

## University of Applied Arts Vienna Strategy for Diversity and Equal Opportunity

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## (1) Preamble

The aim of this document is to present the strategy for diversity adopted by the University of Applied Arts Vienna. This includes the university's fundamental position with regard to diversity, the areas of action that have been pinpointed, and the measures that these areas of action call for.

Diversity means pluralism and denotes the coexistence of differences and similarities among people and groups of people in all their various configurations. Concerning oneself with diversity implies taking a critical view of the kinds of social order that prevail, their institutional forms of logic, and the symbolic and actual hierarchies attached to them.

Topics relating to diversity, issues that arise in the context of ensuring diversity, and the relevant forms of discourse should be appropriately taken into account at various levels within the university: in teaching and research, in personnel policy, in outreach work, in the planning and holding of exhibitions, in processes of knowledge transfer, as well as in such areas as internationalization and digitalization. Fundamentally, it is as much a matter of sensitizing as it is of developing competence in the area of diversity; and it is especially important to establish and ensure a transparent institutional position with respect to the principles of plurality of views and equal opportunity.

The university's diversity strategy builds on an intersectional understanding of diversity and of the mechanisms of discrimination. The strategy is founded on a perception of others that is as free as possible of prejudice; an attitude of respect and esteem; a determination actively to take diversity into account at all levels of activity within the university; an awareness of the university's institutional responsibility to guarantee an environment of sensitivity and constructive criticism with regard to discrimination. In this respect, the university's diversity strategy is consistent with its plan for the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming.

Various organizational entities of the university work together to implement this strategy, all of them sharing a commitment to ensuring real equal opportunities as well as to instilling a true sense of appreciation of the cultural, social and individual diversity of all those who together make up the university. In laying out its strategic aims below, the university commits itself to making forms of diversity that have already been experienced more visible; to defining concrete areas of action and development goals with regard to strengthening diversity; and to implementing the supportive measures necessary for achieving these goals. Diversity and equal opportunity must be treated as (cross-cutting) issues of lasting concern and must actively be taken into account at various levels of functioning within the university. It follows that developing practices that are sensitive to the need to ensure diversity and critical towards all forms of discrimination must be seen not as a finite process but as one that never ends, a process to which the university has committed itself, one to which all persons connected with the university, each in his or her own capacity, contribute in their everyday university lives, a process that evolves in a spirit of active social involvement.

Current findings of diversity research are as essential to the implementation of the university's strategy as is appropriate attention paid to current developments in society, developments connected with digitalization, for example, or with global changes in habitats and environments brought about by climatic change, or with migration resulting from massive threats to the very basis of people's existence.

The university considers that dealing with diversity consciously, constructively, and in a forward-looking perspective is its social responsibility and duty as an educational and research institution and purposefully takes advantage of the impulses and opportunities that this commitment provides for its institutional development as a learning organization. The heterogeneity of the student body and staff is seen as a valuable resource.

In creating and expanding a culture of inclusion, diversified structures, and appropriate teaching and learning opportunities, the university is fulfilling what it sees as its social responsibility and its educational mandate as an academic institution.

## (2) What Is Understood by 'Diversity'

Diversity can become manifest in the greatest variety of ways at every institutional level and in every area of work and field of operation of the university, one notable example being the great spectrum of experience of all those who together make up the university (students, staff, external partners). This multiplicity of individuals generates a multiplicity of perspectives – different ways of understanding reality, different ways of thinking and of going about one's work, differences that become dynamically effective and fruitful when given appropriate attention and when sufficiently reflected upon.

A sensitive approach to diversity takes both differences and similarities into account.

Competence in dealing with gender issues (when it comes to thought processes, various kinds of action taken, teaching, research) makes it possible to structure situations in such a way that exclusion, discrimination, and fixation on role stereotypes can be avoided and the diversity of sexual and relationship lifestyles acknowledged. Nevertheless, awareness of the facts and risks of discrimination in the university environment and approaches adopted for dealing with them must go beyond gender issues and gender mainstreaming.

If one is to adhere – as does the university – to an intersectional understanding of the dynamics of discrimination, an understanding that postulates the simultaneity, overlapping, and possible mutual reinforcement of various categories of discrimination, it is important to bear in mind that various discrimination factors can operate simultaneously to produce a combined effect. For this reason, keeping up to date with the state of research on intersectionality (such as research concerned with the emergence of multiple identities or with the dynamics of power structures) is helpful, indeed essential, if appropriate measures are to be adopted to deal with the problems that arise.

In order to be prepared to meet possible challenges that can go along with implementing diversity, it is necessary to develop a forward-looking approach to dealing with the dynamics of diversity. This requires an awareness of the power structures in society and of the kinds of exclusion and inclusion to which they lead as well as an awareness of the privileges and disadvantages that result from this social exclusion and inclusion and of the ways in which they can make themselves felt within the university.

The aim of the strategic processes set out here is to reinforce within the university a sense of working together in a spirit of mutual respect and watchfulness with regard to discrimination – a fundamental attitude that should be reflected in (self-) critical practice. (Also see in this regard: "Safeguarding Policy for Protecting Vulnerable Individuals at the University of Applied Arts Vienna" – statement against all forms of discrimination, group-focused enmity, repressive identity policies, fundamentalist agitation, and aggressive intolerance:

[https://www.dieangewandte.at/jart/prj3/angewandte-2016/data/uploads/Universitaet/Berichte/UfaK\\_Safeguarding%20Policy\\_En.pdf](https://www.dieangewandte.at/jart/prj3/angewandte-2016/data/uploads/Universitaet/Berichte/UfaK_Safeguarding%20Policy_En.pdf)

Accordingly, argumentation based on stereotypes as well as presuppositions based on clichés or idealization must be challenged.

If equal opportunity is to be ensured, it is essential to avoid discrimination based on demographic factors such as age, sex, gender identity or sexual orientation, or factors such as religion, system of philosophical beliefs, personal origins, family, social background, financial status, or partial physical disability. These diversity factors (some of which may also have been chosen by the individual) correspond to constructed social categories, the mere fact of belonging to which can have an effect in the university context. Accordingly, due attention must be paid to how these factors are perceived and dealt with.

Strategic considerations for ensuring diversity should never be seen as aiming at definitive solutions. Existing measures and processes that have been set in motion – as well as measures and processes envisaged for the future – must continually be made the subject of collective reflection and evaluation and adapted or readapted according to the effects they have had and can have in the future on the various members of the university community.

If this fundamental attitude is to be shared by all, it must become clear to everyone – from actual experience – that an environment free from discrimination is encouraging and motivating, with regard both to personal work satisfaction and to the institution's development.

### (3) Diversity Factors

In the interest of establishing a holistic culture of diversity, adequate attention must be paid to the following diversity factors – all of which contribute to the development of appropriate forms of competence and to defining the orientation of teaching – so that a solid basis for an open and diverse university can be created.:1)

## Factors to Be Taken into Account in Establishing an Overall Culture of Diversity - Areas of Focused Action within the University

**Demographic diversity** refers to the differences that exist among all those who make up the university – both students and staff – with respect to background and individual circumstances or dispositions. The aim to be pursued is collectively to make the university an open space for study, work, and encounter; to ensure that adequate institutional support is provided; and to identify and eliminate the obstacles to achieving this end.

Dealing with each other in a spirit of mutual respect requires an awareness of diverse needs and potentials and a preparedness to react constructively to these; by contributing to a good environment for study and work, an environment in which many voices can make themselves heard, this fundamental attitude strengthens the university.

Demographic Diversity						
Diversity of Educational Backgrounds	Family / Caregiving	Diversity of Lifestyles	Accessibility	Experience with Migration / Internationalization	Education / Socialization / Diversity of Cultural Values	Social Transparency
Openness with regard to differences of age and educational background of students and staff	Family obligations should be taken into account	Recognition of gender diversity	Being alert to and acknowledging »special needs«	An attitude of openness, willingness to learn, active involvement, and inclusiveness on the part of the university	Respect for differing perspectives on cultural values; bolstering and encouraging dialogue; maintaining a culture of discourse and of dealing with conflict	Equal opportunity; recognition of the value of social mobility
To be taken into consideration for admissions and recruitment	Possibility of making appropriate teaching and learning arrangements	Respectful interaction; on-going reflection on the institutional framework with regard to equal treatment	Identifying obstacles and measures needed to eliminate them as well as providing institutional support – qualified contact persons, psychosocial counselling	Removing bureaucratic obstacles; adapting information/communication to specific circumstances and needs; participation in initiatives such as the 'More' initiative or the 'Klasse für Alle'		Compensating for unequal social starting conditions

## Consolidating the Intersectional Frame of Reference and Firmly Establishing an Anti-Discriminatory Attitude – Opening Up the University

### Developing Forms of Competence, Teaching Orientation – Durably Ensuring That the Preconditions for a Diverse University Are Fulfilled

Cognitive Diversity	Specialization Diversity	Functional Diversity	Institutional Diversity
A multiple-perspective approach both in thought and in action seen as a resource	A broad of spectrum of specialized expertise and frames of reference; interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches seen as a constructive resource	Cooperation among departments and institutes of the university as well as translating from one form of expression/thought to another – pooling forms of competence that have a potential for transformation	Organizational learning, sharing lessons learnt, cultivating the ability to cooperate; best-practice exchange
Constructive synergy of diverse knowledge structures (access to learning and strategies for learning, modes of thought, problem-solving strategies, information processing) and of diverse value structures (worldviews and perspectives on life)	Exploring the terrains of individual disciplines and crossing over from one to the other; broadening and expanding familiar perspectives through interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary cooperation; establishing new links, thus providing impulses for devising innovative strategies	Bolstering multifunctional and cross-functional teams with a combined, far-sighted capacity to act; diversity of voices seen as offering potential for development; opening up new terrains and domains; realizing how different strengths can constructively be combined; increasing communication competence and the ability to express notions in more than one kind of language; transferring lessons learnt	Encouraging and supporting processes of self-reflection and self-evaluation; enhancing the ability to cooperate; discovering and tapping new potentials through network activities

**Cognitive diversity** encompasses structures of knowledge and value structures. It is strengthened through interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary interconnecting processes and through internationalization. Diversity of opinions, values, and structures of knowledge has proven to be essential to the success of international and cross-cultural exchange and cooperation. Cognitive diversity therefore constitutes an important resource, one that fosters far-sighted, innovative, creative action, action taken in a critical perspective.

Interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary cooperation broadens thought processes and patterns of thought and action in the individual disciplines and makes it possible to find new connections, new theoretical insights, new forms of practice, new strategies and paths to solutions. **The diversity of specialized fields** therefore constitutes an important resource for the university when it comes to its ability to meet various current and future social challenges.

The transfer of knowledge requires **functional diversity** both within the framework of cross-departmental processes within the university and in the process of effecting this transfer to society. Learning from these processes how to convey and translate – in the larger sense of the word – knowledge and to work collaboratively increases the effectiveness of all individuals involved as well as that of the university as an institution.

**Institutional diversity** refers to cooperation among various entities of the university, organizations, and interest groups / stakeholders. Such cooperation includes the student exchange within the framework of the Erasmus programme as well as the exchange of teachers, researchers, and other university staff. By favouring an exchange of experience, institutional diversity expands the conceptual space and sphere of action of an institution; it encourages critical reflection on established routines and strengthens the university as an institution of learning.

1) Here it is worth comparing the "HEAD (Higher Education Awareness of Diversity) Wheel" devised by M. Gaisch and R. Aichinger.

## **(4) The Culture of Diversity – Perspectives for Development and Development Objectives at the Structural and Personal Levels**

Building and sustaining a holistic culture of diversity is to be seen as a cross-sectional task of the university. Measures to be adopted are to be agreed according to the specific circumstances involved in the situations concerned; they are to be observed with regard to the effects they have and to their dynamics; and they should continually be improved wherever necessary.

The aim of firmly establishing a culture of diversity is to ensure that as many members of the university as possible are involved as effectively as possible in the processes of its functioning and in its various structures and that all concerned have best possible access to the university's resources, an aim that demands, among other things, taking into account the aspects specific to diversity that are involved in shaping working conditions.

It is therefore essential that all of us increase our awareness of diversity and the competence required to deal with the issues it poses in order to be able constructively to address the various needs, conditions to be fulfilled, and demands in teaching, researching, and developing and/or exploiting the potentials of the arts, as well as the demands that arise in collegial contexts and in relation to administrative procedures (at both the centralized and decentralized level). (A key notion to keep in mind here is digitalization: digitalization significantly alters familiar working and studying conditions; reflection on these conditions must be included in the overall process.)

The principle of equal opportunity and that of respect for diversity are to be among the guiding factors in determining access to study and in planning and carrying out the recruitment of staff. This requires increased awareness of the ways in which pre-conceived ideas and prejudices (some of which might be unconscious) and evaluation based on stereotypes operate. Only in this way is it possible to eliminate the negative effects of selection that has not been adequately reflected on.

The university's outreach work should be reviewed with regard to the group of interested persons and applicants it seeks to target. It is important to develop and strengthen appropriate forms of active communication with and provision of information to persons who might have a future at the university but who have not yet been made to feel its relevance to them. (In this context, social mobility is a key notion to keep in mind.)

It is important to create, maintain and, where possible, expand structures for establishing contact as well as opportunities such as the 'Klasse für Alle', the 'More' initiative, and offers addressed to schools, such as the Friday Lectures, etc.

The conditions of studies must be shaped in such a way that as much account as possible can be taken of students' various qualifications, kinds of experience, and personal circumstances. The statutory provisions regulating (full-time) study and the university's terms and conditions are of central importance here. The feasibility of programmes of study always depends on the coordination of the potential flexibility of everyone concerned. Implementation of proposals for change requires discussion and decision-making by the competent bodies of the university. In any event, the planning factor must always be a part of the process.

A vibrant and open culture of dialogue and conflict-solving is the very basis of any organization that seeks to remain sensitive to diversity; this culture requires constant attention, a clear distribution of responsibilities, and adequate institutional support. The specific responsibilities of contact persons, ombudspersons, and competent organizational entities must be made clear, and these persons and entities must be easy to find and approach.

It follows that visibility and networking are essential when it comes to structures put in place to deal with diversity-related issues; initiatives aimed at specific target groups and, generally, initiatives that specifically have to do with diversity; as well as the provision of necessary support and the offering of opportunities for further learning. Easy access is a key notion that should always be borne in mind.

Internal information relative to the context of diversity must therefore be prepared and presented as conscientiously as possible. Information provided and opportunities offered must be geared towards the students' needs, the needs of future generations of artists and scholars, towards the teaching staff, researchers, and the administrative personnel.

Situation analysis carried out on a regular basis, analysis that includes identification of barriers and lacunae that become evident in the process of addressing issues connected with diversity, should serve to support the introduction of appropriate measures and means for dealing with such obstacles and deficiencies.

Diversity-related topics and goals should be taken into account in the university's strategy papers.

## **(5) Competence in the Area of Diversity Acquired Through Cooperative Endeavours, Projects, Network Activities**

The University of Applied Arts Vienna has for many years been an initiator of and active partner in a great number of cooperative endeavours, projects, and networks. This wide range of activity has enabled both students and teachers as well as administrative staff to gather valuable experience in dealing with diversity-related issues. All those involved in these processes have been able to learn from actual experience just what is meant by cognitive, professional, functional, and institutional diversity – all forms of diversity that have contributed in a very positive way to the development of competence in this area and to firmly establishing the Angewandte as a diverse university.

The strong focus on interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary forms of practice and collaboration as well as the introduction of programmes of study designed with such a focus contribute to enhancing the ability of all those concerned to deal productively with diversity both of thought and of action, the ability to pose questions from many perspectives, and the willingness to listen to many voices when it comes to seeking solutions to problems. These cross-functional and multifunctional approaches to one's work – approaches that are often cross-cultural – demand a maximum of skill in translating from one form of expression/thought to another as well as the ability to change perspectives. Developing the competence to deal with the issues connected with diversity that arise in the course of the work done within the framework of these cooperative endeavours always demands on the part of each individual self-critical reflection on how he or she acts or reacts in specific cultural and systemic contexts.

Not least with regard to maintaining the Angewandte's profile as an international, open university, the notion of organizational learning mentioned above under the heading 'Institutional Diversity' is particularly significant. If adequate support is to be provided to teachers, researchers, and students in the processes involved in cooperative work, processes that are often complex, care must be taken to create or expand appropriate space for reflection, further-learning opportunities, as well as concrete forms in which discourse can evolve.

Long-term cooperative undertakings with international partners (activity in which there is a conscious focus on regions of the global South, among others) often make it possible, by virtue of their long-term nature, to establish sustainable *critical friend* relationships of mutual trust. These relationships, in turn, make it possible to identify patterns of behaviour and, at times, unconscious (power) dynamics in collaborative processes and, together, to reflect on these critically and constructively. The emphasis here is on finding common ground so that a true exchange can take place and so that all concerned can effectively reflect on differences of perception and interpretation as well as on inferences drawn from diverse viewpoints. In this way, the collective ability to act finds itself enhanced.

Consequently, the university will continue to pursue its interest in developing exchange with various cultures of knowledge and structures of knowledge and to do so in a variety of forms of collaboration. The gains in learning that result from this collaborative work are considerable; thanks to them

it becomes possible for social challenges to be met with greater fortitude – a strength that is acquired as a result of acknowledging the validity of diverse perspectives. The reciprocal transfer of knowledge makes it possible to establish new connections and to address the great diversity of issues that arise by taking advantage of the broadened horizon as a new basis for considering collectively and responsibly various options for action.

## (6) Competent Entities, Structural Distribution of Responsibilities, Available Opportunities

### Overview of Existing and Future Entities and Responsibilities (as of February 2023)

- **Vice-Rectorate** – strategic responsibility: Univ. Prof.in Barbara Putz-Plecko
- **DAO – Diversity Affairs Office** – provides strategic support to the Vice-Rectorate; contact office for all questions dealing with diversity including needs of international students
- **Working Group on Equal Treatment Issues:** ao. Univ.-Prof.in Mag.a.art Dr.in phil. Marion Elias (chairperson)
- **Department for Personnel Development** – further training; workplace conflict mediation: Mag.a Maria Piminger (head)
- **Department for Gender Mainstreaming:** Mag.a phil. MBA Doris Löffler (head)
- **International Office – counselling for Erasmus students** (incoming, outgoing; organizational counselling within the context of international partnerships): Mag.a Astrid Behrens (chief)
- **Advisor for Students with Disabilities:** Mag.a art Veronika Merklein (International Office team)
- **Advisor for Staff Members with Disabilities:** Shirley Turner (Events Management team)
- **Staff Conflict Counselling:** Mag.a Sabine Maunz, Rafael Rabenstein, MSc
- **Psychosocial Counselling for Students:** DDr.in Susanne Jalka, Dr. Alexander Parte
- **HUFAK (Hochschüler\*innenschaft der Angewandten / Student Union of the University of Applied Arts Vienna)** – represents students' interests; advisor in the context of intersectional, queer/feminist issues: Sarah Naomi Rapatz; advisor for international students: Javier Sosa
- **Klasse für alle** – an open and easily accessible further learning programme for interested persons external to the university: Mag.a Andrea Lumplecker (director)
- **MORE Initiative – open learning opportunities for refugees:** Department of Student and Academic Affairs