# Foregrounding diversity in research and innovation

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# Engaging with Diversity in European Universities

FOREGROUNDING DIVERSITY IN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

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Mainstreaming a progressive approach to diversity to be broadly understood and embracing the related concepts of equity and inclusion is key to the success of the Una Europa vision for research and innovation. It has been well established that research and innovation are enhanced through diversity within teams. We will do better, more creative and more collaborative work within and across disciplines and sectors if we educate, train, recruit and support an inclusive environment. Una Europa's values-led, core-principles approach provides the foundation for the cultural and behavioural shifts required for an inclusive, equitable and diverse research and innovation landscape. Yet, structural barriers persist that prevent or slow progress towards truly inclusive, accessible research and innovation. Una Europa provides an exceptional opportunity to work together to identify and dismantle such structural impediments. This is accomplished through generating a research and innovation ecosystem that places diversity as an essential prerequisite for success – success not only for research staff (teacher-researchers, researchers, doctoral students and the range of professional services and administrative staff) as they pursue their careers but also for the overall mission of creating knowledge that is transformative, challenging and impactful.

Diversity will not take care of itself, despite a values-led commitment to and recognition of the importance of inclusion, because of the complex institutional and societal power relationships that continue to shape inequality and inequity. Diversity must be a strategic priority, part of the roadmap of institution-building and thematic priorities. This requires the creation of strategic instruments, including dedicated institutional policies, to mainstream diversity as well as to target specific priority areas where evidence and experience demonstrate significant diversity-related gaps in our research and innovation landscape. This is why, beyond the actions aimed at taking diversity into account in all Una Europa programmes, a dedicated diversity strategy, specific to research, with specific and targeted actions, must be embedded within, not just alongside, an overall research and innovation strategy.

**The Action Group on Research – our approach**

The Action Group on Research analysed four Una Europa documents that are building a shared research strategy, in order to identify how diversity is being understood and implemented in

research and to identify gaps and opportunities for deepening commitment and engagement. Three documents were produced by the Una.Resin Project, the goal of which is to build a common research strategy for Una Europa. The fourth document was the Una Europa 2030 Strategy, which has a section on research (strategy):

1) Benchmarking R&I Strategies and Priorities for a Joint Una Europa Strategy
2) Mapping RIRs (Research Infrastructures and Resources) and priorities for joint strategy
3) Mapping HR Strategies and priorities for joint strategy
4) The draft for Una Europa 2030 Strategy

Our approach to analysing the documents was to ask the following questions:

- How is diversity articulated in the documents?
- Is diversity embedded in the documents as a strategic and operational priority?
- What suggestions and recommendations are made that would support diversity?
- What significant gaps exist that hinder mainstreaming diversity in Una Europa's research strategy and practices?

After collectively reviewing the documents, we identified key recommendations that will support foregrounding diversity at all levels of the research environment and infrastructure and could help in assessing the diversity impacts of the proposals.

**Una Europa Strategy 2030 draft**

As noted above, the values-led approach provides a principled commitment to diversity, even if this is not directly stated. The strategy outlines six institutional priorities, although promoting diversity is not one of them. The closest priority is building a strong community, but this does not centre around the core requirements of our diversity agenda, namely, equity and inclusion. In a similar way, the thematic priorities do not mention diversity. On the one hand, this may support mainstreaming, with promoting diversity being an inherent part of each theme. On the other hand, diversity may slip off the agenda and opportunities for progressive action may be missed. The core principles mention diversity and inclusivity, but adopting the Diversity Council's broad definition of diversity would strengthen these commitments. This could include promoting equity, thus

foregrounding the importance of fairness and the impact of power relations in perpetuating inequity, inequality and discrimination. This would demonstrate a responsibility to address diverse needs by providing differing resources and opportunities to enable full participation, at all levels, in research and innovation.

**Benchmarking R&I Strategic Priorities for a Joint Una Europa Strategy**

This document states a commitment to inclusivity and the need to develop work culture and professional development. The one short paragraph on diversity reinforces that commitment, noting that the Una Europa strategy should not replicate or reinforce existing career structures that harm diversity. The overarching emphasis on supporting early career researchers (who may not necessarily be young, it should be noted), is to be welcomed in terms of developing a supportive career structure.

The data and consultations informing this report did not detail how diversity is threaded through research strategy. However, overarching institutional strategies frequently prioritise societal health and well-being and also link to sustainable development goals. This suggests that what is being researched itself contributes to more equal societies within which all people can flourish. The emphasis on bottom-up developments in research could be a mechanism for inclusion but also for exclusion. Biases operate at every level and without institutional and strategic interventions, and Una Europa institutions may fail to realise their diversity commitments by not intervening effectively in promoting truly inclusive bottom-up approaches. Such approaches have the potential for increasing diversity and equity – if barriers can be overcome. They can attend to everyday experience and culture, and engage diverse staff in creating solutions.

The commitments to interdisciplinarity and to engaging beyond the academy with citizens and non-academic organisations could be effective pathways to diversity, but only if commitments are enacted through equitable practices and supported by evidence-based interventions. Research on research (evaluating policy and practice) is one way to ensure that Una Europa develops the evidence base required to meet its overarching research and innovation mission and objectives with diversity at their heart.

**Una.Resin Mapping HR strategies and priorities for joint strategy**

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People are central to the research and innovation landscape, along with a range of infrastructural resources. HR strategies are thus key to developing a diverse and inclusive workforce where individuals and research can flourish. Diversity is a key strand in the work of the Strengthening Human Capital work package of Una.Resin. The findings obtained from different methods (quantitative, qualitative and textual) demonstrate some high-level commitments to diversity. The focus tends to be on behaviour and attitudes (described as unwelcome but probably often experienced as bullying and harassment) and on supporting and enabling disabled staff. There is a variety of training to promote equality and prevent discrimination and some evidence of an embedded, strategic approach to diversity in HR and institutional strategy and frameworks, as well as specific interventions for some categories of staff. A combined approach of prevention (promoting diversity through holistic and institutional approaches) and protection (ending discrimination and harassment) will help create the kind of research and innovation landscape Una Europa seeks, while attending to the pressing issues of current harms within our cultures, behaviours and structures.

There is recognition of the need to promote more flexible career pathways and to adopt good practices, such as the use of narrative CVs or promoting mentoring. There is implicit understanding of the need to avoid narrow definitions of excellence. While there is a significant focus on early career researchers, there is also an awareness of the need to support staff across the whole researcher life course.

Survey evidence particularly points to the need for better internal communications, as survey participants seemed unaware of types of institutional support and activity for strengthening diversity. The experience of individuals depends very much on local practices and the teams within which they are placed. As noted in the previous section, a challenge remains to link individual, cultural and institutional practices in a way that ensures diversity is promoted at each level. While equality and diversity featured in this work, it was still not thoroughly embedded in all the dimensions of human capital strategy, which a fully holistic and mainstreamed approach would demand if it is to promote equity. It is worth noting that diversity and related concepts were not obvious in any of the mind maps reporting on the interview data.

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Developing richly supported and flexible career pathways for all staff involved in research is essential for an outstanding research and innovation ecosystem. Such a system actively enables diversity, is accessible to those who may be excluded and disadvantaged, and is inclusive of difference. Diversity should be promoted and celebrated; its lack should be called out at all levels of institutional practice.

**Mapping Research Infrastructures and Resources (RIRs) and priorities for joint strategy**

Alongside human capital, research infrastructures and resources are essential enablers of research and innovation. Promoting diversity through RIRs should therefore be a key strategic aim. This detailed document begins to lay the groundwork for such an approach but does so implicitly, not explicitly. There is no discussion of diversity, other than as a descriptor of the plethora of RIRs; in other words, diversity as a recognition of the differences between people and how these are socially constructed through ongoing power dynamics does not make an appearance in this important document. This is perhaps because the focus is on infrastructure, yet it is a missed opportunity as infrastructures enable – and thus contribute to – an equitable, accessible, inclusive research and innovation ecosystem.

There is much in the strategy that will support diversity, most importantly the emphasis on interconnecting RIRs, whether they are small, medium or large. There is recognition of the importance of local embeddedness and local connections as well as the added value of interconnections and the opportunities they may bring for researchers. This emphasis on ensuring the inclusion of smaller-scale infrastructures is fundamentally inclusive; it can engender wider and more diverse engagement (e.g. with local communities), be more accessible, and prioritise research areas relevant to local context. The proposed Charter for Research Infrastructures should attempt to make visible the way in which RIRs can support Una Europa's overall commitment to diversity: sharing, opening up access and providing researchers at all career stages, but especially during their early career, with access to resources can help promote an equitable research environment.

**Conclusions**

The Diversity Council definition of diversity encompasses equity and inclusion. There is limited discussion of all of the dimensions of diversity in the documents reviewed, although there is an

overarching commitment to it and some identified policies and interventions, particularly in relation to HR. There is little or no attempt to embed a strategic approach to promoting diversity within the research strategies either at individual institutions or within Una Europa. There is a reliance on unarticulated aspirations that the infrastructures and priorities being developed will themselves support diversity. While they may well do so, a strategic approach would map those pathways and evaluate the evidence to identify good practice, barriers, enablers and what works.

Commitments and intentions are an excellent starting point. We now need to develop the frameworks and tools to move to the next level. This could be transformative in centring diversity as both a key enabler of excellent research and a key outcome of an inclusive and equitable research culture and environment.

**Recommendations**

The following themes and possible areas of interventions were identified in the analysis of the four Una Europa research strategy documents. The recommendations are grouped under four themes.

Governance
- Build diversity into governance and make it an institutional priority
- Make governance structures diverse and drivers of diversity – the Diversity Council should be the main enabler for this process but governance for diversity must permeate all processes
- Adopt the concept of diversity provided by the Diversity Council and embed it in all functions, projects and programmes
- Involve diversity professionals in developing projects, programmes and initiatives

Management & HR
- Develop inclusive leadership and management criteria and practices
- Build and support inclusive teams
- Promote diversity in recruitment, including proactive interventions
- Develop and evaluate training actions (for staff) to embed diversity
- Share best practices for improving diversity

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Community, culture and careers

- Build inclusive communities across the research and innovation landscape which embrace difference, promote equity and end discrimination
- Develop bottom-up initiatives to promote a positive research culture including, for example, mentoring and peer support
- Identify under-representation at all levels and address it
- Involve minoritised groups in developing strategies
- Develop internal and external communication of policies and initiatives to promote awareness and engagement
- Promote research and data collection in order to identify the cultural, behavioural and structural barriers to diversity in research communities and cultures to ensure everyone has equal opportunities and access to a successful career
- Ensure that research funding supports diversity
- Promote diversity in research design and practice
- Use interventions across Una Europa to promote diversity, for example, through mobility of researchers and accessible resources, online platforms to connect people and groups/cohorts for support, engagement and action

Evaluation

- Develop strategic and operational equality impact assessments for each policy/strategy
- Ensure that routine data collection to generate needed information is available to inform strategy
- Follow up on progress against established performance indicators
- Develop tools to assess how diversity is mainstreamed in research and innovation strategy

Lastly, the Diversity Council Action Group on Research encourages Una Europa to take two main types of action as a matter of priority:

**HIGHLIGHT:

1) **Take into account the progressive definition of diversity in all its dimensions**, as outlined in the chapter 'Defining diversity'. This should involve linking the Diversity Council Action Group on Research with the overall research strategy work of Una Europa so that diversity is embedded in all research and innovation strategy work.

2) **Develop a specific set of actions** linked to the overall research and innovation strategy to enable the mainstreaming of diversity and to create evidence-based, targeted actions to promote diversity, including for all staff involved in the research and innovation ecosystem.

: HIGHLIGHT**