

Summary

This report presents results from a research project on diversity and inclusion at the University of Oslo (UiO). The project was carried out by the Centre for Gender Research at UiO, on behalf of UiO, to contribute to a knowledge-based discussion about measures in UiO's *Action Plan for Diversity, Gender Equality and Inclusion 2021 – 2024*.

Going into the project, two discussions have formed the basis for the report: What are key challenges regarding diversity and inclusion at UiO? How can these be interpreted and handled?

We explored the questions using several data sources and methodological approaches: A review of previous research on gender equality and diversity in Norwegian academia. Document analysis of action plans for gender equality and diversity at UiO from 1989 to today. Analyses of answers from an electronic survey sent to research and technical-administrative employees at UiO and subsequent qualitative interviews with employees. Based on this data material, challenges were identified and recommendations were formulated.

Approach

UiO has been working on gender equality since the 1970s. Starting with the action plan for 2018–2020, this work was expanded to include diversity in a broader sense.

In the beginning, the work on gender equality at UiO had the ambition of improving the position of women. This was motivated by the fact that women's experiences and perspectives were absent in research and teaching. The basis for knowledge was built on only half the population's approaches; insights into the living conditions and experiences of women were absent. Gender equality proved necessary from a knowledge perspective. It became apparent that women were primarily the ones interested in, and had the prerequisite to investigate, these missing perspectives. Therefore, from a representational perspective, it was necessary to ensure women's right to employment at all levels of the university organisation. Gender equality work was motivated by a double perspective; knowledge and representation.

We have used this as a basis when we have concentrated on practice approaches to diversity. In order to function as intended, practice must have a firm hold in principled perspectives. On the one hand, diversity is linked to

ambitions for diversity of knowledge, on the other hand to diversity of representation – for an equal right to be present. Furthermore, we have assumed that equality and diversity are based on a normative goal of justice, understood as parity of participation. At a university, it is your abilities, efforts and results, not who you are, which will decide your success. It should apply whether you are a student taking an exam, you are applying for a position, or requesting advancement in the university hierarchy. Parity of participation is challenged by organisational and/or cultural institutional obstacles that do not provide everyone with equal opportunities.

Action plans – from principles of epistemological diversity to goal-oriented gender balance

Analysing UiO's action plans for gender equality and diversity from 1989 to today reveals the prevalence of the double perspective (knowledge and representation) in the first plans. But after the turn of the millennium, this double perspective was abandoned in favour of a rather one-sided representation perspective, manifested through the setting of continually new targets for gender balance. The knowledge perspective was replaced by a quality perspective, by a goal of quality as in outstanding – as in excellent. Quality of knowledge in the sense of epistemic diversity, disappeared. This turnaround in the gender equality plans can be interpreted as a result of a new market-inspired goal management that was established through national political decisions for universities and colleges at the beginning of the 2000s. The goal management is focused on student production, research funding and publishing results in the highest ranked journals. This management system derives its legitimacy from the goal of increased production and increased quality, in order to get Norwegian universities to establish themselves on the international research front. When this was introduced into the action plans for gender equality, gender balance became a goal in itself, or potentially a prerequisite for strengthening research quality since a broader recruitment base should provide access to the most outstanding researchers. But with a lack of reflections on what – based on more principled considerations – we are trying to achieve, two problems arise: First, it becomes unclear what the measures are based on, what kind of problems are to be solved. Secondly, it becomes unclear what the measures will contribute to. This is an overall challenge in the work for gender equality and diversity at UiO.

Diversity challenges

Based on practices and experiences among employees, as expressed in the electronic survey and in the qualitative interviews, eight diversity challenges are identified:

1) *Scholarly diversity is challenged by the incentive system*: An important element in the target-oriented management is the Norwegian model for publication-based funding, assessment based on scientific publication [tellekantsystemet]. This entails the goal of publishing research results in peer-reviewed journals, preferably the top ranked journals. The qualitative interview material shows that this incentive system is effective and important in the everyday life of research staff. Some are motivated by the success of such publications. They are willing to make adjustments in the topics they research, the questions they ask and the methods they use in order to succeed with publications. Strategic adaptations of this type can have a detrimental effect on the diversity of knowledge, it can contribute to unification. At the same time, such adaptations presuppose that the motivation for the individual's work is taken from the incentive structure, not from the individual researcher's urge to ask questions, find answers and meaning. To researchers that have a strong inner motivation, publications do not appear as a goal, but as a means.

2) *Gender balance versus diversity in recruitment processes*: Gender balance appears as a consideration that should and must be taken into account in recruitment processes. It is not considered politically correct to submit nominations with only men if there are qualified women among the applicants. It is assumed that qualified women exist, so it is important to find and, if necessary, motivate them. On the other hand, diversity does not appear in the same way as a consideration that *must* be taken into account in recruitment processes, although it is good to achieve that. For example, it is not automatically assumed that there are qualified applicants with an immigration background or disability.

3) *Open ended jobs along three dimensions*: The work of scientific staff is limitless in terms of time and the content of the assignments. Some consider work to be part of their identity. Thus, requirements do not just become system requirements, there are also self-imposed requirements. A lot of research show that for women open ended jobs in academia make it particularly difficult for them to negotiate the work-life balance. Our study also shows this. Women experience that having children stops their academic work for a period. Men experience that their work is only slowed down, not stopped. At the same time, a third thing about the open ended job is also made visible in our data material: place. An international academic labour market does not take into account Norwegian parental leave.

4) *Inadequate peer inclusion*: Experiences of not being included in collegial communities, and the desire to be so, are expressed across different groups of employees. The need for what an interviewee calls peer colleagues [kompiskollegaer] is a clear finding. The internationally recruited staff appear

to be most vulnerable to the lack of peer colleagues. Inadequate peer inclusion is at the same time something the interviewees perceive as something individual, and something they wish to solve individually. A systemic problem is individualised.

5) *Discrimination and harassment as minor violations*: Employees at UiO are exposed to discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment, although our data indicate that this is not experienced by a large proportion of employees. We reveal two different ways of understanding and experiencing discrimination: the very explicit and the non-explicit. Those that have not themselves been exposed to such things understand discrimination as something very explicit, something which indeed is very rare at UiO. Those who are exposed, experience the small violations, the non-explicit events, in a way that makes them question whether this *was* really discrimination, which means that they do not address practitioners and situations that are perceived as unrecognisable.

6) *Vulnerability and individual adaptations*: Perceived vulnerability, in the form of experienced incidents of discrimination, and especially sexual harassment, leads to adaptations around the individual that will prevent the incidents from recurring. Individuals are not confident that problems will be prevented at the institutional and organisational level and make individual adjustments.

7) *Practical problems in dealing with the Norwegian system*: Practical problems with various aspects of the Norwegian bureaucracy are a recurring issue in interviews with international recruits. For example: partner's residence, tax, bank account, bankID, housing and language. Much of this cannot be solved by UiO alone, but it must nevertheless be solved for the employee to be able to function properly at UiO.

8) *Language policy and language practice with wide room for interpretation*: There are many laws and guidelines for UiO's language policy and practice, but none are directly contradictory. International recruits are required to learn Norwegian. The practice seems to be that this is limited to permanent employees. But here there are many unresolved questions that are left to individuals and different entities, such as: What kind of requirements should international employees meet? What kind of training offer should they receive or be imposed on? Who pays? What happens if the employee does not meet the requirements for Norwegian skills?

To sum it up, there is a tendency that organisational and cultural issues that contribute to challenge goals of participation on equal terms are turned into individual problems that the individual must solve themselves. This applies to the absence of peer communities, language policy guidelines with a large

room for interpretation, practical issues for internationally recruited staff upon arrival in Norway and UiO, and handling of vulnerabilities that arise based on experiences of discrimination and harassment. But also that the individual must find out for themselves how they negotiate the incentive system and figuring out the work-life balance, the content of the tasks and the place. Gender and equality are an issue regardless of whether the individual was born in Norway or abroad, and what particularly stands out as a challenge is the balance between work and care/family. This appears to be more demanding for women than for men, both in our study and as shown in other research. This establishes a gender difference in opportunity.

Recommendations

- Discuss what the goal of equality and diversity should be, and why this is important at UiO.
- Initiate reflections on how the management system is important for scholarly quality understood through scholarly diversity.
- Encourage the use of search committees when announcing positions, also for reasons other than gender.
- Leadership training should include and underscore that contributing to peer communities is a responsibility for leaders.
- Initiate a ‘What is discrimination?’ campaign.
- Develop further the current reception system for international recruits through a standardised system at the lower unit levels.
- Establish a clear language policy and language practice.
- Launch targeted research projects that can establish a knowledge base about challenges among employees with different backgrounds – such as descendants of immigrants to Norway. Carry out an exploratory research project among students at UiO.