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Introduction

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Engaging with Diversity in European Universities

INTRODUCTION

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Diversity is a key factor in creating an equal university alliance for all, which promotes equity and social justice. Diversity as a concept acknowledges the multidimensional differences between people that are structured by social categories. Diversity is understood to be a positive aspect of society that should be acknowledged, welcomed and fostered in order for all people to be able to fully participate in society. This requires existing inequity to be addressed (for a comprehensive definition of diversity, see the next chapter). Una Europa created its Diversity Council as a permanent body to assist Una Europa to achieve this goal. The Diversity Council has worked to embed diversity in all dimensions of Una Europa collaboration. The goal of the Diversity Council is to promote an equal and non-discriminating study- and work-related environment for all members of the Una community. With the close of the 1Europe project, which the Diversity Council is part of, this publication brings together the key findings and recommendations derived from the work of the Diversity Council that has been done so far (2020–2022) with eight partner universities.¹

The Diversity Council

The Diversity Council consists of the partner universities' respective units responsible for issues on equality and diversity, and it is led by the University of Helsinki, with the University of Bologna as a co-lead. The core of its work is comprised by four Action Groups, which focus on data collection, research, education and good practices. The members of the Diversity Council have worked towards incorporating diversity in all Una Europa functions. The Diversity Council regularly reports on its progress to the Una Europa Board of Directors and the Rectors' Assembly. It invites the Student Board, the Affordably Abroad initiative and Una Europa Student Challenge on Diversity to present and discuss current topics in its meetings.

The goal of the Diversity Council is to promote equity and social justice, including all possible disadvantaged groups. This includes activities that are aimed for students, academic staff and professionals. The Una universities are committed to promoting equality and respect for diversity in

¹ Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna, Freie Universität Berlin, Helsingin yliopisto / Helsingfors universitet, KU Leuven, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, University of Edinburgh, and Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie.

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their operations. The universities each have their own equality/diversity plans that guide this activity, including concrete measures to promote diversity. Sharing good practices, institutional action plans and expertise, as well as learning from each other, are central to Diversity Council work. Because the Una universities often share the same successes, challenges and structural problems, open discussion is vital for addressing those successfully. This reinforces the member universities' ongoing activities and creates new joint actions.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the operations of the Diversity Council, as its members only got an opportunity to meet face to face after two years of joint work. For the same reason, collaboration with different Una Europa bodies, such as of 1Europe and Una.Resin, have required creativity. The allocation of resources is a constant and practical theme in all diversity work, and it has been no different with the Diversity Council. The resources have not been sufficient, considering the varied objectives and concrete measures expected of the Diversity Council. The demands on diversity work are growing with each passing year, as the different needs of different groups have to be heard and responded to. This work concerns university staff, students and stakeholders.

Aims of the publication

We aim this publication at other European universities attempting to achieve the same goals of diversity that Una Europa has worked towards. The Diversity Council publication brings together the key findings and recommendations derived from the Diversity Council's work on diversity across all Una Europa universities. The Diversity Council publication may be used to help each Una Europa university, Una Europa as a whole and other universities in Europe to create a more diverse university or university network. As a medium to share some of the results of the Diversity Council's work, it provides information for the European Commission on the work of Una Europa regarding diversity. The key goal is to reflect on and find ways in which Una Europa and other European universities can imbed diversity in their practices. Therefore, the publication seeks to disseminate what Una Europa has done in terms of bringing diversity work into Una Europa functions.

The Una Europa Diversity Council members have written this publication, comprising the work of four Action Groups on data collection, research, education and good practices. Each Action Group

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shares the knowledge gathered and produced during their work, including observations, findings, recommendations and next steps. 1) The Action Group on Data Collection looked at what kind of diversity data is currently being collected and how it can be ensured that Una Europa has the data it needs. 2) The Action Group on Research analysed Una Europa work on research strategy to find out how diversity could be best embedded in it. 3) The Action Group on Education focused on how Una Europa can jointly expand the knowledge base and awareness of staff and students on diversity. 4) The Action Group on Sharing Good Practices collected and reflected on the good practices of the Una Europa community, and how we can learn from each other. It has to be noted that these four focus areas do overlap at times. For example, education and research intertwine, and data collection is vital for human resource management on staff in education and research. In addition, good practices are found in all three areas.

Each Action Group section in this publication is structured by a set of overarching questions that bind the themes together. The sections reflect on how diversity is important to each theme and what the key issues on diversity are; how each theme was approached, what the identified barriers and enablers were, and how staff and students can be engaged; and finally, what the lessons learned were, and what recommendations and future steps to succeed in each theme were discovered. In their work, all four Action Groups aimed at helping the policy-building of the Una Europa alliance.

After this brief introduction, the concept of diversity is defined to provide a common understanding of what we mean by diversity in this context. After the above-mentioned sections on data collection, research strategy, education and good practices, the 2022 Student Challenge on Diversity is presented, followed by the Una Europa Affordably Abroad Initiative, both of which give a voice to the student body in Una Europa and its work on diversity. Finally, the conclusion brings together the key findings, lessons learned and next steps towards a diverse Una Europa that strives for equity and social justice.