

D&I at WUR: We Can Do Better

Motivation

A serious commitment to diversity & inclusion (D&I) is increasingly essential in attracting and retaining young talent. Diverse teams and inclusive teams benefit from a breadth of perspectives. They are more creative, have better problem-solving skills, and have stronger team morale.

Despite a professed commitment, WUR has not succeeded in putting itself on the map in this domain. Online rankings of the top 20 most ethnically diverse universities¹ in the world include ETH Zurich, University of Vienna, and TU Delft, along with 8 academic institutions from the UK. An online list of LGBTQ-friendly universities in the Netherlands² lists the Universities of Amsterdam, Utrecht, Leiden, Delft, and Tilburg.

On its website WUR claims to be “striving for an inclusive campus,” yet the word diversity appears in the WUR strategic plan only twice, and inclusion not at all. Compare that to the TU Delft which made diversity one of its core values in the 2018-2024 strategic framework.³ WUR also lacks a single, accessible portal for D&I. TU Delft has a complete dashboard with concrete D&I targets, Terms of Reference, and an overview calendar of D&I activities.⁴

WUR’s available online information seems to reflect what is an internally recognised reality: WUR’s message around D&I remains general and vague due to the lack of an overall connective strategy. Implementation of D&I occurs via bottom-up initiatives, resulting in a disjointed portfolio of independent activities. Anecdotal reports indicate that this state of affairs results in activity fatigue in the overall WUR population and effort mostly being spent engaging with the “already converted.”

At WUR, D&I initiatives are either volunteer-led or in the hands of social/diversity professionals. D&I is an extra side task rather than an embedded value in the primary, daily processes of the organization. Again, compared to TU Delft, which appoints faculty diversity officers from each science domain tasked with linking corporate D&I to the work floor.

WUR can do better.

Call to action

We, the undersigned of this letter, call for WUR to develop and implement a coherent high-level D&I plan. We are convinced that if WUR wants to continue to attract and retain top (international) talent and to prepare our students for a global future, a connected, accessible, and visible D&I strategy is essential. As individuals and organizations, we are each active in this domain. We remain committed to dedicating personal resources to advance D&I at WUR. Yet, we emphasize a need for an overall framework and institutionalized support. We are convinced our efforts would be much more efficient and effective when coordinated and aligned rather than uncoordinated, small-scale, and disjointed as they are today.

¹ 20 Most Ethnically Diverse Universities in the World (<https://leverageedu.com/>)

² Top LGBTQ-Friendly Study Abroad Destinations (<https://leverageedu.com/>)

³ [TU Delft Strategic Framework 2018-2024](#)

⁴ [Diversity and Inclusion \(tudelft.nl\)](#)

Specifically, we call for the following:

- Inclusion of D&I as a core value in the next strategic plan;
- A coherent, connected D&I framework with concrete and measurable targets, communicated broadly through an online dashboard;
- A cross-science-group high-level D&I officer with at least 0.4 FTE to implement the D&I framework, serve as a thought leader in the domain, and coordinate across existing initiatives;
- Appointment of faculty officers (from WU and WR) responsible for working with D&I professionals to embed D&I in the primary organizational workflows, with access to budgetary support for piloting D&I activities;
- A physical space for D&I support for employees and students in a visible location, for example the ground floor of Forum.

Signed (July 2023),

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