

**College van Bestuur  
Spui 21 (Maagdenhuis)  
1012 WX Amsterdam**

Subject: Diversity policy

Amsterdam, June 22nd 2018

Dear Executive Board,

In this letter, the Diversity Forum<sup>1</sup> of the UvA wants to express its concerns and dissatisfaction with the current progress of the diversity policy within the UvA.

In October 2016, the report 'Diversity is a verb' was presented: a research report that describes the steps the UvA could take in terms of diversity, decolonization, social justice and equality. In addition to an analysis of the current state of affairs at the UvA, concrete recommendations are made for improvement. The diversity report is the result of a comprehensive research in which groups from different locations of the university are involved and heard in the process. This greatly increases the reach of the report. For example, the report proposes the appointment of a diversity officer, which was indeed done by the Executive Board of the UvA on 1 November 2017.

The substantive support for the diversity report is still clearly visible at the UvA. For example, two events have recently been organized on decolonization of curricula, by the Board of Studies of Philosophy on 16 March and by Amsterdam United on 19 April, where attendance was high: in total, hundreds of people attended. On 23 April, an opinion piece was published in Het Parool in which a number of students, supported by various organizations, call on the diversity officer to carry out the diversity report and actively share her ideas. Finally, diversity and decolonization were a prominent part of the discussion on the Night of Protest of 22 May and during the March for Education of 8 June, where among other things, the implementation of the diversity report was demanded. At these last two events hundreds of teachers and students were present again, which underlines the broad support for the diversity report. On all these occasions Diversity Forum has heard criticism about the steps the UvA is currently taking in the field of diversity and decoloniality.

Diversity Forum recognizes much of the criticism of the current UvA policy that was brought out at the above mentioned moments. At the moment, the next steps of the diversity report are lacking and concrete progress is not visible even after several conversations with the diversity officer appointed by the Executive Board. There also seems to be no plan of action yet, which is of great concern to us. A plan of action, one of the most important recommendations in the diversity report, was promised several times by the diversity officer to the Diversity Forum over a period of months, but never delivered. It is unacceptable that it is still unclear what steps will be taken. Meanwhile, we still see a university in which most of the taught curriculum is written from a Western perspective by white men, where marginalized groups do not feel safe in working groups, and the largest part of the employees are white and male.

In addition, there is too little transparency from the UvA in terms of diversity and it is almost impossible to trace what steps are being taken. This while the CvB has the duty to inform the academic community about what is happening in the field of diversity. Without this visibility and transparency, democratic participation and participation by the academic community is impossible. A disconcerting point of emphasis here would be the poor accessibility and availability of the diversity officer.

While there is hardly any news coverage from the UvA regarding the progress of the implementation of the report, the diversity officer has made a number of damaging statements in the media, including in Trouw on 16 March 2018 and in Folia on 2 March 2018, which are at odds with the diversity report.

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<sup>1</sup> Diversity Forum originated from the pre-committee diversity existing of: ASVA Studentenunie, Amsterdam United, De Nieuwe Universiteit, Humanities Rally, New Urban Collective, Rethink UvA, University of Colour, de bonden, Central Works Council en Central Student Council

Even after several interviews with the diversity officer, she seems to be undermining the diversity report instead of implementing it. This is of great concern to us: as a result, students and staff from marginalized groups will feel less at home at the UvA, do not feel that the diversity officer and diversity unit will be there for them and that the current structures will support and maintain this inequality.

We therefore ask the UvA to rectify the harmful statements made by the diversity officer in the media. In addition to this, there must be clear communication and decisiveness from the UvA about its commitment to implementing the diversity report. The UvA must play a leading role in the field of diversity and inclusiveness: it can no longer hide behind the excuse that diversity is a difficult subject on which opinions are divided, as previously done by the diversity officer in the media .

Finally it is important that a diversity officer is active at every faculty, someone who supports the values of the diversity report and can actively implement them. It is necessary that the diversity officers have sufficient resources and time, but also the knowledge, to actively take initiative. We are concerned that not all of the appointed officers have the right knowledge for this position. Moreover, there is no defending the fact that there are no people of color among the diversity officers. Both in the case of the faculty-appointed diversity officers as well as in the central Diversity Unit, all members of the staff are white, whereas these are the members with the authority to make important decisions. This maintains current power structures; the only people of colour involved do not have decision-making influence in this structure. The appointments must follow an intersectional approach, as also stated in the diversity report, with which the appointments of both the Diversity Unit and diversity officers will contribute to the diversity within the UvA. After all, one must lead by example. Diversity Forum hopes that the Board will take its concerns seriously and take clear steps to reach a socially just, inclusive university. We look forward to your response, and are willing to further explain this letter if desired.

Kind regards,

Diversity Forum