



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the University of Tübingen

The concept of 'diversity'

Diversity refers to a range of differences between people, conceived of as socially significant characteristics, on the basis of which they can be privileged or disadvantaged. People assign themselves or are assigned to categories such as ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, socio-economic status and mental and physical disabilities and can experience interpersonal and structural (dis)advantages as a result. In hiring or admissions, for example, socially similar people are often unconsciously perceived as being more 'suitable' (unconscious bias).

These various categories, which are the focus of the university's diversity concept, are defined both by the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG) and by the university's own commitment to increasing equal opportunities and an inclusive university culture. Protecting against discrimination on the basis of these group affiliations is an important task of the university. Diversity is enriching, providing the best basis for a creative exchange of ideas. Openness to all people enriches academic life and makes it possible to attract and promote the best talent. But diversity is also challenging, and addressing and dealing with those challenges is also part of our understanding of excellence.

On the one hand, this diversity concept is based on the principles of equal opportunities and *equity*, i.e. ensuring fair and equal chances for all members (or prospective members) of the university community, regardless of gender, origin, appearance or disability. This means providing equal access to resources and development opportunities for all and raising awareness of prejudices and barriers that prevent or impede this access, so that they are reduced as far as possible. Moreover, this concept is based on a comprehensive culture of respectful *inclusivity* that conveys to every member of the university a sense of belonging. The university should be an environment in which all members of the university community feel welcome, accepted, and valued.

This concept establishes 'diversity' (in the management policy sense) as distinct from 'gender equality' and 'internationalization', even if all three areas have large overlaps. It goes beyond the promotion of women as women specifically, or of internationals for whom Germany is completely new. The significance of *intersectionality* is important here: various characteristics play a role in the perception of a person (even if some may initially be invisible). For example, the way a person's gender identity is read is also inflected by the way that person dresses, their accent when they speak, and their physical impairments. All of these aspects can be linked to assumptions about their performance or aptitude (assumptions about, for example, their familiarity with academic culture, the amount of care work they have at home, etc.). Diversity is therefore not in competition with

gender equality, which is legally enshrined in the German Constitution, the so-called Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*, Art. 3, Para. 2), but it expands and complements it. The concept of diversity neither replaces nor subsumes the project of gender equality; by including the dimension of diversity, the work of gender equality gains nuance and intensity. In terms of intersectionality, these two concepts need each other and together they support the inclusive culture of the university.

The University of Tübingen's diversity concept is both resource-oriented (diversity as a source of creativity, innovation and quality) and value-based (equal opportunities, tolerance, anti-discrimination and openness as guiding principles of the institution). By adopting it, the university demonstrates its commitment to the production of knowledge from many perspectives and to the training of academic leaders from many backgrounds. Encouraging diversity in the recruitment and selection of students, doctoral candidates, postdoctoral researchers, teaching staff and employees is therefore just as important as reducing unconscious bias, protecting people from all forms of discrimination and hate speech and acknowledging the dignity and value of every single individual, regardless of their group affiliations. Accordingly, the following priorities for the next three years include fields of action in the area of staff and student recruitment and retention as well as anti-discrimination measures and complaints procedures.

Diversity strategy 2025 to 2028: Priority measures

1. Updated anti-discrimination guidelines: procedures, contact points, digitally supported complaints management
2. Integrating diversity into hiring procedures
3. For the faculties: funding for diversity activities
4. Focus on support for first-generation students and accessibility issues
5. Gathering anonymized, voluntary survey data to aid future strategizing

What has the University of Tübingen achieved so far?

The University of Tübingen has been addressing the issue of diversity for many years. In 2015/16, it was audited by the Stifterverband and was awarded the certificate "Shaping Diversity"; in 2021, it was successfully re-audited and again awarded the certificate for another three years, ending in 2024. That is why this paper sets out priorities for the next three years. The diversity audit provided a decisive impetus to develop and implement new concepts and measures in the area of diversity. These have also found their way into the university's structural and development planning. One of the core concerns at the time was to raise awareness of the topic of diversity at all levels and to communicate it internally and externally. In the meantime, diversity has become a standard part of the selection process in many funding programs (e.g. Athene, Deutschlandstipendium).

The Center for Gender and Diversity Research (ZGD), a cross-faculty and interdisciplinary research center that promotes dialogue between the humanities, social sciences, life sciences and natural sciences in the field of gender and diversity research was established at the University of Tübingen in 2013. It offers a certificate course for students in "Gender and Diversity" in cooperation with the

university's Transdisciplinary Course Program (TCP), where other courses on diversity can also be found.

In 2020, the Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Sciences introduced an elective focus on diversity in its Master's degree program in Historical and Cultural Anthropology as well as a complete Master's degree program in Sociology on Diversity and Society, both of which promote critical engagement with diversity management policies as well as theories of diversity. It provides funding to promote diverse students and researchers as well as diversity-oriented research topics and has piloted a mentoring program for first-generation doctoral students.

Since 2011, students have found support for academic writing in the Diversity-Oriented Writing Center, where they are coached in academic writing on the basis of their previous knowledge, experience and individual, cultural backgrounds. Particular attention is paid to the challenges posed by non-academic backgrounds. In addition, the TCP organizes peer-to-peer mentoring programs and cooperates with external partners to offer service learning on this topic to students.

Sensitivity regarding diversity issues has been further promoted since 2022 through a dedicated awareness campaign with a wide range of workshops and training courses for students and staff. The formats are aimed at various target groups and focus on topics including anti-discrimination, antiracism, gender-sensitive and diversity-conscious teaching, trans- awareness, accessibility and accommodation (both with regard to physical disabilities and chronic illnesses) as well as unconscious bias and inclusive leadership.

The visibility of the topic of diversity is also increased through activities such as the Inclusive Sports Day or public lecture series. Since 2009, for example, there have been several public event series each semester as part of the Studium Generale, in which topics such as gender and diversity research, social background and educational advancement (first-generation academics) as well as forms of discrimination and anti-discrimination work are dealt with. The topic of diversity lends itself well to cooperation with civil society, for example, in offering outreach education on the topic of antigypsyism as well as collaborating on the local exhibition "Queer in Tübingen".

Diversity strategy: priorities for the coming years

1. Updating our anti-discrimination guideline: procedures, contact points, complaints management

An essential component of the University of Tübingen's diversity strategy is the development of an updated anti-discrimination policy, especially with regard to sexual harassment and abuse of power. These guidelines must, by necessity, go beyond the scope of diversity in the sense outlined here, but are included here as a top priority because the implementation of an improved complaints and counseling service for all is essential to the establishment of an inclusive culture at the university. We are pursuing four goals here: (1) clear communication of whom those affected can turn to if they experience discrimination and abuse of power at the university; (2) an increase in adequate

and efficient support; (3) the collection of anonymized statistics that make it possible to identify problem areas and/or patterns and proactively address them; (4) the promotion of a more nuanced and evidence-based culture in the university with regard to diversity and inclusivity.

The guidelines should clearly and comprehensibly define discrimination and abuse of power for all members of the university and clearly present access to a low-threshold counseling service and complaints management. The wide range of initial contact points will be coordinated and supported by a central counseling center, which is also a highly visible, professional, neutral and independent contact point. It will cooperate with the state's external legal counseling center in order to further lower the inhibition threshold for those requiring advice, to prevent internal bias and to involve external, professional expertise. All counseling staff will receive continued training and support.

In addition to the ongoing measures to familiarize people with a nuanced understanding of diversity, the updated anti-discrimination guidelines are intended to contribute to the prevention of discrimination by raising awareness of how discrimination is experienced by those affected and by taking those experiences seriously. Addressing this issue will enable the university to deal better with diversity.

2. Integrating diversity in hiring procedures: equity in selection and recruitment

In selection procedures, it is important not to exclude excellent applications prematurely based on misjudgment of performance or simply prejudice. In order to optimize the selection of the best candidates, diversity - like gender equality - must also be considered as a factor in appointment and recruitment procedures and thus form an aspect of the evaluation. This begins in every job advertisement with the university's explicit commitment to actively promoting equal opportunities in recruitment processes. It continues by establishing a clear procedure for recognizing the performance and suitability of a person who has qualified themselves for an academic position in spite of many structural obstacles.

There are already well-known procedural routines for accommodating special circumstances and breaks in academic careers of female applicants, as increasing the proportion of women in doctoral and postdoctoral positions as well as in professorships is prescribed by law. Although there is no legal mandate for diversity-based affirmative action (except for the disabled), such routines can nevertheless serve as models for a diversity-aware approach to applications. This can include the recognition of qualifications and degrees from other countries as far as legally possible, career delays due to migration and thus change of the education system, an academic qualification later in life, disability and long-term or chronic illness and similar circumstances.

An important instrument here is the correct determination of 'academic age' in order to present the performance record more fairly and thus avoid misjudgments that counteract the selection of the best. The conventional focus on an applicant's biological age must be replaced by one based on the actual years of work relevant for the academic position. To support selection committees in the operational implementation of this endeavor, both an information sheet for appointment

committees and concomitant information for applicants will be created, which will initially be tested for effectiveness in a trial phase. The latter is an online information sheet in which the calculation of academic age is explained using practical examples. It is also intended to support the decision-making process regarding the individual handling of personal data and is based on the current recommendations of the German Research Foundation (<https://www.dfg.de/en/basics-topics/basics-and-principles-of-funding/equal-opportunities/bias>).

Mitigating unconscious bias in appointment committees and appointment procedures can help search committees encourage the submission of more diverse applications and help avoid hasty rejections. The University of Tübingen will therefore introduce appropriate training courses and consider them to be an integral part of the preconditions for participating in an appointment committee or appointment procedure.

By making the aforementioned information and support available to all target groups via newly established digital application portals, a structurally anchored diversity toolkit will be established. In addition, the information will also be incorporated into the "Checklist for recruitment procedures" and the "Guidelines for appointment procedures" (documents forming part of the University of Tübingen's quality assurance system).

3. Funding of diversity activities in the faculties

The University's proven and successful Teaching Equality Program will be expanded to include diversity. This enables the funding of adjunct teaching and guest lectureships by diverse individuals, so that students can encounter more teaching staff with different backgrounds, who can also act as role models and appeal to students from different groups. It is also possible to hold workshops dealing with various topics of diversity (e.g. anti-racism training, workshops on 'decolonizing the curriculum', creating guidelines for language use in teaching, or other specific courses or measures that are desired) for interested faculties or institutes. The faculties will receive applications and allocate fund with the aid of equal opportunities and diversity officers or relevant faculty committees. The dean's offices should provide suitable support for the additional work involved in these activities. Initially, the same amount of funding will be provided for diversity measures as for gender equality measures. Based on an evaluation of demand after 18 months, adjustments can be made with regard to funding and content.

4. Students: focus on accessibility and first-generation academics

The regular teaching report is an important instrument of quality assurance and the development of designing gender-, disability- and diversity-sensitive degree programs. In order to support the writing of these reports, a handout on designing degree programs to support diversity will be developed. The focus here is on both methods and structures, such as examination modalities, disability support or the accommodation of seminar times. There needs to be a clearer understanding of what is meant by 'inclusion (of those with disabilities)' at the university and what types of support should be made available.

To support teaching staff, the Center for Teaching Excellence offers further training with a focus on diversity-sensitive teaching, which will include more information on various aspects of accessibility. In addition, a regular exchange of good practice between lecturers is planned. It is also important that the implementation of physical accessibility at the University of Tübingen is tackled more systematically, as many buildings are not yet sufficiently accessible.

Mentoring programs are currently being developed for first-generation academics who want to pursue a doctorate. In addition, the University is addressing this topic in the recruitment of new students (e.g. at www.studienkompass.de) and in its orientation days for local schools. At the annual study information day, a specific event will be offered for interested candidates whose parents did not attend university. We also need to develop a form of mentoring and support for first-year students from non-academic backgrounds to improve their retention rates. With respect to these students, the topic of financial challenges during their studies should also be given greater attention.

5 Data basis for the next steps

In order to better understand which groups at the university need special support, a corresponding multi-stage survey will be carried out. The first step is to analyze the data already available. Further surveys will then be carried out in the form of a quantitative, voluntary and anonymized survey of students and staff in order to evaluate some particularly relevant diversity categories and present the results appropriately.

In addition, a climate survey on work and study environments will be conducted, which will be further refined in various focus groups. This involves discussions with representatives of underrepresented groups about their experiences and needs regarding barriers and hurdles they experience. In this way, we can find out in which areas there are still weaknesses and where and in what form equal participation can be improved with regard to these groups. The aim is to give those affected the opportunity to contribute their experiences, wishes and suggestions to the university's support services.

With this measure, a quantitative and qualitative inventory will be established that will demonstrate where the University is already quite diverse, in which areas it is not yet very diverse, and which priorities and goals are necessary in the years to come in order to enable corresponding structural and cultural changes.