



10 ways to increase the impact of diversity policies in Higher Education: Policy Recommendations

BACKGROUND

The HE4U2 project aims to develop tools to facilitate the integration of cultural diversity within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This document is a synthesis of a report¹ analysing current European, national and institutional policies that make provision for the integration of cultural diversity in Higher Education (HE). It is addressed to policy makers, institutions and staff of HE, and formulates 10 recommendations on how to better integrate cultural diversity practices which are grounded in research and from consultations with stakeholders and policy makers.

National policies about diversity reflect the regional contexts and thus focus on different groups within the diversity spectrum. These include differences of race, age, gender, social class, sexual orientation, disability, migrant status, and ethnic or religious minorities such as Muslim and Traveller or Roma communities. The terms used to address student diversity in HEIs are oftentimes quite broad and can include different categories of students in umbrella terms such as “socially disadvantaged students” or “under-represented groups”. These general terms can work to make these groups appear homogeneous and thereby hide the complexity of the different issues at stake. Hence, European policies about diversity are important strategic documents (i.e. declarations, position papers) as they are addressed to member states and education systems as a whole. They remain very general, which respects the autonomy of universities in this area, but many have created explicit policy and implementation strategies about their diversity objectives (i.e. equal opportunities for all, access to HE for all). The recommendations from this project attempt to reflect the variation of inclusive policies on student diversity in European Higher Education.

¹ Available at <http://he4u2.eucen.eu/outputs/> (section 3, citation : Bernal Gonzalez, A; de Viron, F; Souto Lopez, M; on behalf of the HE4u2 consortium (Ed.) (2018): *Policy recommendations on better integrating cultural diversity in Higher Education-Full report*)

Integrating cultural diversity in Higher Education – HE4u2

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RECOMMENDATIONS

| No | Recommendations | EU | Nation | HEI |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----|--------|-----|
| Promoting the integration of cultural diversity into HE | | | | |
| 1 | Celebrate human diversity | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 2 | Commit to active diversity management | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Integrating cultural diversity into HE | | | | |
| 3 | Promote open access to and success in HE | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 4 | Integrate diversity into curricula | | | ✓ |
| 5 | Train diversity skills (pedagogical approaches) | | | ✓ |
| 6 | Collaborate to solve intercultural questions | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Sustainability for integration of cultural diversity into HE | | | | |
| 7 | Ensure sustainability | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 8 | Embed diversity in strategy papers and quality plans | | | ✓ |
| 9 | Provide incentives and (financial) resources | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 10 | Monitor the impact of diversity policy | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

1. CELEBRATE HUMAN DIVERSITY

Following a humanistic educational approach, HEI are places that promote person-centred education and where diverse learners meet. Learners with migrant background or from underrepresented groups are nowadays seen as distinct interest groups of their own. Educational policies should place **more emphasis on humanist education, valuing the learner as a person and not only promoting employment benefits or the economic value of education**. This can be achieved, for example, by establishing a culture of hospitality or celebrating a Year of Inclusive Education. Involvement of scholars with minority background should be encouraged at academic staff level.

2. COMMIT TO ACTIVE DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

Universities are relatively autonomous organisations – a principle that allows them to design internal policies and measures according to their needs and allows different degrees of implementation of diversity management or of the creation of an inclusive organisational culture. Thus, HEIs have the **possibility to develop a climate of cultural diversity and social inclusion** in order to become better institutions in terms of social responsibility and internationalisation. HEIs should **merge their activities of social responsibility and diversity management**, making them more visible to the learners but also to the public. This can contribute to working towards **positively influencing the development of an intercultural society**. On campus, this could be promoted by the creation of a shared intellectual space, in which specific cultural identities are encountered, respected and celebrated as a vital step towards a more inclusive society.

3. PROMOTE OPEN ACCESS & SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Previous qualifications of migrant learners and minorities are often not recognised³ in the host country and this leads to exclusion from education and the labour market. Access to HE for migrant students must become a key priority of EU, national or regional and institutional policies. It is important to **promote access through the recognition of migrant learners' professional background and academic qualifications and to promote the recognition of qualifications from countries outside the Bologna Process**.

There is a **lack of data about the impact of active diversity management on diverse student groups**. Universities should therefore not only foster students' access to HE, but also their success, i.e. promote, acknowledge and even celebrate their academic achievements, and collect data about which measures have a positive effect.

2 See UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals <https://en.unesco.org/sdgs> and [eucen Policy Talks discussions in 2017 and 2018 https://eucenstudies.eucen.eu/policy-talks/](https://eucen.eu/policy-talks/)

3 See the VINCE project website <https://vince.eucen.eu/about-vince/>

4. INTEGRATE DIVERSITY INTO CURRICULA

Diversity can be integrated into existing curricula or considered in the development process of new curricula. There are two ways of integrating diversity: **across the curriculum** (i.e. intercultural education across disciplines) and **within the curriculum** (i.e. including specific intercultural references within a curriculum). Working towards more culturally diverse curricula now will influence curricula developed by academics in the future. Curricula should represent cultural diversity and where possible, it should be developed together with students with migrant and minority backgrounds.

The development of intercultural education should be encouraged at all levels. In addition, the aim should be to **expose all students to a rewarding experience of other cultures**. All students would thus be thoroughly engaged in **a dialogue that fosters not only a better appreciation of diversity, but also a better understanding of their own cultural identities**.

5. TRAIN DIVERSITY SKILLS

Pedagogical approaches, especially diversity skills, should be purposefully trained with teachers, librarians, tutors, mentors and administrative staff and should reflect the social, cultural and, in summary, the full diversity of learners.

Pedagogical approaches could include the **reflection of one's own cultural identity**, work on **concrete teaching methods**, and include **knowledge about wider institutional practices** and support services. Culturally-diverse teachers who serve as role models are still rare in HE.

6. COLLABORATE TO SOLVE INTERCULTURAL QUESTIONS

Collaboration brings about new ideas on how to manage diversity of learners, teachers, and staff. **Universities should pursue collaboration with other HEIs, associations** (e.g. adult education, lifelong learning association, etc.) **and other relevant external actors**. When pursuing collaboration, the European vision is enlarged.

Universities are embedded in a local community, a city, and a country. Intercultural issues also arise in other areas (e.g. social inclusion, health care, legal advice). Universities have a role to play in promoting inclusive communities through the creation of collaborative partnerships with local organisations, NGOs and government agencies. In this sense, the European Commission (through the Bologna Process for instance) could have an even more active role through supporting collaborative projects, disseminating interesting practices, and/or celebrating good examples from practice.

7. ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY

Finding durable solutions to integration is necessary for promoting an intercultural society and for managing the already existing cultural diversity within HE, as well as for addressing issues of future migration. This helps to avoid difficulties and exclusion of an already-vulnerable public. The "current refugee crisis" is likely to last and expand. Actions are needed now and these actions need to be sustained (i.e. from projects to long-term solutions). The **sustainability of integration actions and policies has to be guaranteed at all levels**: European, national, regional and institutional.

8. EMBED DIVERSITY IN STRATEGY PAPERS AND QUALITY PLANS

The institutional commitment to inclusion and diversity remains very general in nature. Thus, **HEIs should define a specific strategy regarding inclusion and diversity management, adopt SMART objectives and concrete outcomes in the HEI's strategic planning**, in order to be able to highlight, and track the evolution of, changes. Furthermore, **a quality assurance strategy and specific measures for the change process should be elaborated**. Key objectives and actions might include: determining specific target groups; calibrating linguistic and cultural differences within academia; creating safe spaces for students and academics to communicate (space for a multilingual dialogue as well as intercultural dialogue via periodic publications); encouraging student societies; and stimulating research on the topic.

9. PROVIDE INCENTIVES AND (FINANCIAL) RESOURCES

HEIs need significant **support from the EU and national or regional governments to manage the current increasing cultural heterogeneity of HEI students and staff**. This could be ensured, for example, by providing financial support for access to HE through scholarship programmes for refugees or by funding validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Many diversity policies are noteworthy, but not all their recommended actions are financially supported by European, national or regional bodies. In order to make them work, an appropriate funding system is required.

Inclusion and diversity management also implies that **HEIs must appoint dedicated staff with relevant diversity skills that reflect diversity**, as well as new or extended support services to address the needs of underrepresented groups and minorities, students or staff. Such services could include: language training; career/ education pathways counselling; online tutorials; guidance services; or extra-curricular courses on intercultural skills. **Inclusive teaching requires sufficient resources and infrastructure needs to be improved**.

National governments should provide incentives for universities with diversity on their agenda. Moreover, for a better sharing and dissemination of these new or extended resources, educational policies and initiatives for inclusive education should be communicated more effectively and disseminated widely.

10. MONITOR THE IMPACT OF DIVERSITY POLICY

It is necessary to monitor and document the implementation of policies and specific actions that aim to promote inclusive education and diversity of learners (i.e. degree of implementation, details of specific action plans, or impact on learners from minority groups). Due to the diversity of contexts and institutional requirements, universal “standard reporting” is not recommended. Yet it is nonetheless important to clearly **identify success indicators in diversity monitoring processes** in order to assess sustainable progress made on the ground.

CONCLUSION

The present recommendations point to important areas in which concrete measures have to be developed in order to support the integration of cultural diversity in HE.

The development of such measures of intercultural, inclusive education will have to grow and develop given the levels of complexity involved, acceleration of changes, disappearance of well-defined boundaries with other educational sectors, evolution of mobility and sedentariness and increased fluidity of societies (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018). Therefore, European societies and European HEIs need new conceptual tools and methods more capable of capturing and examining diversity and fluidity, in order to face a new and alternative paradigm: the “super-diversity” (Vertovec, 2007, cited by Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018 p.183).

Policy makers responsible for diversity at EU, national or institutional level, should promote HE as a diversity-friendly sector. All students should have relevant and positive cultural experiences while they study. HEIs need to find drivers and enablers for active institutional diversity management as well as incentives. HE teachers should be equipped with diversity skills and act as role models.

We recommend to elaborate on national and EU-wide evidence-based data about which diversity policies have an impact for migrant students and how this impact could be described.

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