

Introduction

Organisations that wish to receive funding from the European Commission's Horizon Europe framework programme for research and innovation are required to have an institutional Gender Equality Plan (GEP). This requirement applies to all higher education institutions from 2022, and so also to VU Amsterdam.

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam endorses the European Commission's aim of achieving gender equality in research, education, development, innovation and services. The University recognises the value of a diverse workforce and the crucial role this plays in improving our innovative capacity. VU Amsterdam has long been committed to an inclusive work environment where all VU employees have the same opportunities, can develop to their full potential and – of course – can be themselves within the VU organisation, regardless of their origin, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, etc.

The term diversity expresses the fact that a group, society or organisation is heterogeneous in one or more respects. Our University community is characterised by increasing diversity and inclusivity. VU Amsterdam is committed to further strengthening diversity in all its dimensions to raise the quality and impact of its teaching, research and the services it provides. As an organisation, we firmly believe that the variety of perspectives, backgrounds and insights represented in our various teams can only benefit the quality of our research, teaching and the services we provide to our students. This is also the reason why VU Amsterdam actively pursues policies that promote equal opportunities, an inclusive organisation and diversity, such that members of all identity groups are empowered to excel and develop their talents.

At the University, we recognise diversity in all forms, including ethnic, religious, cultural, socio-economic, age, sexual and gender diversity, as well as the diversity of people with and without disabilities. All these forms are relevant to our diversity and inclusivity policy. The recently established Action Plan for Inclusive Recruitment, Work and Recognition is an example of our policy to improve career opportunities for people of colour. This Gender Equality Plan (GEP) is thus embedded in the wider D&I policy of VU Amsterdam.

1. Gender Equality

Initiatives to date

In 2002, VU Amsterdam launched the Equal project, in which the position of men and women¹ within the University was precisely analysed at the job level. This project revealed for the first time a trend: the higher the academic position, the less likely it is that a woman will hold this position. It also became apparent how few researchers of non-western origin there were. VU Amsterdam was thus confronted with a paradox: while we are convinced that gender, ethnicity and cultural background should not play a role in career development, we find that we in fact must pay extra attention to this diversity, because otherwise these groups will have insufficient opportunities and the University will miss out on important talent. This realisation was the starting point for the development of policies and measures aimed at improving career opportunities for women.

¹ Wherever we use the word 'woman' or a derivative thereof we mean everyone who identifies as a woman.

In 2009, VU Amsterdam signed the 'Charter Talent to the Top', committing the University to an effort to increase the share of women in top positions. The University is proud that our active gender policy has helped increase the proportion of female full professors from 11.5% in 2011 to 29.9% in 2021. The University also ranked 37th out of more than 600 universities worldwide for the theme of Gender Equality in the Times Higher Education Impact Ranking for 2020. This ranking is based, among other things, on research into gender equality, the proportion of academic publications produced by women, the proportion of female graduates, and the measures taken by the university to promote gender equality within the organisation.

The present GEP is based on earlier implemented policy, however gender policy is never static in time. New developments in society regarding the role and position of women and men, new academic and practical insights into the significance of gender, and the influence of current social themes (such as social safety), all play an important role in the development of a dynamic gender policy. In addition, an important role is accorded to discussion and dialogue in the development of new University gender policies.

Content and structure of the plan

The GEP formulates concrete measures and actions for the period 2022-2025 under the themes of Recruitment, Work and Recognition.

- *Recruitment* concerns attracting and advancing women to positions where they are currently underrepresented, in particular the positions of full professor and associate professor.
- The theme of *Work* is about promoting a more inclusive working environment, with particular attention for a healthy work-life balance and social safety.
- *Recognition* focuses on talent development, offering career opportunities and ensuring diversity in decision-making on promotions and advancement.

An overview of the capacity and resources that will be made available for the implementation of the GEP and the method of evaluating progress are included at the end of this document.

2. Recruitment: attracting and advancing women

Policy based on insight

It is important to have a good understanding of the job categories in which women are underrepresented so that the recruitment and advancement policy can be adjusted accordingly. VU Amsterdam has participated in the monitoring programme of the Charter Talent to the Top for several years now. This programme reveals that women are adequately represented in higher management positions at the University: more than 50% of the higher management are women. Women are also sufficiently represented in other management positions (salary scale 13 and 14).

However, our own internal reports and the monitor of the Dutch Network of Women Professors (LNVH) reveal that the percentage of female talent in the position of full professor lags far behind other job categories. The University has therefore focussed on increasing the percentage of female full professors in recent years. By setting targets and conducting various incentive programmes, we were able to increase the proportion of female full professors from 11.5% in 2011 to 29.9% in 2021.

This proves that the combination of targets and incentive programmes (such as a mentorship programme and a chair for appointing female professors) is an effective way to increase the percentage of female full professors. In 2020, VU Amsterdam set a new target for female full professors: 35% in 2025.

Increased focus on recruitment & selection of female talent at the assistant and associate professor level

Whereas in recent years we have seen stable growth of the percentage of female full professors at VU Amsterdam, we do not see the same growth in the percentage of female associate professors. This percentage has sat at around 30% for some years now. Because the position of associate professor is the gateway to a position as full professor, it is important that the percentage of female associate professors is increased to match the target percentage of full professors.

The annual monitor of the LNVH reveals that the percentage of female associate professors is declining particularly sharply in relation to the percentage of female assistant professors. This reveals how important it is to develop talent at the assistant professor level in order to stimulate more promotions to the position of associate professor. This is also how we plan to develop the breeding ground for female talent within VU Amsterdam.

The following concrete steps will be taken:

- Monitoring the percentage of women at the assistant and associate professor level per faculty.
- More attention for female assistant professors in the staff review, among others by fostering awareness at the faculties of the lack of promotions at this level.
- Screening job vacancies for associate professors for gender bias.
- More attention for gender diversity in appointment advisory committees for associate professorships, e.g. by providing gender-bias training for members of these advisory committees.

Specific measures at the faculty level

Gender equality does not only receive attention through specific interventions; it is also an integral part of our policy for education, research and knowledge transfer. In the faculties, for example, strategic staffing plays an important role in diversity and the activities the faculty undertakes to increase diversity in the workforce. Diversity is also a key focus area in the partnerships we form through networks and consortia.

In recent years, we have noticed how important it is to take specific measures at the faculty or even departmental level, because some disciplines have much more difficulty attracting and retaining women than others. However, equal treatment law must be complied within all cases.

At the same time, there may be other reasons why female talent is less likely to be attracted to certain job categories at a particular faculty. To address these issues, individual or combined faculties could establish a 'female talent committee' to review their recruitment policy and, in coordination with HR, make recommendations for an appropriate gender-sensitive recruitment and advancement policy.

This will involve the following concrete step:

- The establishment of Female Talent committees by individual or combined faculties where women are underrepresented in certain positions.

Fenna Diemer Lindeboom chair

VU Amsterdam launched the Fenna Diemer Lindeboom chair (FDL) in 2005 to increase the number of female full professors. This programme enables faculties to make a chair available specifically for talented female associate professors. A new FDL round was started in 2020 and paid explicit attention to personal development and coaching of the researchers appointed to this chair. In view of the new target of 35% female full professors, and because this programme has previously been highly effective at encouraging female researchers in their careers, a review will be conducted between now and 2025 to assess whether an additional FDL round is needed.

This will involve the following concrete step:

- Assess the need for an additional round of the Fenna Diemer Lindeboom programme between now and 2025 with a view to achieving the 35% target in 2025.

3. Work: encouraging a healthy and inclusive organisational culture

The goal of inclusive work is to create a safe and open work environment with attention for the well-being and health of all our employees. VU Amsterdam believes it is important to respect the personal situation of each of our employees and to give due consideration to such matters as the provision of informal care or childcare alongside one's work. We want to create an inclusive work environment where everyone can come into their own, regardless of gender, background or personal situation. We aim to achieve this in the following ways:

A healthy work-life balance

Many employees would like to take extra leave to care for a member of their family or their young children. To facilitate this, and in accordance with the national legislation and agreements, VU Amsterdam offers various forms of paid and unpaid leave to employees. For example, they can take paid parental leave, paid short-term or unpaid long-term family care leave, paid adoption and foster care leave, or paid bereavement leave, while partners have the right to take paternity leave. In addition, women who breastfeed during the first nine months after the birth of their child are entitled to spend a quarter of their working hours feeding their child or pumping. Special pumping rooms have been established in almost all VU Amsterdam buildings for this purpose.

Employees can speak to their manager about applying for the various types of leave, but VU Amsterdam also wants to bring these options more actively to the attention of its employees, and in particular young parents and informal carers. This could be done in combination with sending a VU cuddly toy to new birth and adoption parents or a small gift or a card to informal carers on the national 'informal care day'.

There are also other ways in which we want to pay more attention to a healthy work-life balance for our employees, for example by making this a point of discussion for managers and employees during the annual interview, or by offering workshops to increase awareness of the importance of a healthy work-life balance.

The following concrete steps will be taken:

- Actively encouraging employees to consider their leave options, e.g. through messages on VU.nl and in VU-zine and/or in combination with small gifts for employees.
- Organising workshops for all employees on a healthy work-life balance.
- Bringing childcare facilities in the vicinity of the University more to the attention of employees and seeking cooperation with a childcare organisation.

The WO&MEN@VU network

The WO&MEN@VU network was established in 2017 to improve the position of women at VU Amsterdam in general and to promote mutual solidarity. The network is inclusive and open to all VU employees. Its aim is to raise awareness of the theme of gender equality and to encourage the discussion on implicit and explicit prejudices by offering various activities.

WO&MEN@VU regularly organises workshops and events to this end. Workshops have been organised on topics such as imposter syndrome and a healthy work-life balance, and speakers are regularly invited to share their views on gender equality within organisations. WO&MEN@VU also wants to involve men more explicitly in the discussion on gender equality. Changing societal gender role patterns have an impact on how men deal with students and colleagues at both a personal and professional level, and it is important to encourage the discussion on this subject. The 'Men talking' project was recently launched to get this discussion going.

The WO&MEN@VU network is an important partner of VU Amsterdam for raising awareness on gender diversity and promoting an inclusive work environment.

A safe social work environment

Social safety is a precondition for creating a healthy and inclusive organisational culture. A survey by FNV/VAWO revealed that 4 out of 10 university employees have experienced inappropriate conduct. Women report more inappropriate conduct than men, but male university staff are also affected. An LNVH survey revealed that inappropriate conduct as experienced by female researchers takes various forms, such as academic sabotage, sexual harassment, physical and verbal threats, denigrating remarks, exclusion and complaining about special provisions for women, such as the time required to pump.


VU Amsterdam has been paying more attention to social safety for some time now, partly as a result of the recommendations of the Gunning Committee, but the recently published reports by LNVH and FNV/VAWO reveal that inappropriate conduct still occurs too often in academia. Based on these reports, we have been communicating to the employees on a regular basis that we as VU Amsterdam are committed to social safety and that every case of inappropriate conduct is one too many.

To increase social safety, a support matrix has been developed with which employees can see at a glance to whom they can turn with complaints on various matters, such as intimidation, conflicts with a manager, aggression, sexual harassment, bullying, discrimination and abuse in general. VU Amsterdam also provides a training course on social safety awareness for managers. All faculty boards and the MTs of the service departments participate in this course in small groups. For employees, the University offers an active bystander course, in which employees are given concrete tips on how to respond if they experience or witness inappropriate conduct. In the past two years, confidential counsellors have also been appointed to the faculties and service departments to make it easier for employees to report complaints and/or inappropriate conduct.

At the same time, we see that these measures are insufficient, so VU Amsterdam is constantly looking for ways to make it easier and safer for employees to report inappropriate conduct. It also helps to raise awareness of inappropriate conduct by means of communication campaigns and training programmes for employees, such as the active bystander course and the social safety awareness course.

In addition, we think it is important to pay attention to the kind of behaviour we *do* think is desirable and which contributes to enhancing social safety and an inclusive working environment at the University. The VU Art of Engagement principles play an important role here (see image). Various communication instruments are used and new measures are being prepared in order to ensure that all employees are aware of these principles and to help them implement them in their everyday behaviour.


ART OF ENGAGEMENT



1. CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY.


- Balance your professional responsibility and your VU responsibility.
- Commit to collective agreements (apply or explain).
- Practice and preach our mission.

ARTHUR KLEINJANS, UPCAST




2. HAVE THE COURAGE TO MAKE DECISIONS.

- Focus on clear decisions and ownership.
- Convey decisions and take personal responsibility.
- Trust in others and give them scope for implementation.



3. BE TRANSPARENT AND CLEAR.


- Be trustworthy and take different interests into account.
- Make information as accessible as possible.
- Write and speak concisely, clearly and constructively.



4. LISTEN AND PROVIDE SCOPE FOR GROWTH.

- Listen carefully to others' intention.
- Create a healthy working environment, foster diversity and prevent harassment and bullying.
- Use regular feedback when working with others.

HEE LINDTANG, ZONDER TITEL



The following concrete steps will be taken:

- Continue to offer social safety and active bystander courses, and actively approach new target groups, including the heads of departments and PhD supervisors.
- Inform employees of the various safe and easily accessible channels that are available for reporting inappropriate conduct.
- Provide additional information to employees and managers about the Art of Engagement principles and what we understand under desirable behaviour.

4. Recognition: career development, leadership and decision-making

The goal of inclusive recognition is to design the system of assessment and promotion in such a way that all talented employees have an equal chance of getting promoted to a higher position, regardless of their gender, background, religion, colour or disability. The LNVH's glass ceiling index² reveals that women at VU Amsterdam experience hindrance in the promotion to positions at almost all job levels (PhD to assistant professor, assistant to associate professor and associate to full professor). It is however salient that, as mentioned earlier in this plan, this particularly applies to promotions from assistant professor to associate professor³.

In addition, VU Amsterdam is in the process of implementing the VU Vision on Recognition and Rewards, in which the various roles associated with an academic career (teaching, research, knowledge transfer and leadership) are valued more equally. This will have a positive effect on the

² The Glass Ceiling Index (GCI) is an indicator of the promotion, or lack thereof, of women to higher job categories. The GCI is greater than 1.0 when women are less represented at a given level than at the level below. If the proportion of women is the same in two consecutive job categories, the GCI is equal to 1.0.

³ See table 1.4, p. 15, [LNVH Women Professors Monitor 2020](#)

promotion of female researchers because, as LNVH research into hidden pay gaps⁴ has revealed, women spend less time on research and do not have the same access to the same resources to do research.

It is therefore important to pay attention to the career development of female scientific talent, so that they get the same opportunities to improve themselves as researchers and thus qualify for promotion more quickly.

We aim to achieve this in the following ways:

Training, coaching and mentoring

For several years now, VU Amsterdam has been providing the female leadership course for female employees in salary scale 11 and higher. This programme is intended for women who have the ambition to be promoted to a higher position within three years. Evaluations of the course reveal that it has been successful at making these women more aware of what it takes to actually qualify for a higher position, and so the University will continue to provide this programme.

Employees can also apply for career counselling and coaching. These opportunities are available to every employee, but they can be brought more to the attention of female talent in the organisation, especially assistant professors who have the ambition to get promoted up the ladder. In addition, academic staff at the beginning of their career can take part in the VU Amsterdam mentor-mentee programme. Since role models play an important role in the development of ambitions, we want to recruit more female mentors to this programme.

This involves the following concrete measures:

- Continuation of female leadership training.
- Bring career counselling and coaching opportunities more to the attention of female talent in the organisation, and specifically assistant professors.
- Recruit more female mentors to the mentor-mentee programme, with a target percentage of 35% for 2022-2025.

Diversity in decision-making

To ensure fairness in the promotion of women, it is important to also examine the decision-making process for appointments. If the composition of the application committee or the appointment advisory committee is more diverse, there is a greater likelihood of a candidate being selected who does not have the same characteristics or background as the majority of these committee members. Therefore, a rule has applied for some years now that there must be at least two women on the appointment advisory committee for full professors. This currently only applies to full professorships, but as discussed earlier in the plan, it would be a good idea to apply this rule to appointment advisory committees for associate professorships as well.

At the same time, the composition of application committees or appointment advisory committees should not be based on gender diversity alone; diversity is manifested in various dimensions, both visible and invisible, and including within gender identities. So application committees and appointment advisory committees should strive for the most diverse possible composition in the broadest sense. In addition, the WO&MEN@VU network or the female talent committees could be asked to advise on how to make decision-making for appointments fairer.

⁴ <https://www.scienceguide.nl/2019/03/vrouwelijke-wetenschappers-komen-minder-toe-aan-onderzoek/>

This involves the following concrete measures:

Draw up a guideline for more gender diversity in appointment advisory committees for associate professors, along the lines of the guideline for appointments of full professors.

- Where possible and necessary: seek advice from the WO&MEN@VU network and/or a female talent committee on decision-making procedures.

5. Capacity and resources

Capacity and resources will need to be made available for the implementation of the gender policy. For example, €90,000 per year of the VU Amsterdam talent funds are set aside for the implementation of the Fenna Diemer Lindeboom programme. In addition, the female leadership course is partly funded by the University with a budget of €15,000 per year, and career counselling and coaching is available for VU employees at the University's expense (under certain conditions). A budget has also been made available for increasing awareness of the Art of Engagement principles of the University.

VU Amsterdam has an active Diversity Office that helps to shape the broader University diversity policy. The Diversity Office employs a Chief Diversity Officer at the strategic level (member of the College of Deans), four Diversity Officers with each their own focus area (Campus and Community, Teaching, Research, and HR and Communication), two Student Diversity Officers and two project/policy officers. These positions amount to 3.6 FTE in total. In addition, the HR&HSE department employs a policy officer for diversity (in the broad sense) and social safety for 0.3 FTE. The faculties and service departments have also appointed employees as faculty/department diversity officers.

6. Monitoring and evaluation of progress

In order to monitor the progress of this plan and its effect on gender diversity within the organisation, we report the percentages of female full professors and associate professors every four months to the deans and directors of operations and annually to the Supervisory Board of VU Amsterdam. In addition, we participate each year in the Charter Talent to the Top report, which examines gender diversity in the top and sub-top of the organisation, both for academic and for support and management employees. We also review the annual LNVH Women Professors Monitor, which provides useful insight into the career opportunities of women at various levels within the organisation.

Based on these reports, the Gender Equality Plan is evaluated every two years and refined or modified where necessary.

On behalf of the Executive Board,

Prof. Dr. C. Mirjam van Praag

President