



Inclusion as a Core Principle and a Chain

A position paper on inclusive curriculum,
inclusive learning and working environments,
and educational quality in higher education

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Summary

The mission of higher education is to train students to become professionals who can function in a complex, diverse and changing society. This requires inclusive education that does justice to different perspectives, experiences, circumstances and ways of learning. Inclusion is about more than accessibility. It is about education in which students can actively participate, feel recognised and connected, influence their learning environment, and have equal opportunities to develop and progress into the professional world. Inclusion thus touches on the heart of Article 1 of the Constitution, the quality of education, and education's unifying role between training and society.

In this position paper, the working group presents inclusion as both a core principle and a chain.

By '**core principle**', the working group means that inclusion is central to high-quality education. Inclusive education enables students to participate, develop, see themselves reflected in the curriculum, feel safe in the learning environment and influence educational practice. This involves a diversity of voices in knowledge, representation, social safety, a sense of belonging, accessible teaching methods and examination, and recognising differences without problematising them.

By '**chain**', the working group means that sustainable embedding of inclusion can only happen when different links are connected to one another. Inclusion relates to content, access, participation, recognition, progression and status.

Therefore, the curriculum, the learning and working environment, social safety, professional development, quality management, networking, and administrative responsibility cannot be developed in isolation; they must reinforce one another. Based on this vision, the working group formulates recommendations at three levels: the programme level, the institutional level and the higher education system level.

Recommendations at programme level

- 1 Structurally link inclusion to curriculum development.
- 2 Provide scope for descriptive and substantive representation.
- 3 Promote flexibility and diversity in teaching methods and examination.
- 4 Promote accessibility and flexibility in the organisation of teaching.
- 5 Embed and uphold social safety and a sense of belonging.
- 6 Encourage student participation and ensure that the follow-up to such discussions is transparent.

Recommendations at institutional level

- 1** Make inclusion a structural component of quality management, organisational development and professional practice.
- 2** Invest systematically in professional development, diversity literacy and a socially safe working environment.
- 3** Monitor diversity and inclusion from an intersectional perspective.
- 4** Strengthen feedback mechanisms.
- 5** Support student and staff groups.

Recommendations at the system level

- 1** Strengthen collaboration between institutions, sector organisations, quality management professionals, policymakers, students and staff.
- 2** Link inclusion more closely to existing quality processes.
- 3** Improve progression and transition points to and from higher education.
- 4** Develop a joint, sector-wide monitoring system for diversity and inclusion.

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1 Introduction

The societal mission of higher education is evolving alongside a society and professional practice in which diversity, complexity, and inequality are becoming increasingly apparent in many ways. Degree programmes prepare students for this context. This requires an education system that not only equips students with knowledge and skills, but also teaches them to deal with multiple perspectives, different forms of knowledge and a wide range of professional situations.

This broadens the scope of the call for inclusion. Inclusion relates not only to access to education, but also to how education is designed, organised, experienced, and improved. This aligns with the vision of the Advisory Committee Diverse and Inclusive Higher Education and Research (DIHOO), which regards diversity and inclusion as indispensable prerequisites for the quality of education and research. In an inclusive learning and working environment, diversity among students and staff, and within curricula and research, is recognised, valued, and utilised so that everyone naturally feels a sense of belonging, is seen, and can participate.

This development has led to a range of initiatives in curriculum development, student wellbeing, social safety, and accessibility. At the same time, research and educational practice show that inclusion is still too often treated as a separate issue or a collection of isolated activities. As a result, the relationship between inclusion and the quality of education often remains implicit.

The DIHOO Advisory Committee's Working Group on Inclusive Curriculum and Inclusive Learning and Working Environments sees this as a key challenge. In the working group's view, the development of inclusive higher education does not require a constant stream of new, isolated initiatives, but rather a fundamentally different way of looking at educational quality. In this context, inclusion is not a supplement to existing notions of quality, but a principle that provides greater direction for the design of education, the learning environment and the organisation as a whole. The working group therefore decided to assess experiences with inclusion within the curriculum and the learning and working environments in higher education.

The central question is: What conditions are necessary to sustainably embed inclusion as a fundamental quality principle in higher education?

The sub-questions are:

- 1 What is required for an inclusive curriculum?
- 2 What is required for an inclusive learning and working environment?
- 3 How can inclusion, professional development and accountability be sustainably linked to quality management?

These questions are addressed from three perspectives: 1) Insights from the academic literature, 2) Experiences from educational practice, and 3) The working group's analysis and vision.

As such, this position paper is explicitly not a research report or an evaluation of existing initiatives. The document aims to provide guidance on the further development of inclusive higher education.

2 Methodology

The position paper draws on three complementary sources. First, the working group conducted a literature review to identify academic and policy insights on inclusion, inclusive curricula, inclusive learning and working environments, social safety, student participation, and quality of education. This forms the paper's theoretical foundation.

In addition, the working group organised a brainstorming session with students, teachers and education professionals from various higher education institutions. During this meeting, participants discussed their experiences with inclusive education, barriers encountered in practice and possible directions for development.

Finally, the working group discussed the relationship between inclusion and quality management. This discussion with the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) was not used as a separate source of knowledge on inclusion, but to illustrate how inclusion relates to existing quality processes within higher education. By linking these different perspectives, a coherent picture emerges of both the theoretical principles and day-to-day educational practice.

The working group began by focusing on the themes of an inclusive curriculum and inclusive learning and working environments, and on how these relate to quality management. As the exploratory phase progressed, it became clear that these themes cannot be viewed in isolation from broader conditions for inclusion, such as social safety, professional development, accessibility, networking, progression and administrative responsibility. The position paper has therefore taken on a broader scope than the original starting points, without abandoning them. Inclusive curricula and inclusive learning and working environments remain at the core of the exploration, but are approached as components of a coherent inclusion chain.

As this position paper focuses primarily on education, it frequently adopts the students' perspective. While this perspective is important, it is not the only one. Inclusion also relates to teachers, staff and managers: an inclusive learning environment cannot be viewed in isolation from an inclusive working environment. Themes such as social safety, recognition, belonging, accessibility and influence are therefore relevant to the entire educational community.

2.1 Target audience

This position paper focuses on higher education as a whole and is therefore intended for both universities of applied sciences and universities. The working group recognises that institutions differ in their missions, educational philosophy, organisational culture, governance, quality management, and relationships with the professional field.

The recommendations in this paper are therefore not intended as a uniform set of guidelines, but as guiding areas for development that institutions will need to elaborate on themselves within their own context. At the same time, the working group considers those differences as an opportunity for joint development.

Both sectors address similar issues related to inclusive curricula, inclusive learning and working environments, social safety, professionalisation, quality management, and personnel mobility. By exchanging experiences, practices and dilemmas, universities and universities of applied sciences can learn from and with one another.

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Inclusion as a fundamental principle

Inclusion is increasingly regarded as an essential component of high-quality education. In this context, the focus is shifting from who has access to education to the conditions under which students can participate, develop, and feel connected to the educational environment (UNESCO, 2020).

Inclusion is therefore not seen solely as a response to differences between students, but as an ongoing process in which education, organisation and culture reflect the diversity of the student population. For that reason, Ahmed (2012) emphasises that inclusion is evident not only in policy documents, but in everyday educational practice, institutional routines, and the choices organisations make about what they take for granted.

Inclusion thus differs from diversity and accessibility. Diversity refers to the presence of differences between students and staff. Accessibility focuses on the ability to participate in education. Inclusion goes a step further and asks whether students feel recognised, can participate, and can influence their learning environment. As ECIO states: 'Through inclusive education, educational institutions create a safe learning environment where every student feels at home. Education that adapts to the student rather than the student having to adapt to the education system' (ECIO, 2024, p. 5).

An intersectional perspective highlights that students simultaneously hold different identities and social positions, meaning experiences of inclusion and exclusion cannot be considered in isolation (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2020). Inclusive education therefore requires attention to the complexity of individual experiences and prevents students from being approached solely based on a single characteristic or target group.

3.1.1 Inclusion and educational quality

In higher education, quality evaluation is linked to aspects such as academic standards, learning outcomes, academic success, the quality of examination, and professional preparation. In recent years, however, there has been a growing recognition that quality also relates to the conditions under which students learn and develop.

Inclusion is increasingly regarded as an issue of educational quality in its own right, rather than solely as a social issue of diversity or equality (Lister et al., 2021; European Commission, 2022). Consequently, the focus is shifting from individual inclusion initiatives to the question of how the quality of education can be developed in such a way that all students can genuinely participate, learn, and develop.

From this perspective, inclusion is not a separate quality criterion, but a fundamental principle behind high-quality education.

An inclusive learning environment not only supports students in acquiring knowledge and skills, but also creates the conditions for access, engagement, participation and a sense of belonging.

Research shows that students learn better when they feel they belong, when diverse talents and perspectives are valued, and when they have space to actively participate in their education (Strayhorn, 2018; European Commission, 2022). Inclusion therefore not only contributes to equal opportunities but also improves the quality of individual and collective learning.

3.2 Inclusive curriculum

The curriculum is a key tool through which educational institutions put their vision of education and knowledge development into practice. An inclusive curriculum goes beyond simply adding examples or focusing on specific target groups. It requires critical reflection on choices about what knowledge is offered, which perspectives are visible, and which voices are less frequently heard.

From the perspective of epistemic justice, knowledge is never entirely neutral. Fricker (2007) demonstrates that the experiences and perspectives of socially and culturally marginalised groups have historically been recognised less frequently as authoritative knowledge. As a result, curricula still largely reflect culturally dominant perspectives, whereas other experiences, forms of knowledge and interpretations are represented to a lesser extent. Santos (2014) also emphasises that different forms of knowledge can coexist and enrich one another. In his concept of the ecology of knowledge, he places scientific knowledge in dialogue with, among other things, experiential knowledge, practical and professional knowledge, local knowledge, and cultural or philosophical ways of making sense of the world. These forms of knowledge differ in how they arise and are validated: scientific knowledge, for example, is based on systematic, methodological research, while experiential knowledge stems from

lived experience and practical knowledge develops through action in concrete situations. By bringing different perspectives to the surface, students are better prepared to tackle complex social and professional issues (Appadurai, 2006; Suransky & Bot, 2025).

An inclusive curriculum is reflected not only in content selection, but also in teaching methods and assessment (Smucker, 2024). The question is not only what knowledge is offered to students, but also how they access it, how they participate in the learning process, and how they demonstrate mastery of the intended knowledge, skills, and competences. Based on Universal Design for Learning, this calls for multiple forms of engagement, knowledge representation, and action and expression (CAST, 2024). Inclusive examination aims to prevent students from being unnecessarily disadvantaged by an examination's structure or format, while the intended learning outcomes and required level of mastery remain the guiding principles (Tai et al., 2023). This does not mean lowering academic or professional standards; rather, it means critically examining whether the chosen examination format measures what it is intended to measure and does not create irrelevant barriers (ECIO, n.d.; Hubbard & Gawthorpe, 2024).

This links curriculum content, instructional design, examination, and students' actual participation.

3.3 Inclusive learning and working environments

An inclusive curriculum can be fully realised only in a learning and working environment where students feel safe to participate actively in their education. After all, inclusion is reflected not only in the curriculum's content, but also in the day-to-day interactions between students, lecturers, and staff. Supportive and respectful interactions contribute to the sense of safety that students need to ask questions, discuss mistakes and contribute different perspectives. At the same time, such interactions foster their sense of acceptance and connection to the educational community (Edmondson, 1999; Freeman et al., 2007).

3.3.1 Social safety

Social safety is therefore an essential prerequisite for inclusion. Social safety goes beyond preventing inappropriate behaviour. It also refers to a learning and working environment in which students and staff feel respected, heard and valued, and in which they can experience themselves as full members of the academic or working community (UNL, 2023; Strayhorn, 2018). In a socially safe environment, differences can be openly discussed, and there is scope for dialogue and critical reflection. Students and staff must be able to contribute diverse

perspectives, ask questions and discuss uncertainties without fear of exclusion, humiliation or other negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). This aligns with the concept of psychological safety, which refers to the shared belief within teams that it is possible to speak out, discuss mistakes and take risks without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). Furthermore, this broad approach aligns with the Dutch policy context, in which social safety is understood not only as a prerequisite for student wellbeing, but also as a prerequisite for a socially safe study and working environment for students, teachers and staff (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2023; UNL, 2023; Steering Group on Social Safety in Higher Education and Science, 2024).

3.3.2 Belonging

Closely linked to social safety is the concept of belonging, or the experience of connectedness and the feeling of being part of a community. In the higher education literature, belonging is associated with engagement, well-being, academic success, and the extent to which students feel connected to their degree programme and educational environment (Strayhorn, 2018; Ahn & Davis, 2020). More recent studies also emphasise that belonging is multidimensional, bringing together social, academic, cultural, and institutional aspects (Ahn & Davis, 2020; Dias-Broens, Meeuwisse & Severiens, 2024). In her research on students' sense of belonging and student success, Gomes (2020) shows that a sense of belonging to the degree programme does not arise spontaneously but is actively shaped by the study and learning environment, relationships with fellow students, and the role of teachers and academic career coaches. Students who feel seen, heard and recognised experience a greater sense of connection with their degree programme and develop greater confidence to participate actively in their studies. Belonging is therefore not only an individual feeling, but also a result of educational design, pedagogical relationships, classroom interactions and the wider organisational culture. From this perspective, promoting belonging is not a supplementary student wellbeing issue, but an essential component of inclusive education.

4 Outcomes of the Brainstorming Session

During the brainstorming session, participants widely endorsed the importance of inclusion. Students, teachers and education professionals recognised the societal need to make education more inclusive and consider inclusion as an essential part of good education. At the same time, the meaning of inclusion appears to vary in practice. Whereas some associate inclusion primarily with accessibility or support, others emphasise its relationship to curriculum development, social safety, teaching methods, examination, organisational culture, or progression into the professional field. From these different perspectives, various themes recurred consistently in the discussions.

4.1 Structural embedding

First, many inclusion initiatives depend on individual commitment. In various places, valuable activities are being developed by enthusiastic students – for example, through student platforms or ‘student voice’ initiatives – as well as by lecturers or staff. Although these initiatives contribute to innovation and raise awareness, they remain vulnerable when structural support, time, resources, or leadership backing are lacking. Furthermore, inclusion is not yet fully integrated into standard processes for curriculum development, professional development, quality management, HR policy, and administrative decision-making. As a result, inclusion risks remaining separate from mainstream education policy and dependent on temporary projects, making it vulnerable to staff turnover, changing priorities, and budget cuts.

“Inclusive education emerges when it is not dependent on someone’s goodwill, but develops into a genuine part of how we work systematically.”

4.2 Substantive and descriptive representation

Representation was also cited as a key component of inclusive education. Participants distinguished between ‘descriptive’ and ‘substantive’ representation (Pitkin, 1967). Although Pitkin (1967) developed these terms in the context of political representation, this report applies them in a broader, conceptual sense to representation within education. ‘Descriptive representation’ relates to the question of who is visible and present within education, for example in teaching teams, governing bodies, committees, teaching materials, professional role models and the selection of authors and thinkers. A diverse workforce can contribute to a sense of recognition, a feeling of belonging and a broader range of experiences and

perspectives within the educational community. At the same time, participants emphasised that presence alone is not enough. ‘Substantive representation’ means that the knowledge being transferred constitutes a broad and representative reflection of diverse experiences and perspectives.

In this context, participants highlighted the importance of a plurality of voices in knowledge and the need to critically reflect on perspectives presented within degree programmes as self-evident or universal. One example cited was that philosophy and social sciences education pays considerable attention to European thinkers such as Locke, Rousseau and Kant. They are regularly discussed as the founders of ideas about democracy, freedom and human rights, while less attention is paid to those to whom these ideas did or did not apply at the time. By explicitly addressing this historical and social context and also incorporating other intellectual traditions and thinkers, a more complete picture of the development of knowledge and social ideas emerges.

Other disciplines also called for a broader range of examples and perspectives. For instance, the medical field highlighted the importance of teaching materials that help students recognise conditions affecting different skin types. It was also noted that validism and knowledge from the perspective of people with disabilities are still often absent from curricula. An intersectional approach can help to examine topics from different angles, for example from postcolonial, feminist, disability and queer perspectives. The aim is not to cover every possible experience in every subject individually, but to teach students to recognise the position from which knowledge is developed and which experiences may consequently remain overlooked. During the meeting, the term ‘decolonisation’ was also used in relation to an inclusive curriculum. This did not refer to removing existing thinkers, theories, or academic traditions, but to critically examining the position this knowledge occupies within the curriculum, the circumstances under which it was developed, and the voices and forms of knowledge it excludes. As was vividly put during the meeting: knowledge is like water that students desire, but when the supply is too limited, they are not given sufficient space to flourish. By contextualising dominant perspectives and bringing them into dialogue with other academic, professional, local and empirical forms of knowledge, an inclusive curriculum can better prepare students for a diverse and complex professional practice.

4.3 Inclusive teaching methods and examination

Furthermore, the discussions made it clear that diversity in composition is valuable, but insufficient in itself if it is not accompanied by inclusive pedagogy, didactic expertise, and a genuine influence on educational development. Professional development plays an important

role in this regard. In the brainstorming session, participants identified diversity literacy as a key area for development in the pedagogical expertise of higher education professionals. This means the ability to recognise and interpret differences and inequalities, reflect critically on the influence of power relations and dominant norms, and translate these insights into one's own pedagogical and didactic practice (Steyn, 2015).

Inclusive education requires teachers and educational professionals to address differences among students, reflect critically on their own actions, and create space for different perspectives. Universal Design for Learning offers a useful framework, as it is based on educational design that accounts for diversity among students from the outset (Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014; CAST, 2024). Where possible, different forms of examination, such as practical assignments, oral examinations or other ways of demonstrating competences, can improve the accessibility of education. It was emphasised that inclusive examination does not mean lowering standards, but rather critically examining how students can demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and professional competences.

“Teachers must constantly ask themselves who is in their class and what these students need to be able to learn.”

4.4 Social safety and participation

A fourth recurring theme was the link between social safety and participation. Students indicated that they need the space to ask questions, share experiences, and contribute different perspectives. Social safety is a key prerequisite. It means not only that students feel free to speak their minds, but also that they are protected from bullying, exclusion, discrimination, intimidation and abuse of power. Students must be able to trust that their contributions are taken seriously and that they will not face any negative consequences when they raise their experiences, concerns or criticisms.

At the same time, it was emphasised that participation encompasses more than just formal consultation. Participants highlighted the importance of being genuinely heard, visible follow-up to concerns raised, transparency in decision-making and targeted attention to voices that are less likely to be heard. When the most visible or loudest voices are the most influential, participation remains unevenly distributed, and inclusion is realised only to a limited extent.

Social safety also requires ongoing, open dialogue. Within degree programmes and institutions, regular discussions are important about what students and staff understand by social safety, what experiences they have had, and what behaviours or circumstances influence their sense of safety.

By discussing social safety not only when incidents occur, but as an integral part of the educational and organisational culture, warning signs can be recognised earlier, and collective efforts can be made towards prevention and improvement.

For teachers and other education professionals, too, social safety is a crucial prerequisite for shaping inclusive education. They must feel they have space to discuss questions and uncertainties, reflect critically on their own actions, receive feedback, and explore complex situations together. In this context, social safety does not mean avoiding tension, differences of opinion, or discomfort, but rather that these can be discussed respectfully and constructively. Furthermore, facilitating discussions about difference, inequality, discrimination and social tensions requires specific professional skills, support, time and space for reflection. Teachers must accommodate different perspectives without normalising discriminatory or exclusionary language, and manage tensions without bringing the discussion to a premature close. Inclusive learning and working environments therefore place demands not only on students and individual teachers, but also on organisational culture, available support, and the institutional frameworks within which education professionals carry out their work. Clear standards, accessible reporting and feedback channels, careful follow-up on concerns and an open dialogue about social safety are indispensable in this regard.

“Being seen and heard is only the beginning. Action must actually be taken on the input. What happens to the input?”

4.5 Accessibility through flexibility

A fifth theme concerned flexibility and accessibility. Participants pointed out that students differ in their personal circumstances and support needs. These may include, for example, working alongside their studies, care responsibilities, informal care, financial pressure, religious or cultural practices, a chronic condition, or a physical, sensory, mental or neurodivergent disability. Not every disability or support need is immediately visible.

These differences can affect attendance, participation, collaboration and access to education, facilities and social activities. For wheelchair users and other students with a physical disability, for example, accessibility also concerns the approachability and usability of buildings, teaching spaces, toilets, laboratories and other facilities. Field trips, internships, induction activities and informal or social gatherings must also be accessible wherever possible.

Flexibility and accessibility were therefore not viewed as individual favours, but as prerequisites for genuine and equal participation. Among other things, clear and timely communication, physically and digitally accessible facilities, usable teaching and examination materials, hybrid or recorded teaching options where appropriate, and reasonable adjustments were mentioned. The guiding principle is to incorporate accessibility into the education and learning environment from the outset, as far as possible, so students do not constantly have to request exceptions or adjustments on an individual basis.

“You often have to prove yourself first and explain why you’re asking for what you need.”

4.6 Focus on career progression

Finally, it emerged that inclusion does not stop at the classroom, but also relates to the various transitions surrounding higher education. Participants highlighted the importance of support both for progression to higher education and for the transition from higher education to internships, further study and the professional field. Social and professional networks, accessible internship opportunities, links with the professional field and targeted guidance play an important role in this regard.

Students and staff without easy access to informal networks may therefore have fewer opportunities for professional development or to progress to influential positions. This makes it clear that inclusion relates not only to participation in education itself, but also to the broader structure of opportunities surrounding it. An inclusive learning and working environment therefore requires active support for networking, personal guidance alongside digital communication, accessible links to the professional field, and structural support for student initiatives that contribute to connection, recognition and equal opportunities.

During the discussions, participants also identified discrimination in internships as a major bottleneck in the transition from education to the professional field. Participants emphasised that access to internships, guidance within the professional field and professional networks is not automatically equal for all students. At the same time, the working group notes that internship discrimination is a significant and specific issue that requires separate analysis and a targeted approach. This position paper therefore does not address internship discrimination in depth. Still, it recognises the issue as part of the broader inclusion chain in which curriculum, learning environment, supervision, networking, and progression are interconnected.

5 Outcomes of the Discussion with the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)

As part of the field study, the working group discussed the relationship between inclusion and quality assessment. During this discussion, we explored the extent to which inclusion is reflected in existing quality processes and what opportunities exist to link inclusion more closely to the development and assurance of educational quality.

A discussion with the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) confirms a broader finding from the literature and the brainstorming session: inclusion is increasingly seen as an integral part of good education, but is not yet naturally embedded in how educational quality is discussed, assessed, and safeguarded. Within existing quality frameworks, there is scope to focus on inclusion, for example in relation to learning outcomes, the teaching and learning environment, and examination. At the same time, this tends to happen mainly when degree programmes explicitly link inclusion to their vision of quality and when assessors or discussion partners ask specific questions about it.

What becomes apparent is that inclusion is more often implicitly present in quality assessment, but is not yet always systematically identified or utilised. This makes the safeguarding of inclusion vulnerable.

If inclusion continues to depend on individual sensitivity, temporary priorities, or the extent to which programmes themselves raise the issue, it risks being addressed inconsistently in quality discussions.

For the working group, this discussion underscores that inclusion is better linked explicitly to existing quality processes than treated as a separate quality criterion. This requires shared language, concrete example questions, and a focus on professional development and quality assessment processes that explicitly account for the experiences of students and staff. In this way, inclusion can be not only a matter of ambition, but also an integral part of how degree programmes and institutions develop, evaluate and improve their teaching.

6 Conclusion

This position paper addresses what conditions are necessary to sustainably embed inclusion as a fundamental quality principle in higher education. To this end, the working group has explicitly examined the role of an inclusive curriculum and an inclusive learning and working environment. Based on the literature review, practical exploration, and joint analysis, the working group concludes that inclusion must be recognised and safeguarded as the core of education and implemented throughout the entire education chain.

Inclusion touches on **the core of educational quality**, as it concerns the question of under what conditions students can genuinely participate, develop, feel recognised and gain access to opportunities both during and after their education. For this reason, inclusion should not be regarded as a separate issue within higher education, but should instead be woven into various levels of the system.

Furthermore, the practical exploration revealed that, whilst an inclusive curriculum and an inclusive learning and working environment are different components of inclusive education, they cannot be viewed in isolation from one another. Without an inclusive learning and working environment, an inclusive curriculum cannot be meaningfully delivered. At the same time, an inclusive curriculum provides students, lecturers and staff with the substantive basis and tools to shape inclusion in day-to-day educational practice.

This overlap means that inclusive education requires a diversity of voices in knowledge, critical reflection on dominant perspectives, representation, accessibility, social safety, a sense of belonging and structural safeguards. The practical exploration demonstrates how these elements are interlinked in day-to-day educational practice. Students, lecturers, and education professionals do not perceive curriculum, teaching methods, assessment, support, accessibility, social safety, networking, and progression as separate components, but as links in a single, broader **chain of inclusion**.

Embedding inclusion requires board ownership, professional development, quality management, monitoring and visible follow-up on feedback. Only then can inclusion evolve from a collection of isolated efforts into a sustainable feature of educational quality.

6.1 Limitations

This position paper is based on a literature review, a brainstorming session with students, lecturers and education professionals, and a discussion on quality assessment. The practical exploration is not intended as a representative study of the state of inclusion across the whole of higher education. The findings therefore do not provide a complete picture of all experiences, institutions or degree programmes. However, they highlight issues recognisable across different contexts, such as the need for a diversity of voices in the curriculum, social safety, accessibility, professional support, structural safeguards, and better follow-up on concerns.

The combination of academic literature, practical experience, and the working group's collective reflection makes it possible to formulate a guiding perspective. The value of this position paper therefore lies not in its representativeness, but in bringing together insights that can contribute to the further development of inclusive higher education.

7 Recommendations

7.1 Recommendations at programme level

Integrate inclusion structurally into curriculum development

Reflect on which knowledge is central, which perspectives are visible and how different forms of knowledge can enrich one another. Examine which authors, theories, examples, case studies, and professional standards are central to the curriculum, and which perspectives it omits. This involves critically contextualising existing knowledge and broadening the frame of reference within which students learn to think, investigate and act.

Make room for descriptive and substantive representation

Descriptive representation relates to the composition of, amongst other things, teaching teams, committees and other decision-making bodies, and to the diversity of role models and professional images that students encounter. Substantive representation also requires that different experiences, perspectives and interests are genuinely reflected in the curriculum, educational policy and decision-making. Programmes are therefore encouraged to actively involve students and staff in curriculum development, evaluation and improvement. In doing so, attention must be paid to the intersection of different identities and social positions, so that students and staff are not approached solely based on a single characteristic or target group.

Promote flexibility and diversity in teaching methods and assessment

A third recommendation is to make inclusive teaching methods and examination a structural part of the educational design. Where possible, degree programmes should use a variety of teaching methods and examination formats so students can participate in the learning process in multiple ways and demonstrate that they have mastered the intended knowledge, skills, and professional competences. Inclusive examination does not mean lowering standards, but rather critically examining how competences are demonstrated and identifying any potentially unnecessary barriers in examination and evaluation. The learning outcomes and the required level of competence remain the guiding principles in this regard.

Promote accessibility and flexibility in the organisation of education

Students have different personal circumstances and support needs. These may include, amongst other things, working alongside their studies, care responsibilities, informal care, financial pressures, religious or cultural practices, a chronic condition, or a physical, sensory, mental health or neurodivergent disability. Not every disability or support need is immediately apparent.

Therefore, degree programmes and institutions should incorporate accessibility from the outset into how they organise education and design physical and digital learning environments.

This requires, for example, clear and timely communication, as well as accessible educational buildings, teaching spaces, toilets, digital systems, teaching materials and social activities. For wheelchair users and other students with a physical disability, this means, for instance, that teaching spaces, laboratories and other facilities must be both accessible and usable. Attention must also be paid to potential physical, digital, social and organisational barriers during field trips, internships, introduction activities and gatherings outside the regular educational environment. Where general accessibility is insufficient, reasonable and timely adjustments must be made available. Furthermore, where appropriate and feasible, flexible, hybrid, or recorded learning options can support participation.

The procedures for requesting support and facilities must be clear, accessible and respectful, so that students do not have to justify their need for support time and again. This requires careful, and where possible centralised, recording and coordination of support arrangements, with full regard for privacy and confidentiality. Only staff for whom this information is necessary should have access to relevant data. At the same time, lecturers, study advisers, support staff, and administrative staff must have sufficient expertise to assess requests carefully, implement arrangements correctly, and guide students respectfully.

Institutions must also ensure a consistent approach. Students should not face different procedures, assessments, or conditions each time they deal with different degree programmes, faculties, or staff members.

Clear institution-wide frameworks, a clear division of responsibilities, and effective coordination between central and decentralised services can prevent arbitrariness and contribute to timely, reliable support. At the same time, there must remain scope for tailored solutions, as support needs and educational contexts may vary.

Flexibility and accessibility must be approached from the perspective of students' right to participate fully and on an equal footing in education. Support and adjustments are not a favour, but necessary to remove unnecessary barriers and enable genuine participation. The guiding principle is that every student should have the opportunity to achieve the intended learning outcomes, without compromising the programme's academic requirements and professional standards.

Embed and uphold social safety and a sense of belonging

Social safety and a sense of belonging are fundamental prerequisites for good education and equal participation. Institutions must therefore embed these systematically in policy, leadership, quality management and day-to-day educational practice. Students and staff must be able to speak freely and be protected from exclusion, discrimination, bullying, intimidation and abuse of power.

Research and reports indicate that social insecurity in higher education is not isolated.

Furthermore, a low number of reports does not automatically mean that the environment is safe, as relationships of dependency and fear of negative consequences can discourage people from coming forward. Institutions must therefore set clear standards, provide accessible and independent reporting and support structures, and follow up on concerns carefully and promptly. Enforcement requires effective action when standards are breached, and a board and senior management who demonstrably take responsibility for prevention, follow-up, and improvement.

Encourage participation and make follow-up transparent

Finally, the working group advises degree programmes to follow up on concerns from students and staff transparently. Asking for feedback is only meaningful when it is clear how their input is discussed, weighed up and used to bring about improvement. Active participation in decision-making not only improves alignment with educational practice, but also strengthens shared ownership of inclusion.

7.2 Recommendations at institutional level

Make inclusion a structural part of quality assessment, organisational development and professional practice

Embed inclusion in the regular processes of quality assessment, educational development, HR policy, health and safety policy, professional development, social safety, student wellbeing, governance and decision-making. Do not assign responsibility for inclusion exclusively to a single department, official, or temporary programme; make all parts of the organisation jointly responsible.

After all, working towards inclusion goes straight to the heart of high-quality education. As such, inclusion is not an additional objective or a separate policy area, but an essential component of educational and organisational quality. Furthermore, this responsibility is embedded in fundamental rights and in the constitutional principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination, as laid down in Article 1 of the Constitution. Activities that contribute

to this should therefore not be regarded as optional, temporary or dependent on individual project funding. Institutions must embed this responsibility in their policies, capacity, resources, task allocation, and accountability processes. This will prevent the very activities that promote equal access, participation and social safety from being the first to come under pressure when priorities shift, or budget cuts are made.

Invest systematically in professional development, diversity literacy and a socially safe working environment

Inclusive education requires teachers and educational professionals to recognise and interpret differences and inequalities, critically reflect on dominant norms and their own actions, and translate these insights into inclusive pedagogical and didactic practice. The working group therefore advises institutions to systematically allocate time, resources and support for training, peer supervision, collegial consultation and joint reflection. In this context, facilitating discussions on difference, inequality, discrimination and social tensions also deserves explicit attention. Professional development can only take place sustainably in a socially safe working environment, in which staff can discuss questions and uncertainties, receive feedback, and examine and correct mistakes without fear of exclusion or negative consequences.

Monitor diversity and inclusion from an intersectional perspective

To understand how inclusive the curriculum and learning and working environments are, the current situation must first be assessed. This can be done using questionnaires, interviews and external evaluations. For this purpose, the working group recommends using the Diversity Minimal Item Set (DiMIS), where appropriate and with careful attention to privacy and context. Furthermore, the working group sees opportunities to make better use of existing national data, monitoring schemes and research. This includes data on student wellbeing, social safety, accessibility, academic success and progression. An intersectional analysis can reveal how different characteristics and social positions are interlinked and where multiple barriers arise. Combining national insights with the local experiences of students and staff creates a richer picture of both accessibility and perceived inclusion. Quantitative data should be supplemented with qualitative experiences, as these experiences reveal how inclusion is experienced in day-to-day practice.

Strengthen feedback mechanisms

Monitoring is only valuable if the results are clearly communicated and actually used to drive improvement. This involves not only figures and formal evaluations, but also concerns from conversations, reports, complaints, student and staff surveys, participation bodies and day-to-day experiences within the learning and working environment.

Institutions must make clear how they collect, assess, and act on these concerns; who is responsible for follow-up actions; and the timeframe for providing feedback. It must also be clear what improvement measures are being taken and how their progress and impact are monitored. An accessible and transparent feedback mechanism shows students and staff that their experiences are taken seriously and builds trust, social safety, and structural quality improvement.

Support student and staff groups

The working group also recommends that institutions provide structural support to student organisations, staff networks, and informal initiatives that contribute to inclusion. Such initiatives often fill institutional gaps and offer recognition, support, and a sense of community that are not always readily available within regular structures. Structural support may include space, visibility, resources, time, and recognition.

7.3 Recommendations at the system level

Strengthen collaboration between institutions, sector organisations, quality management professionals, policymakers, students and staff

Many issues relating to an inclusive curriculum, social safety, belonging, accessibility, professionalisation, quality management and progression are not institution-specific. Cross-institutional collaboration can help share experiences, develop guidance documents, exchange effective practices, and strengthen the professional knowledge base on inclusive higher education.

Link inclusion more closely to existing quality processes

Institutions are encouraged to set out explicitly how inclusion is part of their vision for educational quality and how this vision is reflected in curriculum development, learning and working environments, professional development, quality management and governance. External quality reviews could also pay more attention to the relationship between inclusion and educational quality. This requires further knowledge development within institutions, study programmes and among the relevant quality management professionals. In this context, attention can be paid to how inclusion is reflected in educational visions, programme profiles, curriculum choices, examination, student support, social safety and student participation.

Improve progression and transition points to and from higher education

Inclusion does not stop at the boundaries of a single course or institution. Students move through a broader education pathway, from pre-university education to higher education and from higher education to the professional field. The working group therefore recommends

strengthening cooperation between secondary education, vocational education (MBO), higher professional education (HBO), university education (WO), and professional partners, so transition points are better supported, and barriers to access, participation, and progression are identified earlier.

In this context, the link with the professional field also deserves attention. Access to internships, professional networks, career guidance, and professional field relationships is unevenly distributed and can significantly affect opportunities during and after studies. Sector-wide collaboration can make internship opportunities more accessible, broaden career profiles, and better support students who do not have automatic access to informal professional networks. Discrimination in internships therefore requires targeted attention and a joint approach involving educational institutions, sector organisations and partners in the professional field.

This includes, among other things, transparent and accessible recruitment and selection procedures, appropriate supervision, and clear agreements on identifying, reporting, and following up on discrimination and exclusion during internships and other forms of work-based learning.

Develop a joint, sector-wide monitoring system for diversity and inclusion

To monitor developments in diversity, inclusion and social safety within higher education over the long term, the working group recommends adopting a joint, sector-wide approach to monitoring. This requires coordination among institutions, sector organisations, quality management professionals, policymakers, students, and staff on relevant concepts, indicators, research methods, and reporting.

An intersectional analysis can reveal, at a systemic level, which patterns and inequalities occur within different institutions, degree programmes, and transitional stages, and where barriers accumulate. Quantitative data should be supplemented with qualitative experiences of students and staff. Only in this way can insight be gained into both formal accessibility and how inclusion is experienced in day-to-day educational and working practices.

The working group also recommends organising a structured exchange of knowledge, methods and good practices relating to monitoring. Institutions can learn from one another how to collect data, incorporate empirical knowledge, interpret results and translate findings into improvements in education, policy and organisation. This exchange should not focus on rankings or simple comparisons between institutions, but on collaborative learning and improving the quality of monitoring.

Sector-wide monitoring becomes meaningful only when results are discussed periodically, fed back to institutions and the communities involved, and used for policy development and quality improvement. This creates a shared cycle of learning and improvement in which national trends and local experiences complement one another.

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Sample questionnaire

Inclusive curriculum and inclusive learning and working environment

Purpose of this questionnaire

This questionnaire aims to gather insights into students' and lecturers' experiences of inclusion in education. In this context, inclusion is not treated as a separate issue, but as a quality issue linked to curriculum content, the organisation of education, the learning and working environment, examination, support, participation, and governance embedding.

Institutions and degree programmes can use the questionnaire as a starting point for further research, dialogue, and quality improvement. The results do not provide a complete overview of inclusion, but they can help highlight patterns, strengths, perceived barriers, and potential areas for improvement.

Response scale

For each statement, please indicate to what extent you agree with it:

- 1 Strongly disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 Agree
- 5 Strongly agree

The following could be added to the possible answers

- Not applicable
- I can't judge

1. Inclusive curriculum: knowledge, content and perspectives

An inclusive curriculum makes room for different sources of knowledge, experiences and perspectives. It highlights the historical, social and cultural context from which knowledge has emerged. It also encourages critical reflection on dominant perspectives and voices that may be missing.

Statements for students

- ☐ I recognise diverse backgrounds, experiences and ways of life within the curriculum.
- ☐ The curriculum offers multiple perspectives on social and vocational issues.
- ☐ Different sources of knowledge and ways of knowing are taken seriously within my degree programme.
- ☐ Theories, models and knowledge are placed within their historical and social context.
- ☐ The degree programme encourages critical reflection on dominant perspectives and potentially missing voices.
- ☐ I am allowed to contribute perspectives or experiences that have not yet been addressed.
- ☐ The literature, examples and case studies used reflect the diversity of society and the future professional field.
- ☐ The curriculum helps me to think critically about differences, power relations and inequality of opportunity within my field of study.

Statements for teaching staff

- ☐ I have a good understanding of the perspectives, sources of knowledge and voices that may be missing within my field.
- ☐ I incorporate different perspectives and sources of knowledge into my teaching.
- ☐ Where relevant, I place theories and models within their historical and social context.
- ☐ I encourage students to reflect critically on dominant perspectives and power relations.
- ☐ I feel sufficiently equipped to discuss sensitive or opposing perspectives in my teaching.
- ☐ I am given sufficient time and space to make the curriculum more inclusive.
- ☐ Within my team, we reflect collectively on the inclusivity of the teaching content.
- ☐ In curriculum development, inclusion is taken into account as part of the quality of education.

Open questions for students

- 1 What perspectives, sources of knowledge, authors, examples, or experiences do you feel are missing from the curriculum?
- 2 Can you describe a situation in which the content of the curriculum felt entirely exclusive or unfamiliar to you?

- 3 Can you describe a situation in which you actually found the curriculum to be inclusive or familiar?

Open questions for teaching staff

- 1 Which perspectives or sources of knowledge are still under-represented within your subject area?
- 2 Where do you experience a tension between inclusion, learning outcomes and professional or educational requirements?
- 3 What do you need to be able to integrate different perspectives into your teaching in a more systematic way?

2. Representation and inclusive pedagogy

Representation relates to both visible diversity among teaching staff, guest speakers, and decision-makers, and the extent to which different groups, experiences, and perspectives influence the content and structure of education. Inclusive pedagogy relates to how teachers approach students, facilitate interaction, and enable participation.

Statements for students

- ☐ Within the teaching team and amongst guest lecturers and guest speakers, I see a variety of backgrounds, experiences and perspectives.
- ☐ I feel that lecturers recognise me and take me seriously.
- ☐ Lecturers treat students as equals and with respect.
- ☐ Lecturers are sensitive to cultural, religious, philosophical and personal differences.
- ☐ Lecturers ensure that students are not reduced to their background or addressed as representatives of a group.
- ☐ Throughout the courses, different ways of participating and contributing are valued.
- ☐ Lecturers are willing to adapt their approach when students experience barriers.
- ☐ I feel that different groups and perspectives influence the content and development of the education.

Statements for teaching staff

- ☐ Within my team, there is scope to discuss inclusion, exclusion and representation openly.
- ☐ I feel supported when I make inclusive choices in my teaching.
- ☐ I have sufficient knowledge and skills in the field of inclusive teaching methods.
- ☐ I reflect on the influence that my own position, assumptions and experiences have on my teaching.
- ☐ I use a variety of teaching methods so that students can participate in multiple ways.

- ☐ I know how to prevent students from being stereotyped or addressed as representatives of a group.
- ☐ Within my degree programme, attention is paid to representation within teaching teams, among guest speakers and in decision-making.
- ☐ Professional development in the field of inclusive education is systematically available.

Open questions for students and teaching staff

- 1 What does representation mean to you in the context of education?
- 2 When does a teacher's background, experience or position make a difference in terms of recognition, trust or participation?
- 3 What can the degree programme or institution do to strengthen inclusive teaching practices?

3. Inclusive examination, accessibility and flexibility

Inclusive examination means giving students fair opportunities to demonstrate the intended knowledge and skills. Flexibility does not mean lowering learning outcomes or quality standards, but rather critically examining unnecessary barriers in examination formats, procedures, scheduling, and facilities.

Statements for students

- ☐ I am given fair opportunities to demonstrate my knowledge and skills.
- ☐ The examination methods used are aligned with the learning outcomes of the programme.
- ☐ A variety of examination methods are used within my programme.
- ☐ The examination methods do not create any unnecessary barriers to my participation or performance.
- ☐ Rules and procedures relating to examination and adjustments are clear and accessible.
- ☐ If personal circumstances affect my participation, I can discuss this without facing any negative consequences.
- ☐ Appropriate adjustments are offered in a timely and careful manner.
- ☐ Where possible, there is room for flexibility in the event of medical conditions, a disability, care responsibilities or philosophical obligations.
- ☐ When making adjustments, we strive to strike a good balance between accessibility and the required learning outcomes.

Statements for teaching staff

- ☐ I am aware of the options available for providing reasonable and appropriate adjustments.
- ☐ I know how to make adjustments without lowering the intended learning outcomes or the required standard.
- ☐ I feel I have sufficient room to use different or alternative forms of examination.
- ☐ I can distinguish between the learning outcome to be assessed and the form in which a student must demonstrate it.
- ☐ Within my degree programme, there are clear agreements regarding inclusive examination and reasonable adjustments.
- ☐ I can seek expert support if I have any questions about adjustments.
- ☐ Professional and educational requirements are applied critically and transparently.
- ☐ The team discusses where rules or procedures may unintentionally lead to exclusion.

Open questions for students

- 1 Have you ever experienced a situation where a particular examination format, procedure or lack of flexibility led to a barrier or exclusion? Please explain your answer.
- 2 What adjustment or form of flexibility would improve your participation in education?
- 3 In your opinion, which examination or teaching practice is already working well?

Open questions for teaching staff

- 1 In your view, where would the barrier be between necessary flexibility and professional or educational requirements?
- 2 Which rules or procedures currently limit the scope for providing reasonable adjustments?
- 3 What would flexibility as a guiding principle mean in concrete terms within your teaching practice?

4. Social safety, a sense of belonging and participation

An inclusive learning and working environment gives students and staff space to ask questions, make mistakes, contribute different perspectives, and develop as full members of the academic community. Social safety requires not only preventing inappropriate behaviour, but also a culture in which concerns are taken seriously and followed up on transparently.

Statements for students

- ☐ I feel safe expressing my opinion or perspective during courses.
- ☐ I feel like a fully-fledged member of my course or educational community.
- ☐ During courses and meetings, there is room for different voices and ways of participating.

- ☐ It is not only students who speak easily or frequently who receive attention.
- ☐ Differences of opinion are discussed respectfully and constructively.
- ☐ Teachers respond when discriminatory, stereotypical or exclusionary comments are made.
- ☐ I know where to turn if I experience discrimination, exclusion or a lack of social safety.
- ☐ Reports and complaints are taken seriously.
- ☐ Students are informed about what happens to reports or complaints.
- ☐ Discrimination or exclusion during internships and other practical components is actively addressed.

Statements for teaching staff

- ☐ I know how to respond to discriminatory, stereotypical or exclusionary comments.
- ☐ I can facilitate discussions on sensitive social issues in a safe manner.
- ☐ I make a conscious effort to ensure balanced student participation.
- ☐ I feel safe discussing concerns, doubts or uncertainty about how to act regarding inclusion.
- ☐ I know where to turn for support in situations of exclusion or social insecurity.
- ☐ I feel supported by my manager and the institution when I raise issues of inclusion.
- ☐ Within my team or faculty, there is a culture in which colleagues can call each other to account.
- ☐ Concerns raised by students and staff are visibly followed up.
- ☐ The institution takes active measures in cases of discrimination or exclusion during internships and other practical components.

Open questions for students

- 1 In what situations do you feel less free, or not free at all, to speak your mind?
- 2 What do you believe happens when students raise concerns or make complaints?
- 3 What, specifically, would improve your sense of safety and belonging?

Open questions for teaching staff

- 1 In what situations do you feel reluctant to take action when it comes to inclusion or social safety?
- 2 What support do you need to handle difficult situations or conversations effectively?
- 3 What do you think is needed to strengthen the culture of openness within the degree programme?

5. Institutional embedding, shared responsibility and governance

Sustainable inclusion requires coherence between policy and practice. Inclusion must not depend solely on individual teachers, students or temporary projects, but must be reflected in curriculum development, staff policy, student support, quality assessment, decision-making and board responsibility.

Statements for students

- ☐ Diversity and inclusion are a visible part of my degree programme's or institution's policy.
- ☐ Inclusion is evident in day-to-day teaching practice.
- ☐ Within my degree programme, inclusion is more than just a policy ambition on paper.
- ☐ The focus on inclusion does not depend on just a few individuals involved.
- ☐ It is clear who is responsible for following up on inclusion issues.
- ☐ The board and programme management communicate openly about inclusion.
- ☐ The board and programme management take concrete action when structural problems are identified.
- ☐ Students' experiences are used to improve the education and the learning environment.
- ☐ Students are involved in the development and evaluation of inclusive education.
- ☐ Inclusion is treated within the degree programme as part of educational quality.

Statements for teaching staff

- ☐ Diversity and inclusion are systematically embedded in the policy of my degree programme or institution.
- ☐ Inclusion is evident in curriculum development, examination, student support and quality assessment.
- ☐ The focus on inclusion does not depend on the efforts of a few individual staff members.
- ☐ Responsibilities for inclusion are clearly assigned.
- ☐ Supervisors support teams in translating inclusion policy into educational practice.
- ☐ The board and programme management demonstrate clear decisiveness when structural problems are identified.
- ☐ Sufficient time, resources and expertise are available for inclusive educational development.
- ☐ Feedback from students and staff is systematically collected and used to drive improvement.
- ☐ Students are involved as equal partners in educational development and evaluation.
- ☐ Inclusion is assessed as part of educational quality within quality assessment and decision-making processes.

Open questions for students and teaching staff

- 1 Where do you see inclusion being structurally embedded within the degree programme or institution?
- 2 In which areas is inclusion still too dependent on individual people or temporary projects?
- 3 In your view, what would decisive board action in the field of inclusion mean in concrete terms?
- 4 How can students and teaching staff be better involved in decision-making regarding inclusive education?

6. Networks, internships and staff mobility

Access to social, academic, and professional networks can significantly affect academic success, internship opportunities, and progression into the labour market. Not every student has the same contacts, knowledge of informal social etiquette or financial resources when they start their degree programme.

Statements for students

- ☐ I have access to social and professional networks that are relevant to my studies and my future.
- ☐ The programme actively helps me to establish contacts within the professional field.
- ☐ Information about internships, projects, events and other opportunities is made available to all students in good time.
- ☐ Opportunities and activities are presented transparently.
- ☐ Students who do not yet have a relevant network receive additional support.
- ☐ The programme helps to reduce barriers such as costs, unfamiliar social norms or a lack of contacts.
- ☐ I receive sufficient guidance when looking for an internship or my first work experience.
- ☐ I feel that all students are given a fair chance at attractive internships, projects and other opportunities for personal development.
- ☐ Active measures are taken when students experience discrimination in relation to internships or progression.

Statements for teaching staff

- ☐ I am aware of the differences between students in terms of access to social and professional networks.
- ☐ I actively encourage students to build up relevant networks.
- ☐ I share information about internships, projects and personal development opportunities transparently.

- ☐ Students without an existing network receive additional support within the programme.
- ☐ Within my degree programme, attention is paid to financial, cultural and social barriers to participation in activities.
- ☐ Internship and industry partners are held to account on equal opportunities and non-discrimination.
- ☐ The allocation of internships, projects and other opportunities is regularly evaluated.
- ☐ I know where to refer students if they experience discrimination or exclusion during an internship.

Open questions for students

- 1 What barriers do you encounter when building a social, academic or professional network?
- 2 What support would help you find an internship, a project or your first job?
- 3 In your opinion, which students currently benefit most from existing networks and opportunities?

Open questions for teaching staff

- 1 In your view, which groups of students find it more difficult to gain access to internships and professional networks?
- 2 What role can the degree programme play in reducing disparities in networking and career progression?
- 3 What arrangements are needed with internship and industry partners to promote equality of opportunity?

7. Coherence: inclusion as the core and the chain

Inclusion is achieved through coherence across the curriculum, teaching methods, examination, support, social safety, participation, staff policy, quality assessment, and governance. If any one of these elements is not sufficiently inclusive, it can affect students' participation and development.

Statements for students and teaching staff

- ☐ Within my degree programme, there is coherence between the inclusion policy and day-to-day teaching practice.
- ☐ The curriculum, examination, support and learning environment reinforce one another in promoting inclusion.
- ☐ Reports of exclusion lead to changes in various parts of the organisation.
- ☐ Inclusion is approached not as a separate project, but as a shared responsibility.

- ☐ The programme regularly assesses whether all students can participate effectively and develop to their full potential.
- ☐ Measures relating to inclusion are evaluated and adjusted where necessary.

8. Overarching questions for reflection

- 1 In practice, where do you experience the greatest barrier to inclusive education?
- 2 What is already working well at the moment and should be retained or strengthened?
- 3 In your opinion, what would be the most important practical measure that the course or institution should take?
- 4 Are there any groups of students or teachers for whom the current education system works less well? Please explain your answer.
- 5 In your opinion, which part of the inclusion chain needs the most improvement?
- 6 Is there anything else about inclusive education or the inclusive learning and working environment that has not been covered in this questionnaire?

Points to consider regarding application and analysis

The questionnaire can be used on a modular basis. To minimise the burden on respondents, an organisation can select several statements for each theme and include one or two open questions.

When using the questionnaire, it is important to:

- make the purpose of the research clear in advance;
- carefully safeguard anonymity and confidentiality;
- allow participants to skip questions about sensitive experiences;
- exercise caution when breaking down data into small groups;
- always combine averages with differences between groups and qualitative explanations;
- inform students and staff of the findings;
- make it clear what actions are being taken in response to the results;
- not use the questionnaire as a one-off measurement, but as part of a broader cycle of dialogue, evaluation, monitoring and improvement.

The questionnaire primarily focuses on perceived inclusion. To get a more complete picture, it is advisable to combine the results with other information, such as curriculum reviews, interviews with students and staff, data on internships and progression, complaints and concerns, professional development activities, and how inclusion is embedded in quality assessment, policy, and decision-making.



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