VU Diversity Office Annual Plan 2024

# 1 About the Diversity Office

## 1.1 Mission

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam) has one of the most diverse student populations of the Netherlands. People differ from one another in ethnic, cultural and religious background, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, disability, previous education and academic orientation. Everybody of the VU community should be able to bridge these differences.

To successfully do so, VU Amsterdam must strengthen her position as a diverse, inclusive and accessible university. VU students and staff members must not feel left out in their learning or working environment. That is why VU Amsterdam strives for tailor-made opportunities for her students and staff members to ensure that everybody can bring out the best in them.

## 1.2 Vision

The Diversity Office strives for a university where everybody feels safe, welcome and appreciated, where we make the most of everybody's talents and where we see individual differences as an enrichment.

## 1.3 Assets

The Diversity Office of VU Amsterdam stands out from diversity offices of other universities by the high amount of fte that the team consists of. In 2023 the Diversity Officer consisted of about 6.7 fte divided among 12 staff members.

Additionally, these team members have varied backgrounds and competences as well as life and work experiences. This variety results in expertise on many aspects of diversity and inclusion within the Diversity Office.

Furthermore, the Diversity Office approaches VU Amsterdam from four angles: campus & community, HR, education and research. This approach results in focused perspectives on the university.

Finally, the Diversity Office collaborates with both established and upcoming diversity networks for people from underrepresented groups. These collaborations allow the Diversity Office to draw upon the knowledge, experiences and perspectives of people from underrepresented groups and to include and strengthen their voices.

# 2 Annual goals of the Diversity Office

## 2.1 Impact goals

In her lifetime, the Diversity Office works to achieve six end goals, or impact goals. These impact goals are further elaborated in Appendix 5.1. In short, the impact goals are as follows:

1. Staff diversity equals student diversity.
2. Students and staff experience that individual differences are acknowledged and valued for equal opportunities in their learning or working environment.
3. Curricula are inclusive in terms of student backgrounds, student success and knowledge perspectives.
4. VU Amsterdam is a leading university in the Netherlands in research on justice, equity, diversity and inclusion.
5. Facilities at VU Amsterdam are accessible for all bodies and minds.
6. VU Amsterdam defines institutional processes and international cooperations through equity, mutuality and justice.

To work towards these six impact goals, the Diversity Office also carries out supporting activities to strengthen the visibility, effectiveness and continuity of the Diversity Office.

## 2.2 Outcomes

The Diversity Office concretises the six impact goals by setting up specific subgoals, or outcomes, every year. These outcomes are tied to large-scale projects, which the Diversity Office realizes with service departments and faculties, the Decentralized Diversity Officers and Diversity Work Groups, and student associations and diversity networks. The projects are further elaborated upon in Appendix 5.2. In 2024 the Diversity Office will work towards the following outcomes:

* Impact goal 1. Staff diversity equals student diversity.
  + Outcome a. The Diversity Office has a measurement instrument for the Colourful Staff Action Plan to gain insight into the composition of the staff population of VU Amsterdam.
  + Outcome b. The Diversity Office supports the team Recruitment to include diversity in their recruitment manual.
  + Outcome c. The Diversity Office collaborates with the team Recruitment to organise at least 2 workshops on an inclusive recruitment process.
* Impact goal 2. Students and staff experience that individual differences are acknowledged and valued for equal opportunities in their learning or working environment.
  + Outcome a. The Diversity Office collaborates with the service department Student and Educational Affairs on the project 'Bridging Success' to support student associations of VU Amsterdam in organising at least 3 connecting activities.
  + Outcome b. The Diversity Office hosts at least 2 meetings for a new network aimed at staff members with a migration background.
  + Outcome c. As part of the project 'Inclusive Workplace', the Diversity Office develops interventions to make the working environment in VU Amsterdam more inclusive.
  + Outcome d. The Diversity Office and the Decentralised Diversity Officer C&M initialise a workgroup for inclusive student recruitment.
* Impact goal 3. Curricula are inclusive in terms of student backgrounds, student success and knowledge perspectives.
  + Outcome a. As part of the project 'Inclusive Curricula', the Diversity Office carries out a pilot to review the curriculum of one study programme.
  + Outcome b. As part of the project 'Inclusive Curricula', the Diversity Office draws up a recommendation plan for study programmes to review their curricula with the help of the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and the Diversity Office.
  + Outcome c. The Diversity Office carries out research into the study success of students with a migration background.
* Impact goal 4. VU Amsterdam is a leading university in the Netherlands in research on justice, equity, diversity and inclusion.
  + Outcome a. The Diversity Office carries out the I Belong @VU survey.
* Impact goal 5. Facilities at VU Amsterdam are accessible for all bodies and minds.
  + Outcome a. As part of the project 'Inclusive Examination', the Diversity Office supports the team Studying with a disability to take stock of the accommodations students with a disability need during exams.
* Impact goal 6. VU Amsterdam defines institutional processes and international cooperations through equity, mutuality and justice.
  + Outcome a. As part of the project 'Decolonization LAB', the Diversity Office takes stock of the good practices of decolonization of other university on an international scale.
  + Outcome b. On the one-year anniversary of the Decolonization LAB, the Diversity Office organises a colloquium on decolonization at VU Amsterdam.
  + Outcome c. As part of the project 'Inclusive Examination', the Diversity Office collaborates with relevant parties, such as education offices, to write a VU-wide policy on exemption from examinations on religious holidays. Additionally, this policy is approved by the Consultative Body for Portfolio Holders for Teaching and the Executive Board.
  + Outcome d. The Diversity Office takes stock of the complaint handling process within VU Amsterdam.

## 2.3 Supporting activities

The Diversity Office also carries out activities that contribute to the viability, effectiveness and continuity of the office. In 2024 the Diversity Office strengthens her network, inventories the needs of the VU community and carries out her communications plan.

* The Diversity Office strengthens her network.
  + The Diversity Office strengthens the internal ties with Social Safety to tackle worrisome behaviour and strengthens the ties with the service department Student and Education Affairs and student associations such as FAM, ISA and Anatolia.
  + The Diversity Office strengthens ties with external parties by being part of the National Network of Diversity Officers to exchange knowledge and experience on setting up and carrying out the diversity policy.
  + The Diversity Office supports established and upcoming diversity networks of VU Amsterdam to strengthen their mission and goals.
* The Diversity Office takes stock of the needs of the VU community.
  + The Diversity Office sponsors initiatives for diversity and inclusion for and by VU students and staff members. This activity supports the initiative and self-sufficiency of VU students and staff members and allows the Diversity Office to learn about their needs.
  + The Diversity Office supports each faculty and service department to assign a Decentralised Diversity Office or Diversity Work Group that is up to date on the needs of their division.
  + The Diversity Office narrows down her role in requests for advice and in complaint handling and makes her role clear to and visible for the VU community.
* The Diversity Office writes a communications plan and carries it out.
  + The Diversity Office employs various communications channels to reach her target audience.
  + The analytics of the webpages of the Diversity Office indicate that the information on those pages is relevant.
  + When relevant, the Diversity Office writes for new or existing projects a communications plan.
  + The events that the Diversity Office organises, get the number of visitors the Diversity Office aimed for.

# Appendices

## A. Elaboration on the impact goals

In her lifetime, the Diversity Office works to achieve six end goals, or impact goals. Once VU Amsterdam achieves these goals, the Diversity Office has become redundant. The impact goals are as follows:

1. Staff diversity equals student diversity.

While the student population of VU Amsterdam is very diverse, the diversity among staff lags far behind. That may mean that there are structures and mechanisms that hinder some groups and favour others and that there is a lack of role models who make diversity visible. That is something we aim to change.

1. Students and staff experience that individual differences are acknowledged and valued for equal opportunities in their learning or working environment.

VU Amsterdam strives for an inclusive culture in classrooms, teams and research groups, where students and staff experience the contributions stemming from their background and capacities are utilised and valued. To achieve this goal, we critically analyse the interactions between students and between staff on the norms of the ‘standard’ student or staff member. Additionally, when hosting group activities, we take cultural differences into account to ensure that nobody is left out.

1. Curricula are inclusive in terms of student backgrounds, student success and knowledge perspectives.

At VU Amsterdam, students must have equal chances to be successful in their academic development regardless of their background and resources. Moreover, a variety of knowledge perspectives enriches students’ academic knowledge. That is why the Diversity Office aims to enrich the curricula with various points of view, for instance by including the contributions of marginalised voices and the experiences of underrepresented groups.

1. VU Amsterdam is a leading university in the Netherlands in research on justice, equity, diversity and inclusion.

More than 200 researchers at VU Amsterdam focus on the broad topic of diversity. To be a leading figure in this area, our university must stimulate a variety of people to conduct research.

1. Facilities at VU Amsterdam are accessible for all bodies and minds.

Facilities of VU Amsterdam, including the buildings, their layout and IT infrastructure, must be accessible by design. This accessibility shows that VU Amsterdam is aware of the existing variety of bodies and visible as well as invisible disabilities. An accessible university meets the needs of students and staff in their study or work environment, allowing these students and staff to flourish at VU Amsterdam.

1. VU Amsterdam defines institutional processes and international cooperations by equity, mutuality and justice.

Lengthy and seemingly obvious developments have allowed for systematic favouritism and discrimination to become intertwined with structures and processes. Examples of such structures and processes are international collaborations and recruitment, open access and cost models. By analysing these structures and processes of VU Amsterdam, the university will become aware on how it stimulates honest and equal relations on both an internal and external level.

The Diversity Office concretises these impact goals by setting up specific outcomes on a yearly basis, which are tied to new and existing projects of the Diversity Office.

## B. Projects

The Diversity Office strives to achieve the overarching impact goals by setting up projects on different scales and by realising these projects with service departments, faculties, the Decentralised Diversity Officers and Diversity Work Groups, student associations and diversity networks. In 2024 the Diversity Office will work on the following projects:

* Colourful Staff Action Plan

While the student population of VU Amsterdam is very diverse, the diversity among staff lags far behind. Moreover, the results from the research 'Diversiteitsonderzoek 2022' have shown that people who are from one or multiple underrepresented groups are more often unhappy with VU Amsterdam as an employer, when compared to people who are not a part of an underrepresented group. As a result, VU Amsterdam uses the tools in the Colourful Staff Action Plan to focus on inclusive processes when it comes to recruiting, working and appreciating.

* Bridging Success

Students at VU Amsterdam have a strong tendency to form groups, where they often stay within their own group. To bring various student groups in contact with one another, the Diversity Office and the service department Student and Educational Affairs have initiated the project 'Bridging Success'. This project gives students the assistance and financial support to plan activities that brings various student associations of VU Amsterdam together throughout the year. By encouraging students to enter into dialogue with one another, create understanding for one another and exchange knowledge, VU Amsterdam strengthens student engagement, mutual connection and solidarity between her students.

* Decolonization LAB

The Decolonization LAB is a physical place where VU students and staff members can interact with various forms of media to broaden and deepen their knowledge of the colonial past of VU Amsterdam, of the Netherlands and of previous Dutch colonies. The Decolonization LAB is a collaborative effort with various parties:

* + service departments of VU Amsterdam, among which the International Office, Centre for Teaching and Learning, DURF and the University Library;
  + faculties of VU Amsterdam, among which the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences;
  + partnerships within VU Amsterdam, among which the Migration and Diversity Centre and CLUE+;
  + external partners on both national and international level, among which the Anton de Kom Leerstoel, Anton de Kom University, University of California Los Angeles and UFS Bloemfontein.

These collaborations allow the Diversity Office to make knowledge on colonialism and decolonialization available, specifically on the ways in which colonization still affects everyday life and on how we can become aware of and tackle everyday colonialism.

* I Belong @VU

The I Belong @VU research gives the Diversity Office insight into which student groups feel less comfortable, safe and welcomed at VU Amsterdam - in other words, which student groups experience less belonging. By comparing the results from this research to the results of the same research in 2020, the Diversity Office can track the change in belonging among VU students.

* Inclusive Curricula

The goal of the project 'Inclusive Curricula' is to critically analyse the curricula at VU Amsterdam, specifically the knowledge perspectives that are included in the curricula, how these perspectives are chosen and which perspectives are forgotten in the process.

* Inclusive Student Recruitment

VU Amsterdam has one of the most diverse student populations. However, this diversity is insufficiently reflected in our student recruitment. As a result, the Diversity Office and the service department Communications & Marketing are initiating a work group to make the student recruitment process more inclusive.

* Inclusive Examination

The Diversity Office receives increasingly more reports of students who do not get the same opportunities as other students to take their exams, for instance due to their religious background or a disability. Consequently, the Diversity Office initiates the project 'Inclusive Examination'.

* Inclusive Workplace

The project 'Inclusive Workplace' is an extension of the Colourful Staff Action Plan and offers VU employees tools to work together more inclusively.

* Complaint handling processes

The Diversity Office regularly receives complaints, reports and questions from VU students and staff members on matters related to diversity and inclusion and on the complaint handling process they go through as a result of these matters. By improving this process, VU Amsterdam gains insights into the damaging and excluding structures at the university and in the ways in which we can tackle and prevent intimidation, discrimination and power abuse.

* Network for VU employees with a migration background

To help VU employees with a migration background to feel more safe, welcome and at home at the university, the Diversity Office will start a network that focuses on belonging for these employees.

* Research 'Study Success of Students with a Migration Background'

The 'Belonging at VU' research from 2020 has shown that students with a migration background relatively complete less study points than students without a migration background. These results have led to the Diversity Office setting up new research that focuses on the study success of students with a migration background.