this for example through the VUB Equality Network (VEN), and also through dialogue with faculties and a faculty-specific approach.
- We work in an intersectional way whenever possible.
- We work data-driven and develop evidence-based policies.
- The vision text and code of conduct developed are central to our operation.
- With this GAP, we meet the requirements of Horizon Europe.
- The UN Sustainable Development Goals are woven into our policy with a focus on SDG5 (gender equality) and SDG10 (reducing inequality) and there is an indirect connection to 7 other SDGs: SDG1 (no poverty), SDG3 (good health and well-being), SDG4 (quality education), SDG8 (fair work and economic growth), SDG11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG16 (peace, justice and strong public services), SDG 17 (partnership to achieve goals).
- We are linking up with the 'The World Needs You' campaign and the 'PEOPLE' section in particular.

An Equality Action Plan 2021-2024 (GAPII) with 6 strategic objectives

- **SD1.** A bias-proof recruitment policy and equal opportunities in career (development) with attention to a healthy work-life balance.
- **SD2.** Anti-racism, decolonisation and diversity in the classroom and the curriculum with a focus on themes and voices that are currently missing and a critical reflection on the impact of colonialism on the university.
- **SD3.** Support for students from under-represented groups in their pathway to academia and the employment market.
- **SD4.** Inclusive campuses with accessible working and learning environments where everyone is treated with respect.
- **SD5.** Community building and participation within the VUB and cooperation with external partners around the VUB equality policy and the themes of equality, equivalence and inclusion.
- **SD6.** To measuring is to know. The monitoring of diversity parameters will be continued and expanded.

These objectives form the framework of the policy under which operational objectives and actions fall and they are in line with the policy vision and the ASP4.

Where SD1 and SD2 of the GAPII connect to **'The compass is right'** and we build on the actions and insights of the previous plan, SD3, SD4 and SD5 connect to **'Solid framework for flourishing and growth'**, SD6 connects to **'Reference for research-driven institution'** and SD5 with Eutopia also connects to **'Heading for Horizon Europe'**.

SD1. A bias-proof recruitment policy and equal opportunities in career (development) with attention to a healthy work-life balance.

- In order to improve the gender balance (evolution towards a 40%-60% female ZAP range), to address the issue of overburdening of female ZAP and the work-life balance in general, as well as to initiate an equality policy for AP with a migration background, a participatory dialogue with faculties has been initiated with the aim of developing a faculty-specific policy with related actions.

ET & Faculties

- Bias training for all new staff and decision makers on recruitment, leadership and internationalisation.

ET & M&O

- Bystander training for sexually transgressive behaviour and racism.

ET & hotline (in time)

Commitments by Vice-Chancellors' offices and Services in collaboration with Equality Team:

- Training for teachers on anti-racism and anti-sexism/intercultural communication in teaching practice. **OS and IRMO**
- Training and a training programme (e.g. casebook) for researchers on gender & diversity in research and research applications (cf. Horizon Europe requirements). **R&D and I&V**
- The OZR asks the faculties to submit an HR diversity plan/strategy in addition to a thematic proposal for the recruitment of Tenure Tracks. **R&D**
- Attention to inclusion and the SDGs in the procurement of revenues and bonuses (e.g. IOF) and in the establishment of reference institutions. **I&V**
- Refinement and provision of gender bias screening software for job vacancies. **DICT**
- Taking into account the impact of COVID on teaching load and research time when evaluating AP and communicating about it. **OS and R&D, in collaboration with Young Academy**

SD2. Anti-racism, decolonisation and diversity in the classroom and the curriculum with a focus on themes and voices that are currently missing and a critical reflection on the impact of colonialism on the university.

- Set up lecture series on anti-racism in collaboration with VUB Fellow Dalilla Hermans (start semester 2 of AY 2020-2021) and embed as interdisciplinary accessible subject (IBOO) and cluster scientists offering thesis projects around this theme.

ET & OS

- Develop an attractive tool for courses, i.e. a roadmap based on the results of the curriculum scan ‘Yes we scan - diversity in the curriculum’ (GAPI).

ET

- Support programmes on diversity in the curriculum in relation to quality assurance (e.g. by means of the roadmap developed).

ET & OS, Faculties and Central Library

Commitments by Vice-Chancellors’ offices and Services in collaboration with Equality Team:

- Facilitate and encourage teaching by international guest professors. **IRMO and faculties**
- Develop initiatives around the broad theme of decolonisation and supporting refugee students. **IRMO**

SD3. Support students from under-represented groups in their pathway to academia and the employment market.

- Connecting our internal groups and individuals working on equality and inclusion with the VUB Fellows as role models and with external initiatives through the VUB Equality Network (VEN).
ET & I&V and WeKonekt

Commitments by Vice-Chancellors' offices and Services in collaboration with Equality Team:

- Guide students from under-represented groups and international students in finding a VUB student job. **M&O and OS**
- Elaborate format support (financial) for promising students (e.g. writing scholarship applications for students with migration background/financial difficulties), to see how it fits in with the status of student-researcher, in combination with a targeted information campaign about doctoral studies.
R&D
- Develop a programme that offers VUB alumni an initial professional/academic work experience at the VUB for one year. **MarCom in collaboration with M&O and Career Center**
- Mentoring/career coaching towards the employment market. **OS and Capital vzw & WeKonekt**
- Optimise buddy programme for students with a migration background. **OS**
- Attention to gender and diversity in promoting entrepreneurship. **I&V**

SD4. Inclusive campuses with accessible working and learning environments where everyone is treated with respect.

- Improve accessibility, safety and inclusiveness of campuses. Draw up a recommendation and step-by-step plan on the basis of a screening by an external consultant.
ET & PRMI (and INFRA, DICT, Campus Development Unit for rollout)
- Broad approach: physical and digital accessibility, welcoming infrastructure that promotes the well-being of students and staff.
- We work towards a validated recommendation and step-by-step plan, anchored in the VUB Global Prevention Plan.

Commitments by Vice-Chancellors' offices and Services in collaboration with Equality Team:

- Disseminate and raise awareness of the code of conduct in all students and staff. **M&O, OS, MarCom**
- Link code of conduct to transparent policy in turn linked to disciplinary regulations for students (organisations) and employees. **M&O and OS**
- Transgender-friendly campus: resubmit BVO project on name change, infrastructure and language use in communication. **OS (and DICT for rollout)**
- Facilities provided for and clear communication about first aid and pregnancy. **PRMI**
- Optimise the hotline and a structural approach to transgressive behaviour, with specific attention to racism. **M&O, OS, PRMI in collaboration with Academic Coordinators for Equality and Well-being**

SD5. Community building and participation within the VUB and cooperation with external partners around the VUB equality policy and the themes of equality, equivalence and inclusion.

- Increase participation and co-creation with students and staff in the equality policy through the Equality Ateliers in connection with DWHJN.
ET & Marcom
- Connect groups and individuals working on inclusion and equality, strengthen them and make them more visible through the VUB Equality Network (VEN). **ET & OS**
- Increase visibility and participation in the Belgian Pride.
ET and ULB, WeKonekt and MarCom

Commitments by Vice-Chancellors' offices and Services in collaboration with Equality Team:

- Develop and roll out communication strategy around the equality policy for internal and external interested parties. **MarCom**

With the objectives:

1. Generate internal attention for the issues and achievements.
 2. Make students and staff enthusiastic about getting involved in the action plan, actions and events.
 3. Highlight scientific research in this context and bring it to the attention of a wide audience.
 4. Translate data generated into communication products and bring it into the core of the university.
 5. Spot opportunities for communicating the problems and solutions in the VUB.
- Roll out Eutopia WP 5 Diversity and Inclusion with European partners. **OS**

SD6. To measure is to know. The monitoring of diversity parameters will be continued and expanded.

- Mapping of research (people) working on the themes of diversity, inclusion and equality at the VUB (using PURE and Food for Thought).
ET & R&D

Commitments by Vice-Chancellors' offices and Services in collaboration with Equality Team:

- A gender and diversity-sensitive procurement policy. **Directorate of Finance**
- Continue and expand annual **monitoring and reporting** on gender and diversity representation, further refine the monitoring system. **M&O, R&D, Datacel STBE**
- Obtain annual figures on personal characteristics of staff: work out definitions and methods. **M&O**
- PhD survey: include gender and ethnic diversity in analyses on a structural basis. **R&D**
- Biennial wage gap analysis. **M&O and STBE**
- Integrate gender budgeting into the budget process (e.g. through gender impact assessment). **Directorate of Finance**