



STRENGTHENING INCLUSIVE COMPETENCIES OF HAN UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES STAFF_

SHORT VERSION

Diversity a fact?
Inclusion and equity a must!

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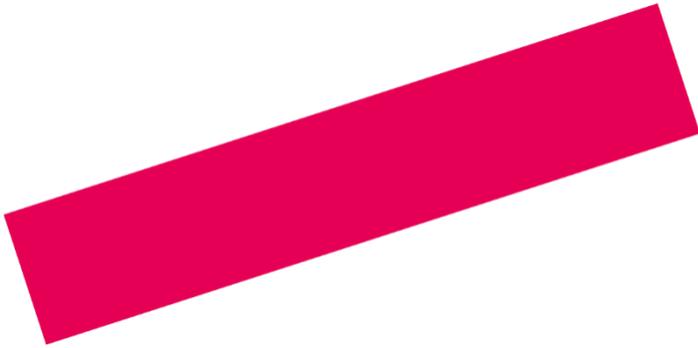


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1. INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on strengthening inclusive competencies of HAN employees and what it takes to make this happen. The Thema team *Inclusive Education and Work* commissioned this exploration. This Thema team is part of Focus group Fair Health of HAN University of Applied Sciences. This report is a translation from the Dutch report: 'Verkenning naar het versterken van inclusieve competenties op de HAN, Beknopte versie'. As it was important to make this report inclusive to all employees, also international staff whose English is better than their Dutch, translation is done by the author (not a professional translator), still hope you enjoy reading it.

Reason

First, the mission of the *Inclusive Education and Work* Thema team is to make HAN more inclusive as an educator and employer. Secondly, the ambitions from the HAN Koersbeeld, which wants to enhance a safe learning and working environment for respectively students and employees (HAN, 2021), are an important push to do this research. The Koersbeeld now lacks an elaboration into integrated DIG policy and a translation to the daily practice of HAN employees. Finally, the developments in diversity and inclusion in HAN and society are a reason to dive into this matter. We also see external pressure from social trends and legislation to pay more attention to diversity and inclusion, including inclusive employee competencies.

Relatively lower scores on diversity and inclusion-related variables from the latest Employee Survey MO (Erkelens, Maartje - van Internetspiegel -Effactory, 2021), the student survey NSE (NSE HAN, 2022), another internal poll at HAN (Work group diversity, 2022), and student research (Sanchez M. e., 2021) indicate that more attention is needed to bring the Koersbeeld vision into HAN practice, especially where diversity and inclusion are concerned. Even though there are great differences between teams and academies, most interviewed HAN employees feel that HAN should make more of an effort to put inequality, undesirable behavior and discrimination between employees and students and between employees themselves on the agenda and counteract on it. Raising complaints often proves difficult, especially in the absence of a safe and independent complaints procedure. Knowledge of procedures, courage and inclusive communication can help in raising and countering undesirable situations, but change is also needed in systems and procedures. Promoting inclusion does not happen by itself, so it will have to be put on the agenda at all levels and translated into the daily practice of employees.

Reading Guide

In this first chapter, I outline the arguments cited by employees for putting DIG policy and inclusive competency development on the agenda. Chapter 2 presents the research design and implementation. In addition, definitions of key terms used in this exploration are explained. In Chapter 3, I outline the current situation around inclusive competencies and DIG policy within HAN. Chapter 4 provides an overview of inclusive competencies needed within HAN to create an inclusive working and learning environment for both staff and students. Chapter 5 distinguishes employee groups that would need more or less inclusive competencies in specific roles. Chapter 6 describes what strengthening these competencies would require from management and employees at the managerial, team and individual level. In the final chapter (7), I put the competencies in perspective. References are included at the end of this paper, as is an appendix of organizational recommendations for inclusion cited by respondents that were not immediately linked to inclusive competency development.

This is a short version of the exploration into strengthening inclusive competencies within HAN. An extensive literature review on the meaning of inclusive competencies of employees within higher education was first conducted as part of this exploration. Results in Dutch of this literature review can be found in Part A (see [Part A](#)). This part also includes the justification for this study. In part B, current HAN policies including ongoing activities related to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DIG) are mapped out. Also included in that part are definitions, perspectives and stories of HAN employees in the field of inclusive competencies, as derived from interviews and meetings (also in Dutch, see [part B](#)).

2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND DEFINITIONS

This chapter outlines the research design and implementation, followed by definitions for key concepts used in this exploration.

Research design

This research focused on the needs and preconditions for inclusive competencies of HAN employees. Short- and medium-term scenarios were also developed to support employees in this matter. Using literature review, HAN policy research, interviews, observations and roundtable meetings with HAN employees and students, data were obtained on their perspectives (see Table 1 for the research design). This research was conducted from August 2022- March 2023, in one day per week.

Method	Number	Information
Participatory observation during HAN events	9 meetings	During HAN meetings, D&I market, training, etc.
Literature research	95 references	English and Dutch articles and policy papers
Interviews with employees	18 employees	Spread over Arnhem, Nijmegen, departments and groups of employees
Interviews with students	7 students	From non-norm groups
Interviews with DEI-experts	3 experts	From educational institutions in the region, outside HAN
2 Roundtable meetings to validate research results	22 participants	One in Arnhem in English and one in Nijmegen in Dutch
Online meeting HAN managers	8 managers	From Arnhem and Nijmegen

Figure 1: Research methodologies used in this exploration.

Definitions

Leiden lecturer Saniye Çelik says in her article "Building blocks for an inclusive college" that theoretically there are many different definitions circulating about inclusion and diversity and different ways to achieve them. The definition of diversity that is commonly found and used here reads:

Diversity includes all the visible and invisible characteristics in which people differ from one another.

This definition is also seen in the Position Paper of Association of Colleges (Association of Colleges, 2022). The metaphor of the iceberg is often used, where visible characteristics can be seen above the water, for example skin color, clothing style, age, and some disabilities. Underwater are the invisible characteristics, such as norms, values, beliefs, fears, character traits, work styles, needs and competencies, and these have more impact on behavior and interactions (Çelik, 2021). Thus, invisible characteristics include invisible

capabilities and limitations, as well as people's knowledge and experience or their gender identity.

Inclusion is defined in Vereniging Hogescholen's Position Paper as follows: 'inclusion is about how we deal with differences, genuinely involving, and including people in the group' (Vereniging Hogescholen, 2022). This does not yet go far enough according to Çelik and others, as they still assume the majority group as the norm: 'in an inclusive culture, everyone is treated fairly and valued for who they are and has a say in decision making.' In addition to members of majority groups, members of minority groups also want to feel that they belong (Çelik, 2021). Therefore, we take a broader view of inclusion in this exploration:

Inclusion is hearing, accepting, valuing, and respecting the differences and similarities present. It also includes the will to use and connect both, in decision-making and actions so that everyone feels recognized and can participate.

When we look at diversity and inclusion, we see in the book *The Inclusion Marathon* that, according to Kauthar Bouchallikht and Zoe Papaikonomou, we cannot avoid paying explicit attention to equity. Equity is not the same as equality. Equality has two meanings: as a legal term of the principle of equality in Article 1 of the Constitution and as meaning that something or someone is the same. The second meaning, they say, can be a trap, because it could result in trying to mold another person in your image and ideas. Then - instead of diversity - homogeneity and exclusion of otherness may arise. Therefore, equity is usually a more appropriate term. Equity is about someone not having to be the same, but - despite or because of the differences - being worth the same and having equal rights (Bouchallikht & Papaikonomou, 2021). We use this definition of equity further in this exploration.

Equity: someone does not have to be the same but is worth the same and has equal rights.

When we refer to the other person as needy and want to "help" them, an unequal relationship is created. Thus, power relations are perpetuated by good intentions. Professor Halleh Ghorashi is quoted in *The Inclusion Marathon* about this pattern, and she indicates that this is especially prevalent in countries with a welfare state, such as the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries. Helping others can be about "becoming like us," while being inclusive sometimes means disrupting existing structures and procedures (Bouchallikht & Papaikonomou, 2021). Employees indicated in interviews that precisely that disruption does not seem to be embedded in the HAN culture. Therefore, it is important to draw additional attention to this blind spot of unequal "helping".

Hence, this report includes Equity and uses DEI as an abbreviation: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Bias is a word that also recurs frequently in this exploration. We use the definition that is also used in the report "*Towards an Inclusive Work Environment*" by De Jong and other researchers from Hogeschool Inholland, GAK and VU University of Applied Sciences:

Biases are "attitudes, associations, beliefs, thoughts, judgments, evaluations and behaviors based on stereotypes and biases rather than on accurate knowledge of an individual and the context" (Machteld de Jong, 2021)

Biases play out not only at the individual level, but also institutionally. That is, where unequal power relations between groups exist and are maintained, partly because they are embedded in the existing culture and structure of the organization. Cox defines institutional bias as the deep-seated prejudices toward "the other" and cultural patterns with exclusionary effects in an institutional context (Cox in (De Jong, 2021)).

Finally, I address inclusive competencies, that is, competencies focused on inclusion and equality, of both the employee himself, his colleagues and students. For competence, I use the definition from the book "*Managing your competencies*" widely used in higher education:

A competency is a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors necessary for an employee to function well within a college context (Grit, 2012).

The following section outlines the current situation of diversity, inclusion, equity and inclusive competencies at HAN.

3. CURRENT HAN DEI POLICY & INCLUSIVE COMPETENCIES

Currently, there is no DEI policy in which HAN defines what "diversity," "inclusion" or "equality" mean for HAN employees, let alone what competencies are important as an inclusive educational institution and employer. An analysis of which inclusive competencies are present or absent within teams and departments was not found, nor integrated systematic policies to strengthen inclusive competencies. This is not to say that this theme is not alive among staff, students and administration. On the contrary!

In the past, policy papers have been written, measures taken and activities in the DEI area organized. Most policies were initiated by external laws and regulations. In addition to these policies, many initiatives were developed within departments and educational programs to put DEI on the agenda and strengthen inclusive competencies, mostly of students and sometimes of employees. Within educational courses, we see that, partly because of the different fields of work that they focus on, the activities towards students within and outside their curricula are implemented differently. Sometimes the activities are specifically aimed at employees, in the form of dialogue meetings, case discussion meetings, meetings and training organized by learning communities or by HAN Academy. The *Week of Inclusion* and the *Week Against Poverty* both had activities that took place primarily in Nijmegen. These are examples of HAN-wide events that aimed to create more internal exchange and connection in this area between staff and students. Most activities are organized ad hoc for students and several involved staff members. Because they are initiatives of a group of employees within a course or academy, employees often do not know from each other what is happening (G&S meeting, 2022). In Arnhem fewer activities in the field of DEI are organized for and by employees than in Nijmegen. Arnhem employees therefore have less access to activities that could strengthen their inclusive competencies. Almost all events so far have been in Dutch. The current range of courses for non-Dutch-speaking employees at the HAN Academy are also very limited.

In 2022, the Executive Board gave the first assignment to the policy departments OOK and HR to develop an integrated and supported DEI policy. Inclusive competency development of employees could be part of this policy and this exploration can therefore contribute to this DEI policy.

Importance of inclusive competencies according to employees

The Executive Board promises its employees in its Koersbeeld to be a good employer through a social, safe, and inclusive working climate in which everyone contributes professionally and personally from their own expertise to a smart, clean and social environment. Indeed, an inclusive team and organizational context is a prerequisite for enabling HAN employees to work inclusively towards students and colleagues. The aim is to have achieved these internal goals by 2027 (HAN, 2021).

Most staff and students in this study indicate that inclusive competencies are important to them, and they use a variety of arguments. External pressure from changing regulations and increasing social polarization are mentioned. Some interviewed employees warn for using external pressure as a primary driver, as they believe intrinsic motivation comes across much stronger. Using fine words such as "creating a social, safe and inclusive working environment" without initiating real change and without investing in it, is also discouraged. This is quickly seen through by employees, which reduces trust in management and causes change fatigue. The main arguments for employees to engage in inclusive competencies should be intrinsic reasons. Employees therefore recommend using the following intrinsic motives in internal communications:

- Include and create equal opportunities for all student and employee groups and thus counteract current discrimination and exclusion within HAN (equality perspective).
- As a team, represent regional and student population for recognition, knowledge, experience and role models for all students and staff (legitimacy perspective).
- Improve collaboration in teams and departments, allowing better use of different perspectives and more creativity (creativity perspective).
- Be able to attract new groups of employees as there could be a labor shortage in the near future (labor market prospects).

All four of Çelik's perspectives (equality, legitimacy, creativity and labor market perspectives (Çelik in: van Hal, 2020)) are mentioned by employees, but the equality and legitimacy perspectives are emphasized the most. Ultimately, it could be more beneficial to employees if they become more skilled in inclusive competencies, as they would consciously feel more capable as employees. It feels good to have more knowledge and skills in diversity, e.g. by being able to have "good" conversations in the team with colleagues, and specifically for teachers in the classroom with their student(s). When teams work more and better together, there is more understanding and discomfort due to differences can be better tolerated. Employees would also feel more heard and seen by colleagues, supervisors and students, which increases bonding and trust with the organization.

The importance of DEI is not clear to all HAN employees. Some respondents do not feel responsible for DEI of colleagues and students or question it: surely, we cannot admit everyone to HAN? What are the limits to inclusion? Some employees miss the voice of the majority or feel exclusion because of their religion. It is good to also listen to doubt and resistance, because if we do so, we get a better picture of employees' needs. Resistance and tension can better be seen as a sign of growth and change than dismissed as whining and not valuable. The moment the obvious norm is questioned, assumptions begin to falter and change can take place (Pulinx, 2021). We can thus build DEI policies and make HAN practice more inclusive for all staff and students, because inclusion is about everyone.

Diversity and inclusive competencies within HAN teams and departments

Within HAN, employees define diversity and inclusion very differently, as was also outlined in Part B of this research (see [part B](#)). Below, a HAN employee describes diversity in a broad sense, like the definition we saw earlier:

"Diversity to me is the enormous range of differences between people, not only in appearance but also in being, and in doing, and in desires, so that is enormous. Everyone is unique in some sense, and you can make groups out of that. But the question is whether we can and should put those people in boxes. It's diversity." (uu)

When it comes to diversity, most respondents define it as having a diverse team or a diverse HAN. Most employees involved in this study are not satisfied with diversity within their teams/departments, as they feel their team is not yet a good reflection of the student population and/or the regional population.

Executives would like to use HR support to recruit more employees from immigrant backgrounds and younger employees to better connect with students. They generally do find a lot of diversity in character and talents among their staff. It varies by team and field whether there is a gender-diverse workforce, when taking a binary perspective (numbers of women and men) and leaving non-binary, intersex, and transgender individuals out of the picture. The biggest problem is that some visible but mostly invisible diversity characteristics are not known to managers. Executives usually don't know exactly if people have a migrant background, mental and/or physical support needs, and/or gender diversity. They do not ask their team members about it, because they feel uncomfortable about asking it and doubtful about the right language and terms. Normally, stricter privacy regulations are mentioned as an obstacle. Some interviewed staff members warn against narrowly defining *diversity in numbers*, as this would only stigmatize specific target groups. Instead of being empowered, they argue, these employees would rather feel disqualified in their expertise by being recruited because of a non-norm sub identity. However, most managers want to work with targets and say they would like more support from HR to diversify their team.

Some interviewed staff members also see team composition as a key to change organizational culture, as they argue that current teams are mostly unaware of their own biases. In most HAN teams, white Dutch Anglocentric/Eurocentric cis heterosexual female or -male biases occur. This was also observed by students, involved in this research. Sociolinguistic researcher Ingrid Pillar confirms the view that most academic research is biased. Most of the research on intercultural communication, for example, is done by American and British researchers (70%). These are also the most influential (via the most citation by other researchers), while only representing a little over 5% of the world's population (Pillar, 2022). This bias is not only the case for research in social studies, but also applies to technical and economics courses within HAN. Our view of the world, from Applied Psychology to International Business, is distorted if our educational resources at HAN are almost exclusively from this small part of the world, when at the same time our target audiences and society consist of people from other backgrounds. That we are biased becomes only clear through self-reflection, training, or stepping outside your own bubble, for example by sharing experiences and perspectives with friends and colleagues outside our own bubble. The prerequisite for valuing other perspectives is that employees dare to express themselves, that they are heard and appreciated for their input, and that change is initiated. Unfortunately, this does not always happen in HAN teams and departments

because a safe and inclusive environment is missing, causing these employees to drop out early or keep a low profile. So diverse employee teams are not a guarantee of inclusion and inclusive competencies, but they are a first step and other steps need to be taken to change the implicit norms and values in the team.

The latest MO research (Employee satisfaction survey) showed that HAN scores relatively lower on inclusion-related variables than the HBO benchmark (Erkelens, Maartje - from Internetspiegel -Effactory, 2021). The MO revealed that in some departments employees experience a pleasant and safe work environment, where they feel involved in each other's ups and downs. However, in other teams and departments, cooperation seems more difficult, and unsafety and exclusion is experienced among both staff and students. A poll done by a Work group on diversity consisting of both employees and students within one academy, found that exclusion and discrimination occurred frequently. The analysis of poll results showed that staff members rarely addressed each other about undesirable behavior, and, subsequently, report such unsafe situations (Work group diversity, 2022). This undesired situation was also mentioned more than once by interviewed employees of other academies. What is going on among staff and students remains invisible in most cases if it is not asked directly and people do not feel safe to speak out. Specific minority groups that experience the most exclusion within HAN, according to the respondents from this poll, are employees/students of color, with a migration background, whether or not from the LGBTQ+¹ group and/or people with a physical or mental disability. It is not self-evident that employees feel safe enough to speak out against existing discriminatory statements, practices, norms, or inaccessible norms and buildings.

Another benchmark is Sustainabil, a ranking for sustainability in higher education in the Netherlands, created by the organization Students for Tomorrow. HAN finishes as one of the last on the list on the 30th place, out of 33 participating colleges and universities in the Netherlands. No institution-specific data were found on *Social Sustainability* (which includes diversity and inclusion), but HAN is not mentioned with any best practices either. Under the topic of 'Management', HAN has a similarly low ranking (Students for Tomorrow, 2022). We see best practices at close neighbors Hogeschool van Hall Larenstein (at number 1) and Radboud University (at number 5) on inclusive competency development, so we could ask for advice there. Involving students in sustainable and social solutions is the key advice of Students for Tomorrow (Students for Tomorrow, 2022). In addition, they would like to see DEI policy linked to Social Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations². The HAN's Regiegroep Global citizenship (Wereldburgerschap) also advocates the SDG's.

¹ LBHTIQ+ abbreviation stands for Lesbians, Bisexual persons, Homosexual persons, Transgender persons, Intersex persons, Queer persons and persons with other sexual orientation or gender identity who are not part of the majority norm (heterosexual-cisgender persons).

² Sustainable Development Goals are 17 sustainable development goals in a United Nations development plan, which was signed by more than 150 world leaders in 2015. Goals aim to end extreme poverty, inequality, injustice and climate change by 2030 (Duurzaamheid.nl, 2023)

4. INCLUSIVE COMPETENCIES OF HAN EMPLOYEES

No one has an overview of the entire HAN or considers all perspectives and contexts, and this is probably impossible. HAN has employees in Nijmegen and Arnhem, employees working in different programs and departments, people with more and less experience in using inclusive competencies. We see different attitudes, language and perception and different inclusive knowledge and skills among HAN employees.

All stakeholders in this study have ideas about what diversity and inclusion should look like in their work and which inclusive competencies are needed. In doing so, they primarily start from their own context (their department, team or program) and their own role (e.g., janitor, student career counselor or academy director). Teaching staff and researchers know the term "competencies" and use this concept regularly themselves. While some service staff members could not relate to this concept and use words such as "able to participate" and "unfair" when some students/staff were excluded.

Most employees consider the inclusive competencies, they mention themselves, important in their work. Having inclusive competencies, they usually use them daily when interacting with colleagues and students. Employees also share in the interviews many situations in which they find it rather difficult to be inclusive. Students experience a lack of inclusive competencies among teaching and coaching staff, saying that they miss knowledge and skills, but also sometimes adopt an easygoing attitude. Employees also experience boundaries with themselves, colleagues, students and with HAN as an organization to be inclusive. They would like to receive more support in training and intervision, but also in more break time to get to know each other as colleagues and to have more understanding of each other's perspectives to learn from it.

Many interviewed employees wonder what is expected of them in terms of inclusive competencies from HAN as their employer. The majority expects more clarity about expectations from the Executive Board. They find the existing situation unclear and want unambiguous definitions and guidelines. Other employees find it interesting and learningful to dialogue with each other about this within the team. They want to develop bottom-up definitions and guidelines. So here we see two approaches: getting a framework from above and defining and working on DEI from the bottom up. These approaches can be combined. Both groups require more time to get to know each other better as colleagues and to understand and learn from each other's perspective.

Because of the diversity among HAN employees, a broad range of perspectives, knowledge, attitudes and skills exists, when referring to "inclusive competencies". The list of competencies found in the literature (see [Part A](#)), was also mentioned and seen as important by the participants in this study, both students and teachers. The table below describes those inclusive competencies, adapted to HAN practice by the employees involved in this study (see [part B](#)). Employees named knowledge, attitudes and skills aspects of 8 inclusive competencies, regardless of employee role, namely: *Seeing people in context, Collaborating equally, Recognizing and acknowledging biases, Building relationships and networks outside your bubble, Inclusive communication, Questioning the status quo, Creating equal opportunities & Inclusive leadership* (see Figure 2).

The most frequently mentioned inclusive competencies are: *Inclusive Communication*, *Recognizing and acknowledging Bias*, *Questioning Status Quo*, and for executives *Inclusive Leadership* and *Creating Equal Opportunity*. Less mentioned are *Building Relationships and Networks Outside Your Bubble*, *Seeing People in Context*, and *Collaborating Equally*. Here we may have some blind spots as HAN employees.

These inclusive competencies cannot be viewed in isolation, as they sometimes overlap in knowledge, attitudes and skills and are often linked to each other in a situation/context. An empathetic attitude of the *Inclusive Communication* competency was linked by one employee to *Questioning Status Quo* and *Building Relationships and Networks Outside Your Bubble* competencies, as can be seen in the following citation:

"Very important is that you can put yourself in another person's shoes. We are prone to look at situations or groups only from our own perspective. If you're really inclusive, you can ask open questions about another perspective, why does another person say it that way. Opening yourself up though. It's nice and safe to gather the same people around you, but that's not inclusive. It also requires looking outward, guts: dare to step over yourself." (ss)

Inclusive competencies should be known among all employees as a framework for expected and valued behavior and action. This competency list can be used when hiring new employees and when getting them on board during their introductions.

If these inclusive competencies are known to all HAN employees and based on regularly monitored by their supervisors and colleagues during performance interviews, peer reviews and team meetings, this could normalize inclusive competencies and encourage employees to further strengthen them.

After Figure 2, key competencies are discussed for each employee group.

Competence	Attitude aspects	Knowledge aspects	Skills aspects
View person in context	Situational human-centered approach	Know and apply diversity factors; Intersectional Theory	Intersectional thinking and acting; ask the other question; Discover similarities besides differences
Collaborating on an equal footing	Willing to collaborate; Willing to be equal to others	Know in- and exclusion patterns and power mechanisms in groups and in communication	Recognize similarities and differences; Acknowledge and appreciate differences Inclusive communication techniques; Having good honest conversations; Give and receive feedback and feedforward
Acknowledge and recognize biases	Informed-not-knowing attitude	Know yourself and the other; Recognize bias; know cultural patterns of biases	Recognize and question biases; park biases; Postpone judgement and check interpretations
Building relations and networks outside your bubble	Attitude of curiosity; Open attitude	Know how to connect and keep connection; Know how to communicate inclusively and culturally sensitive	Deal with uncertainty; Connect and keep connection with others; Inclusive and culturally sensitive communication
Inclusive communication	Informed-not-knowing attitude; Open attitude; Reflective attitude; Empathetic & curious attitude	Know empathy exercises; Know storytelling and Interview techniques; Know rules and patterns of communication	Communication and interviewing techniques (listening actively, summarizing, and asking open and follow-up questions) Recognize and appreciate differences; Change perspectives and communication styles; Say Sorry; Empathize and respect others who have other norms, values & beliefs; Postpone judgement and check interpretation;
Question Status quo	Courageous attitude; Open to change and feedback; Growth mindset; Focus on possibilities (and not on limitations)	Know and use power, privilege, and position; know theories about discrimination, microaggression and racism; know power mechanisms in groups and communication	Reflective skills; Having good honest conversations; face and deal with 'hot' moments; Giving and receiving feedback and feedforward; Strategic skills
Creating equal opportunities	Willing to be a global citizen; Willing to change Dare to make mistakes; Open to experience experts	Know DEI definitions & models, Global citizenship models; Sustainable change management Inclusive research methods; Evidence based tools & interventions for inclusion and equal opportunities	Skills for change; Dealing with uncertainty and diversity fatigue; Say sorry; Inclusive research skills
Inclusive leadership	Open attitude to everyone; Willing to be a role model; Giving work to people who do not meet your image of a standard employee	Know team conversation techniques & individual coaching tools to appreciate diversity; Know HR tools to diversify teams; Know Teambuilding techniques	Reflective skills Having good honest conversations; face and deal with 'hot' moments; Giving and receiving feedback and feedforward; Having an intuitive ear and eye for team patterns; Facilitate in-between space and teambuilding, and norm disruption

Figure 2. Inclusive competencies HAN employees (more info, see [part A](#) and [part B](#)).

5. EMPLOYEE GROUPS AND INCLUSIVE COMPETENCIES

All employee groups need inclusive competencies to some degree to create an inclusive HAN environment, according to the employees, who participated in 2 validation sessions (n=22). Some employees may need inclusive competencies more in one situation, than in another, or than other employees. For some employees, inclusive competencies are new, and they feel consciously incompetent in certain areas; they know that they need to adapt or change their behavior but do not know how. Unconsciously incompetent employees also exist at HAN; those who do not realize that they exclude people or exhibit undesirable behavior. For them, awareness is the first step. Most employees would be willing to develop these inclusive competences if they see advantages in their daily work practice. Other employees were already professionalizing in these competences, and they are sometimes experts in a field, so consciously and unconsciously competent. Receptionists, for example, will especially need *inclusive communication* to make everyone feel welcome when entering a HAN building, while a teacher in project groups may focus on *equal collaboration* of students. Both in the literature and by the respondents in this study, certain groups, because of their position and/or role, are seen as key groups to promote inclusiveness within HAN. Key groups are firstly Board of Directors, academy managers and overhead staff like HR, Finance and related policy departments. Second are team coordinators, team managers and professors. And third, lecturers and student coaches. For each of these subgroups, the key inclusive competencies are described below. Finally, we address inclusive competencies of groups of staff, which were less mentioned by respondents, such as service workers, experience experts and researchers.

Inclusive competencies of Board of directors (Bod), academy management & overhead departments (HR, Finance)

According to most respondents, Board of directors and academy managers, need all the inclusive competencies. According to some participants, Bod, academy managers, overhead staff, and professors have more influence and need to take more responsibility in diversity and inclusion. Therefore, they need more competencies than the other employee groups, especially *Inclusive leadership*, *Questioning Status quo* and *Creating Equal Opportunities* at organizational level. Interviewed employees doubt whether inclusive competencies are sufficiently present among Bod and academy managers. Furthermore, some respondents question whether those with the most influence have an interest in questioning the status quo. Managers at the macro and meso levels say they are willing to change, but interviews and observations indicate that when conflicts and decision-making around diversity and inclusion occur, there is very cautious communication and little action. Staying within the lines of existing policies seems to be an important shared value of HAN managers. This is why some respondents think competences like *Recognizing and acknowledging bias* and *Questioning Status quo* is needed. They mention that external expertise is needed to identify blind spots and missed perspectives. They can also support decision making on DEI issues in a more confident way.

Looking at overhead departments, HR staff indicates that they need more inclusive competencies to support team managers in a more diverse workforce. They need expertise and time to attract and retain staff from minority groups. *Recognizing and acknowledging biases* as HR staff and *Questioning the Status quo* of current HR practices and procedures, team compositions and departmental ways of working, can make a change in more

inclusive teams. To do so, they need *Networks outside their own bubble*. A culture change is needed within HR. According to the employees interviewed, HR could shift a bit more from serving purely organizational interests to a balance of organizational and employee interests. When this happens, employees have more confidence in HR. HR employees are willing to develop further in inclusive competencies, but this requires investment, as they do not have time for this now. Hiring new people within HR, who have more experience with inclusive hiring, promotion and exit policies, will create a desirable more diverse HR workforce, when new staff is acknowledged and valued in their perspectives.

Some HR staff at the Taalkamer and HAN Academy deploy their inclusive competencies such as *Inclusive Communication* and *Status Quo Questioning* to make and keep their services permanently accessible to all HAN groups, especially non-native speakers and low literates. Their expertise can be used much more.

Overhead staff also include HAN Finance, policy and quality staff. Inclusive competencies are also important for them. For example, Finance staff members can collaborate with experiential experts on poverty reduction among staff and students.

Policy officers 'translate' DEI policies at the HAN level to the academies and teams below. They therefore need competencies such as *Recognizing and acknowledging Biases*, *Inclusive communication* and *Questioning Status quo* if they want to promote inclusiveness. In Tim's Jongers' book '*Beledigende Broccoli*' he promotes a sustainable and equal use of experiential knowledge of people in vulnerable positions. He argues that despite good intentions of policy makers, they often miss the mark completely when it comes to social policy. That is why it is important to precisely involve people in vulnerable situations in arriving at effective solutions. If you work together on an equal footing, where each staff member is also valued equally, a good and humane solution can emerge (Young, 2022).

Inclusive competencies of team coordinators, managers and lecturers

Team leaders (including lecturers) are seen by employees as an important group for inclusion because they can create a pleasant working climate. They need (almost) all eight inclusive competencies, according to respondents, to promote a pleasant environment. Respondents indicated that those employee groups sometimes miss inclusive competencies, and employees do not always feel heard or protected. Executives themselves also say they need more competency development in the DEI area.

Among leaders of teams, we see that awareness of power differences and power patterns between them and employees, is needed. This falls under the competencies *Recognize and acknowledge Bias* and *Collaborate Equally*. As the most important competency for leaders, *Inclusive leadership* is emphasized by employees. We saw earlier that a safe and inclusive work environment is lacking or could be strengthened in some teams. Then *Inclusive Communication*, *Questioning Status Quo*, *Creating Equal Opportunity* and *View persons in Context* are extra important for a team leader. Potential new employees who are not-norm employees and who might experience social distance from leaders and the team, should be given equal opportunities to be hired or promoted. For this, the competency *Relationships and networking outside your own bubble* is a must. Managers themselves say they need tools to diversify their teams in terms of personnel and promote inclusion within the teams. A manager says she is sometimes searching for the best solution when conflict arise in the cooperation between employees within a team:

"A Dutch colleague [...] was discussing a module. She had been quite direct with an international colleague, who thought something about that module or wanted to do something with it, and that was really [...] a slap in the face for that international colleague. She found her communication really intense. I think the Dutch colleague didn't even realize how her direct communication came across. Yes and what then? [...] This is a situation I struggle with in my role [as a manager], for example [...], because I hear this via via [...] but I struggle with the how?" (ss)

Inclusive competencies of lecturers & student-coaches (SCs)

Students indicated that they expect the most inclusive competencies from Student-coaches (which used to be in Dutch SLB-ers or 'studieloopbaanbegeleiders') and on a second place the lecturers. SCs and lecturers themselves also indicated that they feel responsible for an inclusive learning climate in the classroom and in the educational program.

SCs need more *Inclusive Communication* than others, according to the participants in this study, but also other inclusive competencies and then especially *View persons in Context*, *Recognizing and Acknowledging Biases* and *Creating Equal Opportunities* are mentioned. Student-coaches need to refer students to a variety of internal student support departments (including Student Support, Deanery, psychologists, the Taalkamer), but they seem to miss information on all the possibilities and/or do not always have confidence in proper support from these departments. In addition, students indicate that it depends on the attitude of the SC whether they are willing to do a little extra, such as finding out where the student can go with his/her specific question, if the SC does not know it themselves. Students indicate that Student-coaches sometimes take it easy when they do not always have the right knowledge. Regarding inclusive competencies, we see that SCs themselves sometimes struggle with questions from students, especially when it comes to groups that need extra support. On top of this, SCs also mention that they need more time to properly hear, support and refer their students.

Lecturers need more inclusive competencies than other employees because they play an important role in countering exclusion in the classroom and valuing and using existing diversity among students. Lecturers themselves see an increase in diversity in the student population. Social changes regarding identity and inclusive language are new to them, and they do not always know how to deal with those changes. Teachers struggle with takes place in the classroom. Lecturers wonder in such situations what to do. Should they lay down a behavioral norm: this is not how we treat each other at HAN! Should they talk to the bully or the bullied person? Often the bully is not addressed, and attention goes to the bullied person. Of course, what is wise depends on the context, but "the honest conversation" with the bully is sometimes avoided because it is uncomfortable for the teacher to intervene in front of a full class. Moreover, there is a risk that the bully may complain or engage in further bullying behavior toward this student or towards the teacher as a counter-reaction. Complaints towards lecturers (for addressing their behavior or giving low grades) are sometimes strategies used by students to get an extra resit. A pattern that several staff members thought they recognized in the stories of their colleagues was that complaints from mostly male European/Dutch students towards female and/or colored

teachers were more frequent than towards male white teachers. This could be investigated to see if this is a structural pattern. Several staff members indicated that when they receive complaints from a student, they doubt whether they are adequately supported by their supervisor. Even if the complaint is unfounded, they are sometimes afraid of consequences, especially if they do not yet have a permanent contract.

Dealing with these 'hot moments' at uni are seen by many teachers and SCs as one of the biggest challenges regarding diversity and inclusion. These 'hot moments' usually involve colleagues as well as students and are including mostly racism against black people, exclusion of LGBTQ+ persons, people with a migration background and/or Muslim faith. This research shows that employees sometimes feel vulnerable in these situations and often feel shy and incompetent. More support in competencies such as *Questioning the Status Quo*, *Viewing Persons in Context* and *Inclusive Communication* seem desirable. A teacher explains why she sometimes finds it difficult to teach students something, that we are still developing as employees.

"At least thinking out of the box, daring and showing guts; those are competencies that are very important. That you don't rigidly hold on to how things always have been done. But that you can teach students to think in a different way. That's what we want to give our students, of course. That's quite a difficult one, of course, if you've never done it yourself. [...] I think that is typical of our time. We have to teach students something that we are still developing ourselves." (ff)

A second challenge for lecturers is about language standards, belonging to *Inclusive communication*. Language norms exist at HAN and new students are being tested beforehand or must show their diplomas upon entry, with a minimum Dutch level in Dutch programs and a minimum English level in international programs. Language standards remain a knock-out criterion during many exams in different educational program. Language standards are also used when hiring new employees. These can be explicit language standards e.g. Cambridge Advanced for teaching English-language courses. Implicit language norms are usually used for Dutch-language courses. Obviously, there needs to be a shared language in a team and in the classroom to understand each other and cooperate together, but these language norms can sometimes be unnecessarily exclusionary. The HR department can support employees on catching up on language deficits rather than excluding these employees from employment. We can also be more aware within HAN of the value of different accents in relation to one's partial identities. For example, we don't all have to speak English with a Cambridge accent (the dominant accent within most international English taught programs at HAN) to understand each other. We could question this privileged position and be more inclusive with other accents, to strengthen people's self-identity, as we know that our language is closely linked to self-identity. In the same way we could question whether European Dutch (ABN) should be the privileged standard for HAN staff and students, especially when it lowers Caribbeans self-esteem and language ability.

Inclusive language is the third topic on which teachers have questions and discussions. This usually involves non-binary forms of addressing, such as 'they/them', and addressing people by skin color, such as 'people of color, black, white', and 'native, local people and immigrants, (allochtoon/autochtoon in Dutch)'. These language issues are precisely centered around minority groups that experience less safety and privilege at HAN. Here we

see that some teachers question whether inclusive language is necessary. They sometimes find it unnecessary or too awkward and then are not always willing to adapt. The surveyed students indicate that they find this inclusive language very important. These students find some lecturers not inclusive enough. There is a need among lecturers for more knowledge about the importance of inclusive language and skills in using the right terms. Unconscious assumptions and cis biases play a role in change readiness. So besides competencies like *Inclusive Communication (including an empathic attitude)* and *Questioning Status quo*, we see that *Recognizing and acknowledging own biases* are important competencies to be able and willing to meet the needs and wishes of students and colleagues.

Among SCs and lecturers, the question arises where the boundary of inclusivity lies. Here we see two interesting observations by the participants in this exploration. Firstly, there seems to be a HAN culture of wanting to stay within the frameworks without making exceptions. According to an employee of the Education Inspectorate (Onderwijsinspectie), at HAN more than at other universities, there is a culture in which everyone should be treated equally. Instead of equity, equality seems more important. Some lecturers are afraid that exceptions will lead to the lowering end terms, thus devaluing diplomas. Others do not want precedents for other students or more work. On the other hand, respondents see that tailormade solutions and exceptions are necessary if people with extra support needs are to have the same opportunities at HAN. This is where teachers and SCs need extra support, because they do not know where they are allowed to deviate from the standards and they do not know all the possibilities of support and customization. Furthermore, making another exam takes more time, so that extra time investment is also a prerequisite for behavioral change.

Among international teams, we see even more urgency and importance of *Recognizing and acknowledging Bias* and *Inclusive Communication* among staff. International colleagues heard their colleagues and students use negative stereotypes about their country of origin frequently. Besides, these international employees notice that their colleagues assume that they would be less competent in certain areas or that standards should be lowered for them, when that is not the case at all, is not desired, nor asked for. Here, more competency development through awareness and exchange will have to lead to less stereotypical assumptions within international teams. To do this respectfully, all team members (including executives) will need to be competent in *Inclusive Communication*, *Recognize and acknowledge Own Bias* and *Questioning Status Quo*.

Inclusive competencies of employees in Support Services

At universities of applied sciences, we often see a lot of focus on lecturers, while other groups of employees are underexposed, including service employees in support services. At HAN, these are employees in many professions: janitors, secretaries, receptionists, process coordinators, International Office staff, ICT staff, amanuenses, internship coordinators, schedulers and (sometimes external) catering and cleaning staff. Students and employees in this study do not mention these employees themselves when it comes to inclusive competencies. But when asked what competencies this group needs, they conclude that they do need inclusive competencies to offer their services to staff or students in such a way that all target groups know their services and have equal access in using them.

First, it is noticeable that there is more diversity in education, job description and background among this group of service employees than among other employee groups. Some service employees have a practical educational background or little experience with concepts such as 'inclusive competencies'. They never use them and find them unclear. Other service employees with theoretical educational backgrounds use these terms themselves and have ideas about them. Inclusive competencies needed for service workers depend on their role within the organization. Student psychologists, deans and confidential advisors work primarily 1-on-1 with students and need the same competencies as SCs. Other staff members only work for or with employees. Interviewed Service staff mentioned as key competencies: *Inclusive Communication and Equal Collaboration*. In addition, service employees themselves mentioned *Questioning Status Quo* and *Creating Equal Opportunity* when additional support was needed for specific target groups. What stood out was that employees in supportive service teams seem less aware of DEI concepts and sometimes make more stereotypical statements without being aware of it. On the other hand, they give feedback more quickly to their colleagues about undesirable behavior than, for example, staff in lecturers' teams. Service staff seems to work in smaller teams, knowing each other better and having more in-between time, which facilitates mutual understanding and increases inclusion.

Inclusive competencies of researchers

Researchers (including lecturer-researchers) were hardly mentioned by respondents as a staff group in relation to inclusive competencies. Some lecturers have a lot of expertise when it comes to DEI and some of them use inclusive research methods, while other lecturers do not. Knowing these inclusive methods and being able to do inclusive research are the main competencies that some HAN professors and (lecturer-)researchers are already deploying, especially if they want to *create Equal Opportunities*. *Inclusive communication* is also needed with the people who are the subject of the research, so that they can be involved in the research process. This involves listening to and collaborating with the people concerned. Effective solutions to problems are usually not devised by researchers who do not experience the problems themselves, but rather in consultation with stakeholders who themselves have a role and interest in solving those problems. This means that sometimes roles must be reversed, as the researcher/policy maker is most of the time ignorant of the experiences around the problem and elaboration of solutions. The experts by experience are knowing in practice. In other words, the *Status quo* of power relations between researcher and researched are continuously *questioned* and frequently reversed. We also saw this echoed in Tim's Jonger's book "*Beledigende Broccoli*" about using the experiential knowledge of people in vulnerable positions in a sustainable and equal way (Jongers, 2022).

A number of activities have been organized by the Learning Community *Inclusive Research* (HAN, 2023) that can serve as good practices for other researchers. A nice example of inclusive research is the workshop '*Everyone seen, spoken, heard*' (in Dutch: '*Iedereen gezien, gesproken en gehoord*'). Research was done by Rick Nijkamp (HAN employee) in collaboration with Wijzer in Geldzaken & Ministry of Finance (HANRedactie, 2023 checked). He asked financially vulnerable people on the streets what they need to be wiser with money and also made suggestions for other inclusive researchers. Indeed, the target group will have to feel urgency with the research question to be interested. Some target groups are quickly excluded by researchers due to different language skills, limited or

absent online accessibility, different thinking and doing abilities, limited financial resources, health or social network and stress, distrust or shame (Sander Wilmsen, 2023). For lecturers and (teacher-)researchers, competencies like *Viewing person in Context*, *Questioning Status Quo*, *Collaborating Equally*, and *Building Relationships and Networks Outside Your Own Bubble* are badly needed to do inclusive research.

Inclusive competencies of Experts by Experience

As we saw in the last paragraph, experience experts are very valuable participants in inclusive research, but also in education. They are also mentioned by some employees, working at the HAN in Nijmegen, for coming up with inclusive solutions, when it comes to adapting buildings and digital facilities to make them more accessible for all. At the HAN, the experience experts who are employed also dedicate themselves to education in curricula especially in social studies. In 2021, the Learning Community Inclusive Research, brought together researchers and experience experts from the STERKplaats³ for a training course in *Visual Communication*. Both steps of defining the research process and analysis of results were done together and communicated in a comprehensive way for everyone (HANRedactie, 2021).

Collaboration with experts by experience should also be used in other than social studies and services to get better results. This will enhance both students and staff's knowledge and skills about inclusivity of all people, including non-norm groups and consideration of specific support needs. For learning from each other, researchers, SCs, lecturers and Service staff will need to go from being experts in their field to having a 'not knowing' attitude and open up to experiential knowledge so that both can complement each other. Inclusive competencies needed in experts by experience are mainly: *Questioning Status Quo*, *Recognizing and Acknowledging Biases*, *Communicating Inclusively* and *Creating Equal Opportunity*. Some of these competencies are part of the Associate Degree Experiential Expertise (AD Ervaringsgerichte expertise in Zorg en Welzijn) at HAN (HAN, 2023).

³ The [STERKplaats](#) is a learning/working place for people with mild intellectual disabilities where their unique knowledge and experience is used in education and research.

6. THREE-LEVEL SCENARIOS TO BUILD INCLUSIVE COMPETENCIES

In the previous chapter, we saw that inclusive competency development is considered necessary by many employees. Some employees want more support than others, depending on the discomfort they experience in feeling consciously incompetent in contact with other colleagues and students. How HAN as an organization can strengthen these competencies is elaborated in this chapter.

When learning and strengthening inclusive competencies, respondents usually initially think of scenarios such as inclusive competency training and peer exchange on DEI. Board and managers are seen as role models and representatives of HAN. Employees expect role modelling behavior from them and are willing to change on DIG, if they also see this behavior in their managers. In addition, as employees point out, a non-negotiable framework is needed as to what DEI entails and where the boundaries lie. Employees expect from the BoD to know what desired behavior entails (openness, respect for all and valuing differences). This includes a clear statement against discrimination, stereotyping and racism. This statement should not only be captured in words in a vision document like Koersbeeld, but should be radiated everywhere, such as on HAN websites, in education to students, in student surveys, performance appraisals, in buildings and on flagpoles, in scheduling days off, extracurricular activities, and especially in employee behavior. Below, an employee depicts what such a non-negotiable framework is about:

"The BoD and policy makers need to think more about what our non-negotiable framework is. With such a framework, you set limits on behavior. For example: You may always think what you want, have your own beliefs or convictions, and you may also adopt new perspectives. But there are limits to your behavior associated with those ideas." (mm)

The desire to develop themselves in inclusive competencies is present among most employees. This can be done in the form of training, peer review and team discussions. But it is also indicated by HAN employees that this is not sufficient to make HAN as employer and educator inclusive. It is not only the employee's responsibility to keep up with social developments and become proficient in inclusive competencies. Board and managers also must do this. They even have a leading role in this process because they represent the status quo and make decisions about strategies, investments and calendars. They set the agenda in terms of systemic changes at team and HAN level. Interventions are needed that will have to be initiated and implemented at board level, in collaboration with staff departments, experience experts and academy management. In this way, HAN as an organization can strengthen the inclusive competencies of all employees.

Employees distinguished scenarios at three levels: at board level (macro), team level (meso) and individual employee level (micro). All scenarios found in the literature (see [part A](#)) were reflected in interviews with HAN employees (see [part B](#)) as ways to strengthen inclusive competencies of employee groups. These were ultimately presented again to and

validated by participants of two roundtable meetings in December 2022 (n=22). Participants were asked which scenarios were most important and urgent to them and if there were any additional scenarios. They agreed with the scenarios and provided additions only in word choice, which have been incorporated into the final table below (see Figure 3).

The scenarios in bold are identified by the participants of the two sessions as most important scenarios. The top row shows scenarios that should be started this year (in 2023). The scenarios in the second row are needed soon (2024-2026) and those in the bottom row could be planned in the longer run (from 2027).

	Macrolevel: HAN top management and staff	Mesolevel: Teams and managers	Microlevel: Individual employees
2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear framework of everyone’s responsibilities towards DEI • Inclusive HR-policy • Steering of translation of policy into team and staff objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting managers in creating an inclusive work environment • Support teams to leverage diversity and inclusion • Managers as role models and driving force of DEI team objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating more in-between time and attention to each other’s vulnerabilities and strengths • Development of inclusive competencies • Support in seeing and hearing everyone.
2024 - 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collecting data on diversity of employees and students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting managers on diversifying team composition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting inclusive communication skills
After 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment in knowledge sharing and ambassadors’ network to increase support • Definition of DEI-policy by BoD: an inclusive story for everyone. • Investment in a long-term culture change process • Independent DEI-team just below the BoD as a driving force of this process • Cooperation with DEI partners outside the HAN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting teams in deep democratic decision-making techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in support base by sharing expertise and strengthening ambassadors

Figure 3: Scenarios to strengthen inclusive competencies at three levels.

For each level, the most important scenarios for HAN to further develop and strengthen inclusive competencies are explained below.

Board-level scenarios: Board of Directors, academy top management and overhead staff

At organizational level, most important scenarios according to the employees is *Definition of DEI policy by BoD* and related *Investments in translation of policy to team and staff objectives*, especially *inclusive HR policy*. The vision of the Koersbeeld is already a story for many students. Not all employees feel always included in this story. They want an *inclusive story for all employees*, the norm employees and non-norm employees, service employees, researcher, managers and lecturers, employees who are temporarily or permanently working at HAN, vulnerable employees and employees who do not feel vulnerable.

Defining DEI policy by BoD is needed to be clear about what is meant by diversity, equity and inclusion. It includes boundaries on what can and cannot be done within HAN in terms of exclusion, inequality, inequity, and undesirable behavior. HAN employees want more clarity on definitions, expectations, and boundaries, so they know they are 'doing the right thing'. They want to know what their inclusivity responsibilities are and where they end. DEI policy will also have to think about in- and exclusivity of system standards, that now seem 'self-evident' within education. Deviation from the norm is something, which needs attention, because norms can exclude certain groups of employees. What do we do with language standards (NL and EN), education standards (master's), practice standards in relation to Earlier Acquired competencies (EVCs in Dutch = Eerder Verworven Competenties), if they stand in the way of inclusion? Should these norms be strictly retained at all times or are there exceptions? Making exceptions to the rule or procedure is not something HAN as an organization excels at, but by doing so we exclude many employees. So, policies should make clear under what conditions employees are allowed to deviate from certain norms to become more inclusive. As one interviewed employee articulates:

"[We have to] get away from: that's where the standard is for everybody. Maybe we can be more flexible sometimes if we do this deliberately. It is indeed possible. We have quite a bit of freedom. Employees of the Education Inspectorate [...] said: you at HAN [...] are so bound by your own rules. You really have much more freedom to do some things. There is a kind of policy defining it has to be this way and otherwise it is wrong. Deviating from those standards in individual cases? HAN is very tricky about that. That was their story." (ww)

One example of unclear system standards is frequently cited by staff: language policy. Unambiguous inclusive language policies will need to be developed on how we speak about groups and how we address each other. The dignity paradigm⁴ seems to be the most powerful according to a few staff members. Mounir Samuel gives many examples of value-based communication in his recently published book '*Je mag ook niets meer zeggen*'. Samuel indicates that it is not so much about *what* we say, but rather *why* we do it and *how* it could be done better. Samuel points out that language is constantly changing and sometimes excludes minority groups. At the same time language can actually give people a face and voice (Samuel, 2023). HAN can use his advice to start the conversation about value-oriented and inclusive interactions. Inclusive language policy at HAN level is necessary, also including how to use language standards and describing under what conditions they can be deviated from.

⁴ The dignity paradigm assumes a view of humanity in which the other is treated as a fellow human being with desires and experiences rather than 'people with limitations, abilities, rights and obligations.' This gives much more dignity and space to utilize 'otherness' (see [Part B](#) for more information)

We see most of the paradoxes discovered by a DEI research team of Hogeschool InHolland, GAK and VU, also reflected at HAN. These paradoxes were based on opposing perspectives of employers and of non-privileged Dutch people in five groups. These five groups include Dutch people of color, Muslim Dutch people, Dutch LGHBTIQ+ people, refugees, and Dutch people with disabilities.

Employers do not recognize biases and exclusion of employees based on color, sexual orientation, gender diversity, religious and migration background, or disability, while those groups do experience it (De Jong, 2021). Within HAN, we also see that some groups and teams experience stereotyping and unequal access to resources, while other employees and managers are not or less aware of it. HAN employees from minority groups call on the BoD to be more transparent and creative in dealing with certain norms, as otherwise they do not feel at home and their groupmates are left out. Here, BoD and policy makers have a responsibility to unravel paradoxes at play within HAN and listen to experiences of all groups to obtain a safe working atmosphere for all.

Once strong, integrated and systematic DEI policies have been formulated at the organizational level, a translation is needed to academies/departments and teams, with goals and key performance indicators. *Steering is needed on this translation to team and department goals*, according to respondents and participants of the roundtable meetings, because without steering and push, employees fear that real change is impossible. They also emphasize the need for investment when setting extra goals. If the organization expects employees to change, it also has to invest in them.

Inge Godts indicates in the book *Diversity in Higher Education* how successful policies can be set up step by step. She has created a reflective questionnaire with 40 questions to reflect on the different organizational aspects of a DEI policy and inclusive habits among pedagogical staff (Godts, 2021). This instrument can be used as a starting point, where not only pedagogical staff but all staff groups should be involved and goals and actions at team level should also be included.

A platform is needed where DEI initiatives, questions and experiences can be shared and people can find each other. In this way, internal expertise can be better utilized, as well as external networks outside HAN. An *independent driving DEI team* with resources to coordinate exchange and actions could accelerate this change process. It would also such a DEI team could support academy directors in setting DIG policies for each academy and monitoring key performance indicators.

Investment will also be needed in the HR department so that it can implement more *Inclusive HR policies*, in collaboration with managers and teams. According to respondents, a culture change is needed within the HR department to obtain inclusive HR policies; The HR department is now too white, too Dutch and too focused on organizational interests. It could be more diverse, inclusive and employee oriented. HR should shift from serving purely organizational interests to a balance of organizational and employee interests. When this happens, employees will have more confidence in HR. HR employees are willing to develop further in inclusive competencies, but this requires investment. Hiring new non-norm staff members within HR, who have experience with inclusive hiring, promotion and exit policies, will also create a desirable more diverse workforce. In fact, as a team becomes more diverse, we must also develop inclusive competencies in the team to strengthen internal cooperation. Otherwise, it will lose the new colleagues in no time. A team culture is needed throughout the organization in which everyone can participate and in which even someone with a different idea is heard.

Collecting data on diversity of employees and students is needed to create representative teams and diversify teacher teams and academies.

This HAN DEI policy could include the inclusive competencies that HAN as an employer expects from its employees, with organizational implications and investments for those teams where these competencies are not yet sufficiently present. The competencies most often mentioned by employees were *Inclusive Communication, Recognizing and acknowledging Biases, Creating Equal Opportunities, Questioning Status Quo* and for managers on top of that *Inclusive Leadership*. HAN policy will need to specify who is expected to have which inclusive competencies. We saw in the previous chapters that within employee groups different emphases were placed on which inclusive competencies they needed most. We also saw that different teams need different competencies and team trainings achieve more resilience than individual trainings on DEI. HAN Academy can add the needed learning possibilities to their webpage accordingly and focus on team trainings besides open enrollments.

Some HAN employees already have expertise in inclusive competencies and already use them in their daily work at HAN with colleagues and students. They could be supported by giving them recognition for their pioneering work and *Questioning the status quo*. Unfortunately, it is usually the case now, that these ambassadors receive negative comments and are dismissed as 'extreme' or 'woke'. This can cause diversity fatigue and the norm becomes: better to say nothing than to burn your hands. This is counterproductive because it increases unsafety. It is important to value inclusiveness and to invest in sharing knowledge and expertise about it and to set up a *Network of ambassadors to increase support*.

Team-level scenarios to strengthen inclusive competencies

At team level, we see that managers are given the leading role in the scenarios: *Supporting managers in creating an inclusive work environment* and *Managers as role models and drivers DEI goals* is considered most important and urgent. *Supporting teams to leverage diversity and inclusion* is additionally important in the short term.

Inclusive leadership means that *managers create an inclusive work environment*, and both managers and employees say they could use support in this, especially when there are opposite ideas, perspectives and interests in the team and the going gets tough. Managers would like to develop their competencies especially in the areas of inclusive communication techniques, democratic decision-making, and inclusive language. At team level, discussions and inventories can be made: What is going well, and which competencies need more attention? And what do employees need to get there? As one respondent put it:

"What could be even more beautiful: If we say we want to be inclusive: what does that require? List things that every colleague must be able to do. Make sure they can do those things. We all had to do BKE and SKE. That's directed towards testing skill. But we could also train on inclusiveness skills" (uu).

Managers also indicate that *they would like to develop further in diversifying their team*. Support from HR is desired, as they do not always know in which networks to post vacancies and how to make texts inclusive to make vacancies accessible to applicants from immigrant background, younger employees, or other target groups.

In addition to working toward a representative and diverse workforce, leaders will also need to be role models when it comes to *inclusive competencies and drivers of agreed-upon DEI team goals*. Team leaders who are inclusive-competent dare to mention differences and, as role models, value and utilize these differences. They also have honest 1-on-1 conversation with colleagues, who exhibit undesirable behavior, and if needed question those employees' behavior, give feedback and make agreements.

Interviewed employees note that those with least competencies in DEI might be least open to inclusive competence development. Some employees may have little idea of their own prejudices or the impact of derogatory behavior, even though they show it in their behavior. Some might not seek opportunities to improve their inclusive competencies on their own initiative. However, it could be addressed in their team by their manager and colleagues, if there is safe space to have good and honest conversations about desirable and undesirable behavior. It is important that diversity is valued within teams. Different perspectives are asked about out of curiosity and empathy. If employees unconsciously exhibit exclusive behavior, it should be addressed in a safe way, not by cancelling anyone, but by discussing the behavior and asking questions on what intent is behind the behavior and what impression it leaves to others. At the same time, it does not mean that unsafe behavior should be accepted. Employees should be motivated to ask each other questions and address behavior that according to them crosses the line. In doing so, it is important to avoid a cancel culture in the workplace as much as possible and encourage employees to address and ask questions to each other in a constructive way. Managers are facilitators of these inclusive team dialogues using, for example, *deep-democratic methods*, so they should also be competent in inclusive communication and decision-making methods. Support can be obtained from the HAN Academy for teams through team coaching and DEI training. Training and InterVision of managers in inclusive leadership is currently lacking. It would strengthen inclusion if managers were given more tools and confidence to act as role models. HAN Academy could fill this missing link.

In addition, *teams should be supported to leverage diversity and inclusion*. Facilitating a good conversation in teams about what is desirable and undesirable behavior strengthens the desired team culture. A team scan can be used, or a collective analysis can be made of issues and inclusive competencies present and what can be improved. To do this safely, one must (get to) know each other well and dare to get personal.

For this reason, customized team trainings are the best solution for team development on inclusiveness, because these trainings focus on the competences that need extra attention in that team, such as (daring to) address each other. At the same time, they help team members to get to know each other better as colleagues, especially if personal stories are shared. In 'Protective wraps' trainings, this combination has already been experienced positively within two international HAN teams. Team trainings also offer a way to start to learn and exchange about new topics with each other, not forced but mutually energized. The team training courses offered by the HAN Academy in this area could be used for this purpose and supplemented further.

Getting to know each other works best in small teams. Being present offline and having time for a chat works better than online meetings and overly busy employees running from one room to the other. Here too employees should be given time to get to know each other and learn from each other. In the individual-level scenarios, we see *facilitation of more in-between time* also reflected as a scenario.

Scenarios at individual employee level

Facilitation of more in-between time and *Attention to each other's vulnerabilities and strengths* are considered most important for the employees, involved in the validation sessions. By in-between time is meant jointly scheduled break time and a common place for the team members to meet. The opportunity then arises to get to know each other better and exchange experiences with each other about groups, students, modules, and personal issues. This in-between time helps employees to be able to be vulnerable in their teams and see not-knowing or making mistakes as an opportunity rather than something to be avoided. Just as more attention to each other is needed at the team level, more in-between time is also needed at the individual level to reflect on oneself, and one's own perspective bias. When everyone is busy and keeps going on, there is only room for quick judgment. When we do not take the time, we can only use our limited tunnel vision, stereotypes, and biases. When there is more time, we can see our own bias, change perspectives and make more conscious choices for greater inclusion. This in turn increases our inner space, space within ourselves to remain open in the face of new experiences. This is also explained and confirmed by neuroscientists in the book *The intercultural mind* by Joseph Shaules (Shaules, 2015). According to his book, our brain works with two systems at the same time. The intuitive mind is the fast, quick judge of situations, based on what we already know (stereotypes and assumptions) or have read in media. The attentive/reflective mind uses more time and energy and reflects more on the issues at hand. The automatic pilot of the intuitive mind does not function well when encountering unexpected behavior or new situations. We need the reflective mind to help us understand what is going on, but this takes more time (Shaules, 2015).

This scenario of *In-between time facilitation* received the most points out of all the scenarios on importance and is additionally urgent, and implementation of this scenario should start right away in 2023.

Employees indicate that they find training and *Support on communication skills* useful. They refer to *General communication techniques* such as listening, summarizing, asking questions (LSD in Dutch meaning Luisteren, samenvatten, doorvragen) and Leave Your Grandma at home (OMA = Oordelen, meningen en aannamen), leaving out Judgments, Opinions and Assumptions/Advocations. It is also mentioned that giving and receiving feedback still needs more attention. Feedforward was not mentioned but could also be part of training in basic communication skills. A feedback conversation, which literally means giving the other person something back about what has happened in the past, is often experienced as awkward by both students and staff and thus regularly avoided. Feedforward, on the other hand, is directed towards the future. Focused on a particular situation or task in the future, you state in advance what desired behavior you expect from the other person. This makes a feedforward conversation easier to do for both giver and receiver because it offers opportunities for improvement. 'Where you cannot change the past, you can change the future', HAN researchers Ingrid Van Rompay Bartels and Jannemieke Geessink, comment in their research on peer feedforward (Geessink, 2021).

Support in developing inclusive competencies for employees was frequently mentioned by employees, and especially among lecturers, SCs, supervisors, staff and administration. According to interviewed employees, this support could take different forms. Mentioned were: coaching on the job, internal and external skills training, online knowledge clips and antibias clips, exchange and intervision with colleagues and students, co-teaching with each other, feedback

and feedforward from colleagues and students, and asking questions to experts by experience. As an existing instrument, the HAN Behavioral Compass (in Dutch: Gedragscompas) could be used to start a dialogue within teams about desired and undesired behavior. The compass should then be supplemented with inclusive competencies that are not yet mentioned. In addition, it should be known to all employees, should be discussed, and adjusted per team. In this way, not only new employees would be aware of expectations about how they should behave, but all team members would know. This Team Compass will then be adapted to the context of the industry and the needs of the employees in their own team. Needless to say, that every member of the team should be involved in these discussions in an inclusive way. For new employees, more attention could be paid to inclusive competencies, including feedforward, within the Basic Didactic Competence (BDB) training. Now, only basic skills receive attention, so expansion is desirable.

Support in seeing and hearing everyone, including non-dominant voices or opinions and the experiences of people from non-norm groups and intersections of those groups is seen as very important by participants. Seeing and hearing everyone will help employees to work more inclusively. But connecting to people that are different from yourself, outside your bubble, is not self-evident yet. Some people with more privileges get more space to present their ideas and are heard more often than others with less privileges, who are questioned often if they are heard. Competencies such as *Communicating Inclusively* and *Recognizing and Acknowledging Bias* are related to this scenario. The HAN Academy can accomplish this scenario in training, but there are other possibilities as well. As non-norm groups indicate, we need to educate ourselves. With this they mean, that employees can also develop themselves by reading books about people or groups outside their bubble, seeing films, going to specific exhibitions about this and by expanding their network outside their bubble through volunteering, for example. The impact would be much greater if this awareness raising, and self-educating is done in groups. Exchange among colleagues and students could be facilitated at HAN about books, films, etc. to generate multiple perspectives and train in recognizing, acknowledging, and celebrating diversity. This could be a translation of world citizenship for HAN employees on an educational level.

Training on inclusive competencies should focus on knowledge and skills needed in the role(s) one has within HAN. SCs need more 1-on-1 skills, e.g. inclusive coaching, than lecturers working in groups. International office workers need more intercultural sensitivity than secretaries at a Dutch-language program. It is important to start with an intake meeting to collect differential needs of participants. Involving experts, experience experts and role models as guests in these trainings could also enhance understanding and increase the inner space of employees. From literature we know that trainings work best when they are voluntary and interactive. Training programs that focus on biases toward a specific target group, need to be critically screened, because they could be sending the wrong message, repeating stereotypes. When trainings zoom in too much on one characteristic of a specific minority group and leave out context and intersectionality (Vink, 2022) it will only strengthen stereotypes and thus be counterproductive. HAN Academy can check these criteria to improve current and future training offerings.

What was not named in the scenarios in literature, but mentioned frequently in interviews, is the need for a *colleagial buddy* or an *exchange system for employees*, such as a search-and-find system, where the needs of colleagues can be matched together. This involves not only subject-specific knowledge, but also organization-specific knowledge: e.g. how the internal HAN organization is structured and works in terms of implicit rules of conduct, what

career opportunities, behavior protocols and complaints procedures there are? Some (international) colleagues like general information about important laws in the Netherlands regarding diversity and inclusion (Article 1 of the Constitution, for example) and how these are applied in education. Also, some colleagues wanted to know more about financial security (fe pension), DI hours and other secondary work benefits, which can now only be arranged in Dutch via e-HRM. In addition, there are cultural differences in teaching and student behavior, which can lead to embarrassment and culture shock for some Dutch teachers in international groups and for some international teachers in mixed or Dutch-speaking groups. Colleagues would like to share about difficult situations in the classroom and interventions on discrimination and other undesirable behavior. A buddy system for colleagues who want to exchange perspectives and experiences is therefore helpful. A system, where employee interests and needs can be matched on an equal basis, would enhance more equity in the work relationship between the two employees, than in a system where one employee is helping the other. It is important that both buddies are facilitated in time, as both learn from each other, and equity is ensured.

It would be a win-win to facilitate learning exchange also between courses that score differently on inclusive competencies at the MO. This can be organized within the different staff groups, e.g. managers among themselves, teachers among themselves, staff people among themselves. It would also be nice if staff from Arnhem and Nijmegen crossed more bridges to exchange and collaborate, because there was a lot of difference between teams and campuses in knowledge and experience in sub areas of inclusive competencies.

7. COMPETENCIES IN PERSPECTIVE

There is already a lot of in-house expertise at HAN regarding inclusive competencies, diversity and inclusion, and that knowledge and expertise is used frequently. Yet, the impact can be much bigger if we work more structurally and effectively on inclusive competencies for all HAN employees and link them to each other. A sound DEI policy with translation into employee daily practice makes all the difference here.

When defining policy, it is important to find a balance between external expertise and personal wisdom within the team and HAN. External expertise can reveal unconscious biases and pinpoint blind spots, but change will always have to be supported internally to be implemented in practice. One will always have to move from bottom to top and top to bottom in an organization to create a supported policy. The policy is not only meant for minorities, but also for the majority, not only for employees, but also for students, not only in Arnhem, but also in Nijmegen, not only in English, but also in Dutch; It is for everyone.

In terms of team and individual competency development, more is needed than a training course or a study day. Employees expect from HAN as an inclusive employer that its board and top management also practice what they preach. The participants in this study recommended several organizational changes for HAN as an inclusive educator and employer in addition to the scenarios aimed at inclusive competency development outlined above. In appendix 1, these organizational recommendations are included. According to them, it is important to look at organizational systems, structures and procedures that operate exclusively or discriminate against certain groups, to change them and in this way to promote inclusiveness.

As we read from both students and staff: improvement in inclusive competencies of staff is not enough, because also students, management and board need to change; it is and organizational cultural change which takes time, money, and energy. It is renumerating as in a positive and safe working atmosphere, employees can more easily create an inclusive learning and working environment for their colleagues and/or students. HAN employees themselves can only strengthen inclusiveness within their departments, teams, buildings, programs, classes, and student groups if they work in an inclusive environment where they feel safe, valued and backed by their colleagues and managers. Thus, HAN is not an inclusive educator until it is also an inclusive employer.

EPILOGUE

I would like to thank all the participants, contributors to this research, for the great conversations, new ideas, dominant and "different" stories. Especially Lineke van Hal and Ruth Bruggemann provided me with valuable feedback. Thank you, Cecile Nowack, for your patience and help with editing and digitalizing reports.

Of course, there are blind spots, prejudices, and undesirable behavior at HAN - just like in many organizations. I agree to the remarks of employees that we are individually and collectively responsible for an inclusive learning and working community. This does not only feel as a nice choice for an educational institution like HAN but more as our duty.

This research also showed me how rich HAN is in knowledge, expertise, experiential expertise, enthusiasm, and diversity in the field of DEI. Every conversation, interview or meeting brought new perspectives. The HAN could use this wealth much more by coordinating and connecting it more. The know-how and willingness of other organizations in the region to cooperate can help HAN to become more inclusive and create equal opportunities for all students as an educator and all employees as an employer. Working around DEI is an opportunity to innovate and excel. Hopefully this research will contribute to this challenge.

Saskia Kreutzer

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Advice from staff and students at the organizational level.

Staff and students advise organizational change in the following ways:

- Transparency in the organization about MO results and other information; honest information about what is going well and not so well, and fewer intermediate layers when it comes to decision-making.
- Mutual commitment from the employer to all employees, especially new employees, who have flexible and/or temporary contracts. New employees without permanent contracts often do not feel safe to speak out about e.g. harassment or too many tasks. They are vulnerable when it comes to complaints from students and they will need to be heard as well. Students must be able to feel safe but also employees. Especially in gray zones of misunderstanding, it would be good to hear each other's perspectives, as then they can learn from each other in a safe way.
- Adjustment of holidays where other than only Christian events can be celebrated (e.g. the Islamic Sugar Festival (Led-al-Fitr) and Feast of Sacrifice (Led-al- Adha), March 8 (Women's Day) and Purple Friday or October 11 (coming out day - LGBTQ+). We should also reconsider scheduling exams during Ramadan.
- There needs to be one central and independent point of contact for students and SCs when it comes to extra support needs;
- An improvement in complaint procedures for both employees and students, with an independent person, works better for most employees than a supervisor or academy director.
- Building should be changed to make it accessible for everyone: there are many HAN (emergency) buildings where people with physical disabilities have little or no access. People with visual impairments also lack supportive walkways in HAN buildings. There is also sometimes insufficient digital support e.g. specific computer programs for people with mental and/or physical disabilities. In addition, gender-neutral toilets are not present in every building and or currently not properly equipped.
- More diversity among executives, staff and directors is mentioned again.

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