

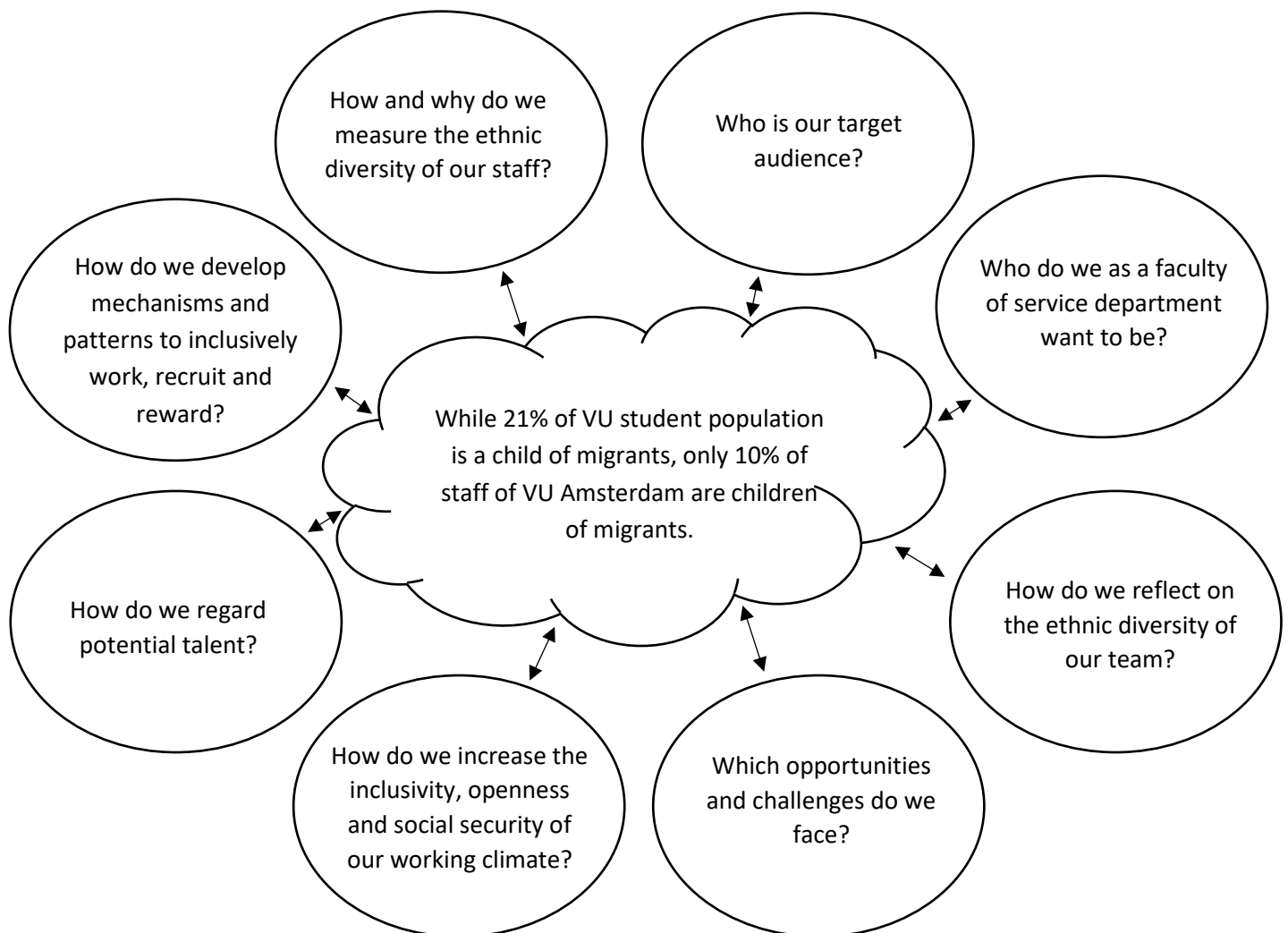
Colourful Staff Action Plan

Inclusive recruiting, working and rewarding,
with a focus on migration background

Finalised 27-09-2022

Action plan
Inclusive recruiting, inclusive working
and inclusive rewarding

**Goal. To employ, move up and retain
more colleagues with a migration
background in all layers and units of VU
Amsterdam**



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Introduction

The Diversity Office (DO) of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam) focuses on multiple dimensions of diversity: gender, age, sexual orientation, physical and mental capabilities and cultural, religious and social background. The Colourful Staff Action Plan, which the DO has drawn up, focuses on cultural background, specifically on migration background. This action plan is partially based on research that employed the distinction between western and non-western. As these terms are outdated, this action plan aims to primarily distinguish between migrants, who were born abroad and migrated to the Netherlands, and children of migrants, who were born in the Netherlands. Only where we must refer to data from the research in question do we employ the outdated distinction. We will fully transition to the new distinction between migrants and children of migrants once research employs this distinction in their data.

Many VU students with a migration background are of Surinam, Turkish, Antillean and Moroccan (STAM) descent. Especially these students, who are often children of migrants, are less likely to move up to an academic career. The goal of the action plan is to bring down barriers and facilitate a more natural career progression. As a result, the percentage of STAM employees will be closer to the percentage of STAM students. This action plan does not limit itself to the STAM group but focuses on all students and staff with a migration background.

The focus of the Colourful Staff Action Plan is on recruiting in a more equal manner, creating an inclusive working environment and paying more attention to inclusively recognising talent. This plan describes multiple interventions to inclusively recruit people with a migration background, to offer them a more inclusive working environment and to be receptive to recognising their talent. All talent is welcome at VU Amsterdam—regardless of the cultural background of these talents—but it seems we are unsuccessful in recognising and holding onto that talent.

This action plan is built upon three pillars, which are recruiting, working and recognising, and gives examples per pillar of effective interventions. Faculties and service departments can include these interventions in their annual plans; by doing so, they can systematically work towards a lasting diversity policy throughout the year. This plan also includes suggestions to improve the central diversity policy, which is predominantly focused on better recognising talent at entry, during selection processes and on promotions. This plan may contain suggestions for measures that benefit specific underrepresented groups; this fits with our vision that diverse teams are an enrichment and have an added value. To achieve the diversity goals of VU Amsterdam, we must be successful in this domain. Examples of interventions are career tracks or grants for specific groups of staff or traineeships for people with a migration background, similar to existing programmes at VU Amsterdam as well as other universities, such as Rijksuniversiteit Groningen and Eindhoven University of Technology. Another example is scouting specific employees. Interventions such as these fall under preferential policy and are therefore subjected to strict legal criteria. For this reason, when developing and continually adjusting these interventions, it is crucial to closely collaborate with our HR advisors, privacy lawyers and Privacy Champions.

The suggestions in this plan can be considered to be tools in a toolbox of which each faculty and service department decides which tools are most applicable to use within their team. The DO is more than willing to offer support, together with HR advisors and labour lawyers.

This action plan has already been discussed at length within numerous service departments and faculties. Once the Executive Board has laid down the Colourful Staff Action Plan, the DO will discuss the implementation of parts of the plan with the relevant organisational divisions and faculties with the goal of improving the decentral initiatives that contribute to an increased diversity of the staff.

Besides faculties and service departments deciding to implement interventions, colleagues can do multiple things as well. After all, the culture of a department is not created by rules but by people. For that reason, this action plan also contains examples and suggestions to make this culture more inclusive.

Finally, the action plan also requires effort on a central level. The Executive Board lays this plan down and discusses the implementation with the service departments and faculties. The Executive Board also initiates the implementation of this plan in VU-wide divisions.

Vision on diversity

Diversity is crucial to VU Amsterdam. It is in the DNA of the institution to value the differences between people. However, we cannot do this value justice until these differences are recognised and taken seriously and until we are also aware of the unequal opportunities that exist between people. That is why VU Amsterdam actively pursues policies for an inclusive organisation. These efforts occur in multiple domains of diversity, among which gender and sexual diversity, health and disabilities, cultural and religious diversity and first- and second-generation students. VU Amsterdam approaches diversity principally not as an individual characteristic of our employees and students, but from the perspective as an advancement of the organisation. The goal is not to make a policy to simply bridge the gap. However, the fact that specific groups are underrepresented is an indication that we might be inadequate in recognising talents from these groups. This action plan focuses on cultural diversity among employees as a result of several evident percentages and observations from the Belonging@VU research, the Diversity Monitor 2022—which was carried out during the employee survey research—and the multi-year plan of the DO.

Student population of VU Amsterdam

- VU Amsterdam is one of the most colourful universities in the Netherlands, as in 2015 21% of students has a non-western migration background, of whom 15% are children of migrants and 6% are international students (IVA Diversity Monitor 2017, p. 10). For comparison: the national percentage in the Netherlands of people with a non-western migration background is 14%.

General employee population of VU Amsterdam

- In 2022, VU Amsterdam has about 5200 employees. Of these 5200 employees, 39% has a migration background. That equals to a little over 2000 employees with a migration background.

- The percentage of employees with a non-western background in 2018 lagged far behind that percentage among students. This percentage in academic staff was 8.1%, of whom 1.4% are children of migrants and 6.6% are migrants or internationals, while the percentage in supportive and administrative staff was 8.4%, of whom 3.3% are children of migrants and 5.0% are migrants or internationals (IVA Diversiteitsonderzoek 2018, p. 23).
- Of all 2100 migrants in the employee population, the numbers of people from the STAM group and Indonesia decreased from 15% in 2018 to 11% in 2022 (IVA Diversiteitsonderzoek 2022, p. 4). This means that 4.2% of all employees at VU Amsterdam comes from the STAM group and Indonesia. For comparison: this group makes up almost a quarter of the population in Amsterdam.
- Among employees, migrants and children of migrants give a slightly lower report grade for working at VU and for their career opportunities. The longer they work at VU Amsterdam, the lower they grade. When grading the diversity policy of VU Amsterdam, men of Dutch descent are the most positive and women with a migration background are the least positive (Diversity Monitor 2022).

Academic staff population

- From 2018 to 2022 the composition of the academic staff has changed unprecedentedly. In 2022, almost half of the academic staff has a migration background, of which 41% migrated themselves and 6% is a child of migrants (IVA Diversiteitsonderzoek 2022, p. 17). From 2018 to 2022, the number of migrants has sharply increased from 27% to 41% (IVA Diversiteitsonderzoek 2022, p. 17). This increase is parallel to the increase in international students at VU Amsterdam in the same period.
- The increase is largely due to the people who are recruited as PhD candidates and postdocs on temporary contracts. The number of PhD candidates who were born abroad has risen in four years' time from 36% to 58% (IVA Diversiteitsonderzoek 2022, p. 19). In other words, most PhD candidates come from abroad.
- Academic staff with a migration background are most commonly teachers, researchers and PhD candidates. In other words, they have jobs at the start of their career with temporary and part-time contracts and are at a lower salary scale.
- Among professors and deans, 75% is of Dutch descent (IVA Diversiteitsonderzoek 2022, p. 19). Although the level of deans and directors has internationalised, there is no visible cultural diversity regarding migration background. It is thus also important we pay attention to international staff moving up to managerial positions.

A lack of diversity among staff can have multiple causes. It could be related to personal or group preferences. It could also be an indication of barriers in the structure and in the organisation. Whatever the cause may be, this lack of diversity implies that in managerial positions a wide variety of valuable perspectives are not heard and that students with a migration background have less role models with whom they can identify when it comes to their background.

VU Amsterdam strives to be an inclusive organisation where everybody feels at home. Moreover, various perspectives, backgrounds and perceptions within our teams can increase the quality of our

research, education and services to our students. For these reasons, VU Amsterdam attaches value to, among other things, more cultural diversity among employees.

The diversity policy of VU Amsterdam assumes that an inclusive organisation takes its shape through three dimensions:

- 1) facilitating accessibility and visibility of various groups, which results in the representation of these groups;
- 2) creating equal opportunities and equal rights for everybody in the VU Amsterdam community;
- 3) critically analysing unconscious social exclusion mechanisms.

With these starting points, VU Amsterdam responded to for instance the Black Lives Matter movement that put the need for equal rights and the prejudice against ethnical differences on the agenda on an international level. Another example is how the DO drew attention to unequal opportunities and unequal effects during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, the core question is which social exclusion mechanisms are consciously and unconsciously in effect in our organisation when we fill in job positions in advisory committees, selection committees, juries or bodies that make managerial decisions. How do our recruitment procedures affect cultural diversity? Do we sufficiently represent cultural diversity in key strategic discussions and decision-making processes?

This action plan gives concrete suggestions to increase inclusivity in three domains: equal recruiting, working and rewarding. ‘Recruiting’ refers to strengthening diversity by drawing more employees who have a migration background. To what extent are colleagues and students represented in this process? Which mechanisms consciously and unconsciously lead to including and excluding people in our work processes and working environments? How can we better identify, assess and appreciate talent in an inclusive way? And to achieve this, which new ways of taking action will be necessary?

‘Working’ refers to a more inclusive working environment that considers inclusive talent development—in other words, personal development in your working environment—, team diversity and culturally sensitive leadership.

‘Recognising’ refers to considering cultural diversity when weighing potential talent, with promotions, with prizes and with recognition in general. By including different cultural-ethnic backgrounds, new perspectives from that background, upbringing, migration process, living in different worlds and so on can result in various contributions.

Collaborating and monitoring

A new policy that focuses on inclusive recruiting, working and appreciating is not unique. Other higher education institutes have also put this theme on the agenda. For this reason, we will collaborate within Amsterdam and beyond (Amsterdams Akkoord September 2020) where possible. VU Amsterdam has a long history of collaborating with the Expertise Centrum Diversiteitsbeleid (ECHO) [lit.: Centrum of Expertise on Diversity Policies]. Additionally, since 2010 VU Amsterdam has been collaborating with the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and Bloemfontein in the domain of good practices. To make the new diversity policy, VU Amsterdam has also drawn inspiration beyond the world of

universities, for instance from the City of Amsterdam and the municipality The Hague, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), the Dutch Network of Women Professors (LNVH), PwC, various financial institutions and metropolitan colleges of higher education.

Good policy also requires proper monitoring. We want to set our goals as precisely and clearly as possible and check yearly whether we have reached these goals. However, that is easier said than done, because registering employees' ethnical background is rightly met with opposition, and other indicators are subjective in nature.

One example of a monitoring instrument is the Cultural Barometer Diversity Staff Randstad Universities (Sep 2020). A request to use this instrument has been submitted with the Statistics Netherlands (CBS) to measure the intake, career progression and drop out for the academic staff and the supportive staff. The expectation was that the monitoring could start in June 2021. However, a discussion erupted around the terminology 'western' and 'non-western' as employed by CBS. By now, CBS has adjusted the employed terminology and once again VU Amsterdam and other higher education institutions are given the choice to start either with this instrument or with a different monitoring system. The goal of the system is to make the ethnic diversity of the staff visible without this data being traceable to individuals and without VU Amsterdam registering the background of employees. Additionally, we can use the employee surveys from 2018 and 2022 and other surveys to show the effects of the diversity policy. Moreover, we can examine more closely what makes various groups of students being more or less likely to choose an academic career. In other words, this monitoring will give us insight in the degree of diversity per unit and helps us to make more effective policies.

What will we do?

The goal of the Colourful Staff Action Plan is to strengthen the inclusivity of VU Amsterdam by focusing more on people with a migration background, for instance the STAM group. By better incorporating different cultures, talents and perspectives, our teams can deliver higher quality research, education and services to our students. To achieve these results, we must actively recruit academic staff and other employees with a migration background, to create a more inclusive working environment and to tackle blind spots and obstacles in our appreciation and promotion policy. These actions can also stimulate, attract and retain colourful talent.

Focused policy requires choices. The percentage of academic staff who are migrants or children of migrants noticeably lags behind both this percentage among students as well as the Dutch average. Therefore, an important intention of this action plan is moving up students to an academic career. As most students with a migration background come from the STAM countries, we particularly have them in mind, but the policy is not limited to this group. The goal is to facilitate students with a migration background naturally moving up. The gauge for this is the percentage of STAM employees in comparison to the percentage of STAM students. To reach this goal, we must emphasise a pipeline approach where our own students with a (second generation) migration background are optimally stimulated to strive for or, at the very least, consider an academic career. Good policy is made

together. For instance, faculties can do a lot to improve students moving up to an academic career. VU Amsterdam in its entirety can stimulate that.

An example of a successful diversity policy is the interventions focused on female academic talent. After a yearly increase of 1% at the start of 2002, in 2020 VU Amsterdam reached the target percentage of 25% female professors. For the next years, the new ambition is to reach 33%.

<i>Timespan</i>	<i>Project</i>	<i>Goal</i>
<i>2002-2005</i>	<i>Equal Project 1</i>	<i>Awareness of gender issues</i>
<i>2005-present</i>	<i>Fenna Diemer Lindeboom (FDL) chairs</i>	<i>Recruitment, career growth and retention of female professors. Role models.</i>
<i>2009-present</i>	<i>Charter Talent to the top</i>	<i>Moving up female talent to job positions on the top; diversity in men and women in the organisational structure.</i>
	<i>Establish and monitor target figures on a yearly basis</i>	<i>In collaboration with universities and the Dutch Network of Women Professors (LNVH).</i>
	<i>More transparent criteria for the recruitment and selection commission (FDL)</i>	<i>A minimum of 2 female members in the AAC for FDL and professor positions.</i>
	<i>Mentorship female academics</i>	<i>Role models, networks, empowerment, leadership.</i>
	<i>Workshops Female Leadership</i>	<i>Stimulating women in personal leadership.</i>
	<i>Communication policy measures</i>	<i>Communication policy on gender neutral language use and on the visibility of women.</i>
	<i>WO&MEN@VU network</i>	<i>Network for a more balanced view on men and women in the organisation.</i>

What can a faculty do to stimulate students with a migration background to pursue an academic career?

- Organise information meetings on PhD programmes and research masters for master students, for instance by working with role models. Ensure that talented students from the STAM group are aware of these meetings by collaborating with our multicultural student associations.
- Arrange a platform (for instance digitally with videos and interviews) with visible colourful role models and offer possibilities in the domain of personal development, dilemmas and expectation, motivation, academic discipline and building a network.
- Explicitly use videos and photos of researchers with diverse cultural backgrounds for vacancies for PhD students and young researchers.
- At the moment there are only few student assistants with a migration background in employment. When recruiting student assistants, employ an inclusive approach that allows students with a colourful background to meet a faculty or service department of VU

Amsterdam during their studies. This measure will allow them to educate themselves and have a greater chance for their unique talent to be recognised. Ensure that various groups are represented in the selection committee.

- Present a yearly prize for talented graduates with a master's degree and with a migration background. This prize entails a grant for three months and intensive coaching for writing and submitting a PhD proposal or request. Criteria will have to be established with the Institutional and Legal Affairs of VU Amsterdam.
- Create awareness for inclusive talent scouting within faculties.
- Organise meetings on VU Amsterdam as an inclusive employer that has an eye for everyone's talent and qualities. Explicitly use videos of colleagues with diverse cultural backgrounds.

What can VU Amsterdam in general do?

- Initiate incentive programmes to inform master students with a migration background on academic career prospects and, more specifically, PhD programmes.
- Include in the trainee programme a specific focus on talented alumni and other candidates with a migration background and strive towards a quarter of trainees having a migration background.

In addition to stimulating students with a migration background, we will also work towards inclusive recruiting, working and rewarding.

Inclusive recruiting

The goal of inclusive recruiting—as described in this action plan—is to hire more employees with a migration background for an (academic) career at VU Amsterdam. Without excluding others, we especially keep children of migrants from the STAM group in mind.

Academic research positions

For the academic pipeline to properly function, it is necessary to create an initial breeding ground for junior teachers and PhD students and a second, follow-up breeding ground of postdocs who can move up to a position as assistant professor, associate professor or professor. As mentioned before, junior teachers, PhD students and postdocs do see an increase in the percentage of internationals, but the percentage of children of migrants is decreasing. We relate the target figure to the student population; in other words, we want to strive for 21% of employees being a child of migrants. The percentage in 2022 was 10%. In the first five years of this action plan our advice is to work towards an increase of 2 percentage points of employees in this target group.

The strategy must be, on the one hand, to make the pipeline more ethnically diverse by increasing the number of PhD students, postdocs and junior researchers with a migration background and, on the other hand, to ensure sufficient role models for academic positions. The latter can be encouraged by also pursuing an incentive policy later on in career paths. Non-academic staff requires a slightly different approach, as the intake in this group usually consists of people from all levels of different industries where there might be more diversity.

As employees who are children of migrants from the STAM group are in particular and noticeably underrepresented, the policy is focused on that group and thus not primarily on new highly skilled migrants. Highly skilled migrants experience a different socialisation process and usually navigate through academic networks. The last four years have shown that this group is incredibly successful in doing so.

Which instruments can faculties employ during recruitment?

- Use specialised recruitment bureaus, such as Colourful People and Global People.
- Employ focused scouting for and support talented students from the aforementioned groups by analogy with the programmes Be Prepared and Better Prepared.

For the positions of senior researcher, assistant professor, associate professor and professor we aim for a yearly growth of 1 to 2 percentage points. Instruments that we can employ, are:

- the tenure track and career track programmes for employees of the aforementioned group as well as specific inclusive scouting programmes;
- stimulation and facilitation of managerial experience for these employees;
- a chair programme (analogous to the FDL) that stimulates faculties to quickly increase ethnical diversity among their professors.

Involve your HR advisor and Privacy Champion with these initiatives. When in doubt, the employment lawyers and privacy lawyers of Institutional and Legal Affairs of VU Amsterdam are always available.

Non-academic staff

With the service departments, the pipeline is less problematic, as there are more possibilities to recruit employees from other industries with a culturally diverse background. In the past, there was a clear distinction in diversity between the lower and the higher scaled positions. Although this topic was not explicitly included in the 2022 employee survey, the cultural diversity in the lower scaled positions remains to be relatively high and the cultural diversity in the higher scaled positions remains to be relatively low. For that reason, the ambition for positions from scale 11 onwards must become greater in order to reach the same target figure. With the help of focused recruitment procedures and specialised bureaus, we can work towards rapid improvement of diversity in managerial positions and from scale 11 onwards. Moreover, when recruiting for staff positions where there is little cultural diversity within the teams, we will work towards more inclusivity. During the yearly strategic personnel planning, service departments will clarify which positions will be open and how they plan to fill these positions to achieve the target figure. See below for questions and advice for inclusive personnel planning and how you as a team can reflect on that.

To recruit more inclusively, it is important that we start vacancy texts with the priority area of VU Amsterdam to strive for diverse teams in order to increase the quality of our education, research and services and to become future proof. We also want everybody to feel recognised at VU Amsterdam and to feel at home. To achieve this, role models with a migration background are necessary. By signalling that VU Amsterdam wants to be a diverse university, candidates with a migration background

will feel invited to respond. Even more inclusive is the phrasing that candidates with a migration background are explicitly invited to apply to a job.

By doing so, you show that teams at VU Amsterdam want to increase their ethnical diversity. We must critically examine the entire recruitment process. Keep in mind that diversity is not a characteristic of a single individual, but a characteristic of teams and communities. 'Diverse' employees do not exist; teams can be more or less diverse and take diversity more or less seriously in their duties. Every step in the recruitment process has unintentional obstacles and we can take steps to become more inclusive, which refers to both cultural background and other forms of diversity. Below is an outline of the five steps of inclusive recruiting. Each step contains options that we can use during recruitment processes. The HR advisor and the DO are glad to assist if there is any need for information or additional training.

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"We need to focus on diversity. I want you to hire more people who look different, but think just like me."

Focus points for inclusive recruiting

Step 1: Inclusive personnel planning

- Reflect on the composition of the team: Who are we? And who do we want to be?
- Research which competences and qualities are present in the team. Does the team reflect the target group, students?
- Consider the degree of cultural diversity in the team and the wish of reinforcing it.
- Make use of an external view on diversity in the strategic personnel planning. This can be done through the DO.

Step 2: Inclusive selection committee

- Form selection committees with attention to internal diversity. When a formed team lacks diversity, then invite external and complementary members or students with a different background, for instance through the DO.
- When you want to explicitly welcome candidates with a migration background, ensure there are committee members with a migration background. To ensure success, go

through all steps with an external member of the selection committee as support, expert and critical friend. The DO trains colleagues who can fulfil this role.

- Train or inform the selection committee in the domain of bias in selection criteria, evaluation criteria and interview tactics.
- Train the selection committee to ask in-depth questions, as these questions provide various ways of getting a full answer from the candidate. With more modest candidates with a migration background, asking more questions is crucial for the conversation and eventually for choosing the best candidate.

Step 3: Inclusive vacancies

- Make use of methods for more inclusive job profiles. The DO can inform you on this topic.
- Phrase the vacancy in an inclusive manner, keeping in mind the various elements and choice of words that are more or less likely to recruit various target groups.
- Share the vacancy through channels that are findable by and effective for the various target groups.
- Actively reach out to candidates from underrepresented groups, for instance by using specific recruitment bureaus. The DO can inform you on this topic.

See below for an example with a focus on employees with a migration background and a link to the focus area in the VU Strategy.

Step 4: Inclusive selection of job application letters

- Ensure that the selection committee is transparent over any involvement with the candidates and that this committee critically reflects on the impact of this involvement on the selection.
- Be alert for any self-reinforcing mechanisms in the committee, for instance by immediately sharing first impressions, especially when the dominant voices speak first.
- Reason from complementation: do not just take the individual qualities into account, as this tactic risks looking for clones of what is deemed to be successful. Instead, look at which additional qualities strengthen the team.
- Particularly invite those candidates for job interviews who add the most to the team, for instance especially because they are unlike the rest of the team, as long as they meet the job requirements.

Step 5: Inclusive job interviews

- Use a structured questionnaire and the same assessment framework for each candidate to compare candidates with one another.
- Employ a process supervisor who ensures that all candidates get the same questions and that in-depth questions are asked to ensure that every candidate answers the questions on the structured questionnaire.
- Create the opportunity for candidates to converse with an application committee with at least two members with a migration background—that is, if the committee is of decent size—and give them the possibility to experience a connection with the various members.

By assigning two members to this role, two pairs of eyes and ears function as a critical friend.

- Confirm and appreciate the individuality of candidates in the interview and take the unique contribution and experience of each candidate into account during the assessment.

Step 6: Evaluation

- Was the recruitment process sufficiently inclusive, according to the aforementioned steps? Does this have the intended effect? What are the success factors and what are points for improvement?
- Was the process sufficiently transparent? How is this evident?
- What are the different insights of the members of the selection committee?
- Is expertise regarding recruitment necessary? If yes, what kind of expertise?
- How did you experience this experiment? How do you reflect on this experiment?

An example of inviting and effective phrasings in vacancy texts:

Based on the core values 'open' and 'diverse', the VU Strategy 2020-2025 has chosen diversity as a priority area, focusing on colour, ethnical, cultural and religious background, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, disability, previous education and academic field.

Faculty X has a relatively high percentage of first-generation students, of which the majority have a migration background.

Faculty Y believes that the enrichment that diversity offers in every facet has not yet been sufficiently utilised and finds that at the moment diversity among students is only partially reflected in the staff.

Faculty Z has a culturally diverse student population, among which many students with a migration background as well as English-speaking international students. It is important that you are able to place yourself in these students' shoes.

For that reason, candidates with a migration background are explicitly invited to apply.

Inclusive working

The goal of inclusive working is to create a working environment with a safe and open climate in which we can optimally work with one another and feel at home. Such working environments occur less naturally once the backgrounds of colleagues differ more from one another. Employees must feel like they are a valuable part of the organisation and that they have found their niche. Processes of inclusion and exclusion are often implicit but have all the more effect. Inclusion is created together, with colleagues, managers and students.

Open, welcoming and safe (source: VU.nl)

'The VU Campus aims to be an open, safe and welcoming environment and actively takes steps to achieve this.'

- 'The VU Campus is an open and welcoming environment.' That is why VU Amsterdam actively takes steps to recognise, prevent and contain safety risks and incidents. We want to safeguard everybody's safety with safety and security management. VU Amsterdam has a safety policy that brings together all aspects of safety. There is a Commission Safety & Security and an Expert Group Social Safety. The DO is represented in both.
- VU Amsterdam has a single point of contact for [social safety](#). Although reports can be made anonymously, for an optimal response it is preferable that the person who made the report can make themselves be known. Additionally, VU Amsterdam has five confidential counsellors for students and staff. Students and staff can contact these counsellors for help when they have—directly or indirectly—experienced sexual intimidation, discrimination and other forms of inappropriate behaviour, such as a violence and aggression. Together, they can discuss the next possible steps of action, for instance an independent investigation by a complaints committee. At the moment, PhD students can turn to multiple confidential counsellors.
- Every unit has decentralised confidential counsellors. The number of reports that all confidential counsellors receive, is indicated in the yearly report of VU Amsterdam. VU Amsterdam also has an ombudsman. VU employees can contact this person for help with analysing, solving and assessing problems or complaints, for instance on unkept promises about education or promotions, working conditions or reorganisations. Managers can also contact the ombudsman. The ombudsman has an independent position, and any complaints are handled confidentially. Additionally, the ombudsman has a referring role.
- VU Amsterdam finds it important that any misconduct or wrongdoings within the organisation can be reported safely. For that reason, the Whistle-blowers' Regulations have been drawn up (<https://vu.nl/en/employee/policy-and-organisation/whistleblowers-regulations>). Whistleblowing can be described as an employee or student at VU Amsterdam reporting suspicions of serious, illegal or immoral practices that are taking place under the responsibility of VU Amsterdam and in the context of which a significant general social interest or an interest of the institution itself is at stake.

- For questions that are related to diversity, discrimination and inclusion (regarding culture, gender, sexual orientation and philosophy of life), the DO is also a contact point and offers information and advice.

An inclusive working environment can only come into being when we continue to work towards it together, to give it shape within departments and between colleagues. Therefore, the inclusivity of the working environment depends on people's attitude and behaviour. Managers, faculties and service departments can facilitate an inclusive working environment by setting the right example and by ensuring a safety net for when something goes wrong. The important take-away is that when the team becomes more diverse, it is no longer the newcomer but the whole team that changes and adapts.

A culturally diverse team is no longer the old team with a new colour, but a new team that brings new possibilities and challenges for everybody.

What can you as a colleague do for a more inclusive working environment?

- Show interest in the other person, especially if they have a different background.
- Do not automatically assume that the other person is immediately familiar with the habits and customs of the organisation or unit. And do not automatically assume that habits and customs are self-evident and mainstream.
- Keep cultural and religious sensitivities in mind, for instance a different degree of directness and assertiveness, other types of human interactions, different ways of addressing each other, as well as holidays, foods and drinks and so on. That does not have to mean that everybody suddenly has to adapt, but just that the majority does not rule. Instead, make it a subject for discussion and search for a compromise that works for everybody.
- Ensure that the voice of (cultural) minorities are heard during meetings and conferences. Explicitly ask for the opinion of others and take it seriously. Be aware of your own discomfort and how to deal with this. Feelings of discomfort are understandable. Recognise them, acknowledge them and do something about them. 'Deep Democracy' can prove to be helpful with this. For more information, contact the DO.

What can a department do for a more inclusive working environment?

- Organise (monthly) lunch meetings for colleagues with and without a migration background as part of professional bridging.
- Ask buddies to function as contact points to ensure that new employees, especially those with a migration background, have an easily accessible way of asking questions to find their way at VU Amsterdam.
- Organise networking meetings for employees with a migration background where they have a safe environment to reflect on how they can hold their position in a way that fits them, their background and the organisation (for instance regarding assertiveness, competitive drive and collaboration).

- Strengthen the inclusion skills of managers and evaluate those skills with for instance a satisfaction survey among employees. Ensure that the support network is well known and accessible, including a help centre for asking questions and reporting unpleasant experiences.

What can VU Amsterdam do to create a more inclusive working environment?

- Organise awareness campaigns and workshops for teams and managers on cultural sensitivity, prejudices, bullying behaviour and bystanders and undesirable behaviour.
- Organise focused mentoring and managerial workshops for employees with a migration background.
- Create opportunities to include opinions of minority voices when making decisions and discussing and explore how you can do so in your team and unit, for instance with the workshop Deep Democracy.
- Make use of workshops for managers on inclusive leadership, diversity sensitivity and your team. The DO can inform you on this topic.
- Organise Courageous Conversations on sensitive dilemmas whenever the situation calls for them.



Inclusive rewarding

The goal of inclusive appreciating is to take great care in setting up evaluation and promotion processes that will allow talented employees with a migration background to move up to higher positions just as easily as other employees. That may seem self-evident, but it is not. Similar to recruiting employees, our evaluation criteria and the way we have organised evaluations have proven to contain blind spots that we are not conscious of and are often unintentional. We often recognise qualities more easily in people who look like us than in people who are quite different.

This topic is closely related to the wider project 'Recognition and Reward', where we change the way we look at employees' talents and performances. In this project, we search for more variation in what a career path can look like and emphasise the various ways in which employees function and excel. Moreover, it is not only the individual achievements that are of importance, but also the way in which somebody contributes to the team, to the organisation or as bridge between the university and society

(https://www.universiteitenvannederland.nl/en_GB/Recognition-and-rewards-of-academics.html).

Within this process of recognising and rewarding, an inclusive and cultural-sensitive approach results in a number of critical questions:

- How inclusive are the criteria that we employ for evaluating academic achievements? How are publications in languages other than English taken into account? How are academic publications and other publications, such as lectures and podcasts, for a wider audience taken into account?
- How inclusive are the criteria that we apply to employees of service departments?
- Which talents are rewarded and stimulated and to what extent are these talents in particular a characteristic of the culturally dominant group?
- Which qualities of researchers play a part in culturally sensitive leadership and in meticulously handling diversity when promoting managers?
- Who make the decisions on evaluations and promotions and in what way are they challenged to critically engage with their own blind spots?

Every day employees are faced with recognising and rewarding on the short term. However, rewards, recognitions, evaluations and promotions are all related to functioning on the long-term.

Not only because changing an institutional structure is a long-winded matter, but also because becoming aware of different talents simply takes longer. An important starting point is therefore that new employees—especially those with a migration background—follow a longer development initiative in which they can orient on the organisation in a broader sense, get a better impression of the possibilities, join in based on their talents and get more opportunities for their talents to be recognised. This development initiative can be realised by offering traineeships or degree programmes and tenure tracks of more than one year. If other employees are barred from this, then it is a matter of preferential policy, which is only allowed under strict conditions. For advice on this topic, contact the legal experts of VU Amsterdam. These instruments will give potential talents the opportunity to develop and will increase the size of groups of people whose talent is visible. With more variety in job profiles, more justice will be done to the variety in talents.

What can we do as VU Amsterdam?

- Increase the cultural awareness by including this topic in workshops and leadership programmes. Also pay attention to programmes for junior and medior positions, as decisions are often made earlier in the career path.
- Pay more attention to inclusive leadership, as this measure will strengthen equal rewarding and promotion for employees with a migration background.
- With promotions, ensure that the higher job positions gradually become as diverse as the lower job positions. Keep your strategic personnel planning in mind to ensure that not only employees of the majority group move up to higher functions.
- Specific programmes, such as the aforementioned chair programme, can support employees with a migration background, as long as the preferential policy follows the legal requirements. Attention to an inclusive personnel planning increases by reflecting on the

representation of the various dimensions of diversity in the composition of the staff. For instance, to what extent is the assessment system of the staff review an inclusive tool with which to reflect on the development and promotion of colourful talent? Use these instruments to increase diversity. In what way do managers encourage one another to consciously look at colourful talent and their own qualities? Give more attention to potential talents. Reflect more on the development of employees.

- Put the focus of annual consultations more on professional development and increasing cultural diversity. Consciously reflect on the implicit norms and standards that you as a manager carry with you and on the question how inclusive these norms and standards are. Develop incentive programmes such as career tracks with which employees can move up to the next position within three years. You can reflect on this with colleagues of the DO.

Final words

This action plan serves as a handle and gives specific activities to inclusively recruit employees with a migration background, to offer them a more inclusive working environment and to look in a different light at their functioning by looking more broadly at the reward and promotion processes. The goal of this plan is to make VU Amsterdam a more diverse organisation, especially for employees with a migration background. However, there are more dimensions of diversity, such as gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, social-economic background and education of the family of origin and so on. Every dimension of diversity raises specific questions. That also means that policy on inclusion and diversity—and therefore this action plan—is not one-size-fits-all but is focused on each person's individuality.

Who plays a central role in this process at VU Amsterdam? And who can you contact for questions?

- The Executive Board has addressed the priority area Cultural diversity and puts it on the agenda, draws borders and defines quota and target figures partly based on the benchmark of the Cultural Barometer or a different system to be selected for monitoring.
- Managers place cultural diversity in the organisation and unit on the agenda, facilitate processes on diversity and inclusion in teams and units and carry the level of awareness of the organisation as well as their own process of awareness.
- The DO functions as an initiator, facilitator and advisor by providing knowledge, expertise and expertise platforms on diversity and inclusion related to personnel, colourful bureaus, Cultural Barometer, HR&HSE, Communication, social security, discrimination reporting centre and trained external members with a migration background for selection committees. Contact us at divers@vu.nl.
- The service department HR&HSE is the co-ambassador of this action plan. Contact HR&HSE through the department manager HR Advice and Career & Development for guidance with selection processes, knowledge and expertise on leadership programmes, targeted workshops and meetings, tools for recruitment and selection of candidates, targeted traineeships, talent programmes, talent managements and labour market communications.
- Institutional and Legal Affairs fulfil the role as an advisor and ensures that everything happens within the boundaries of the law.