DIVERSITY IN THE MAKING

CIRCLE U. NATIONAL CONFERENCE
KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

08/03/2023

Circle U.
European University Alliance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a summary of the key insights and recommendations at the Circle U. National Conference, *Diversity in the Making*, which was held at Aarhus University 1-2 March 2023.

With a mix of speakers from the university sector and from external organisations, the aim of the conference was to share inspiration and knowledge pertaining to concepts of gender equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) as well as to discuss possible recommendations on how to increase EDI within the universities of the alliance.

The insights and recommendations below are synthesized from contributions by speakers and participants of the conference (see programme for list of speakers).

KEY INSIGHTS

What is EDI?

- Equality, diversity and inclusion are complex matters. More than merely a question of gender, EDI should always be thought of as a concept that can be evaluated on multiple parameters. They include factors such as age, ethnicity, nationality, social class, disability, sexuality, gender identity among many others. Furthermore, all these different characteristics can interact in various combinations, creating the need for a perspective of intersectionality – something the EU Commission also recognizes in its Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

- Each university will experience different types of EDI challenges pertaining to both their national legislation and local cultural context, as well as to their organizational structure and the specific composition of their staff and student body. Therefore, there could be advantages to letting local circumstances for each alliance member dictate the prioritisation of the elements within the EDI work. Even though the core of the conversation about EDI is the same across the alliance, the concrete goals and initiatives need not be uniform.

- EDI work is not about homogenisation, but about complementarity. The aim is not to blur out differences, but to acknowledge these differences and finding out through respectful curiosity how to make them work together.

Why is EDI important for universities?

- Studies indicate that more diverse research teams will include more perspectives in their work, and therefore tend to produce better and more broadly relevant research.

- Globalisation and cultural change are historic megatrends, and even though most European universities are still dominated by white males, institutions have generally become more diverse decade by decade. With declining birthrates in many Western countries and rising birthrates in Africa and Asia, the balance of the global talent pool will continue to shift. Subsequently, in order to remain competitive, European universities will have to keep improving their ability to accommodate and integrate people of different cultures, beliefs etc.

- The younger generation tends to be more aware of different concepts of EDI, and they will expect universities to reflect this.

- In many countries, there is a large gender disparity within entrepreneurship. This means that society could be missing out on growth which is why the Circle U. Female Founder Network actively promotes entrepreneurship among female students and staff.

KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Explain to your organization why EDI is important**: If you are to succeed in enriching your EDI agenda, students and staff need to understand the purpose of an EDI strategy or initiative, and the values behind it. So the issue should be addressed openly. In this process, you should listen to the critics as well. EDI work requires a committed mind, but also a critical mind.

- **Evaluate your processes and practices:** Look closely at key processes and consider if they impact negatively on EDI. Does the wording in your job postings appeal more to some groups than others, or do they in some other way reflect unconscious biases inherent in your organisation? Do the statues and artworks on campus only depict men? Remember that EDI is not only influenced through recruitment, but also through retention.

- **Differentiate your efforts:** EDI has structural and organizational aspects, but also personal and cultural aspects, and these should be addressed in different ways. Aim to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in social interactions, in academic content and in leadership (studies show that laissez-faire leaders and authoritarian leaders fare the worst, so it is important to strike the right balance).

- **Base your actions on research and data:** Gather data before acting, lest you run the risk of basing your efforts on preconceived notions. At the same time, data collection on some diversity related categories can be ethically challenging, so consider which data you need and how you collect it.

- **Consider how you measure success:** According to studies, female researchers tend to have slower career development, are less geographically mobile, less likely to publish in high-prestige journals, and generally receive lower amounts of funding, Many of these statistics do not take into account maternity leave, or the fact that women tend to spend more time teaching and doing non-promotable tasks – including diversity work. Scrutinise your metrics for success to ensure that different groups are evaluated on truly equal terms, and that rewards are given for different types of contributions.

- **Consider promoting sponsorship rather than mentorship:** Sponsorship is a more active and committed way for senior researchers to further the career of junior researchers. Female researchers tend to be under-sponsored as compared to males. The difference can be compared to helping younger colleagues open a door instead of just showing them where the door is.

- **Build alliances:** Share your knowledge about EDI challenges and success stories – both internally and externally. Seek inspiration and advise from outside partners as well as from inside stakeholders. Help build a common Circle U toolbox with ideas for EDI work. And remember to include your students – they often see disparity and diversity in a different light and can be a valuable source of renewed perspective.

- **Be prepared to invest:** There are no quick fixes with EDI work. To succeed, you need a long-term commitment, and it will depend on there being resources and (wo-)manpower to drive and energise the efforts.

- **From action to action:** Let your EDI work come from action and transform into action with concrete goals and activities based in the local context of the faculty, department or other unit.