

# CUSU stance on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Circle U.

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## Introduction

Equality, diversity, and inclusion (ED&I) are essential values that should involve active student participation. The Circle U. Student Union (CUSU) is dedicated to fostering a culture of inclusivity and fairness within the Circle U Alliance. This paper outlines CUSU's stance on ED&I, presenting key priorities and recommendations to advance equality, diversity, and inclusion across the alliance.

## Equality

### Main priorities

**Promote Equal Opportunities:** Circle U must actively promote equal opportunities, combat discrimination, foster safe environments, and encourage inclusive policies.

**Attendance Exemptions:** Students should, like staff, be allowed exemptions from obligatory attendance due to personal reasons, including but not limited to deaths, disabilities, religious observances, and illness.

**Economic Accessibility:** Consider the economic aspect, as the social class of origin may limit access to opportunities. Circle U should ensure that all students can effectively enjoy the opportunities offered, regardless of their financial background.

**Gender Equity:** Consider efforts to reduce gender inequality among academic staff. Diverse role models in all fields of study are crucial to avoid the perception that certain fields are gender-specific and make sure that everyone feels welcome in their programmes and don't struggle with the environment.

**Safe and Respectful Environment:** Ensure a study environment free from sexual harassment, where everyone feels welcome, regardless of gender and sexuality.

# Diversity

**Diversity in academia:** Misplaced academic focus on specific perspectives limits the academic soundness of certain fields. As such, CUSU considers it to be important in order to facilitate the highest academic quality, that there be a focus on the diversity in material and research when relevant. Circle U. should work on minimising structural biases and incorporate intersectionality into programmes.

**Protecting religious diversity:** It is important that there is equal space for and recognition of diverse religious practices within the alliance. Religious discrimination should not be tolerated and the universities should work towards minimising any unequal practices. University, as a disseminator of knowledge and learning, should play a proactive role in contrasting all forms of religious discrimination that persist within the social context.

**Open and diverse space for both students and staff:** Society is characterised by a high degree of diversity. It is within this society that the university operates in reciprocity, and we as students are trained to navigate it. We want the university to reflect the reality we are part of. This desire stems from the awareness that diversity is an enrichment that creates perspectives and fosters different approaches to both academic and social aspects. Therefore, the university must be open to everyone regardless of gender, sexuality, age, religion, nationality, and disability (both physical and mental).

We are aware that diversity is also important among staff, partly because it impacts the quality of our teaching. There is already a focus on this, for example through Aarhus University's initiatives to strengthen gender balance. Precisely because there is already attention to diversity issues among staff, we will focus on students.

# Inclusion

**Support for Gender and Social Justice Initiatives:** Collaborate with the Sustainability Development Committee to address gender stereotypes, expand gender studies, provide sustainable period care, and ensure access to gender-neutral bathrooms. Furthermore it is recommended to create access to for example period care dispensers.

**Accessibility for All:** Ensure that all resources, facilities, and opportunities are accessible to everyone, regardless of ability.

Accessibility is essential for creating an inclusive university environment, ensuring equal access to resources, facilities, and opportunities for all, regardless of physical ability or disability. This includes designing accessible spaces, providing suitable learning materials (e.g. using fonts which are accessible for dyslexic people, recording and tools for those who have some sort of visual or hearing impairment etc.), and implementing inclusive policies. Some disabilities are not visible, and the process of recognition can be lengthy and costly.

By ensuring accessibility for the entire student community, we can also address the needs of those who do not have the privilege of a formal diagnosis. The focus should be on providing the necessary tools to anyone who may need them, regardless of whether they have official documentation to certify it. By prioritising accessibility and inclusion, the university fosters a culture of equity, where everyone can participate fully in academic activities. This also includes a shift in the approach to teaching.

**Alternative Teaching Methods:** Advocate for non-standardized teaching methods, such as Universal Design for Learning, to accommodate diverse learning needs and avoid favouring specific groups.

**New Support Structures:** Propose the creation of a dedicated ED&I platform or body to address ED&I issues and establish a University Anti-Violence Center (CAV) for violence prevention and support for victims.

**Accessible buildings and facilities:** The physical environment is an important aspect of wellbeing in any situation.

As such we recommend that the universities make sure they have as many of the campuses be accessible to students and staff with disabilities. Implementing accessibility features can go in tandem with upgrading the general features and teaching tools of the universities.

## ED&I strategy

**Create and use relevant bodies and committees:** Our universities have several bodies and committees dedicated to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion, with active student participation to address community needs. These are important and could be a great asset to Circle U. and a potential centralised task force.

**Paternity/Maternity leave and childcare:** Our Universities should be supportive of caregivers and have lenient dispensation options regarding mandatory attendance.

## University Introduction

The start of studies is the foundation for a good academic journey. It is vital that all new students have a safe and supportive start, both practically and socially. We recommend that introductory days or similar events be offered in all bachelor's and master's programs to foster a diverse and inclusive social environment from the outset.

These introductory days are often planned by volunteer students who should have the freedom to design these activities. However, financial barriers should be minimised, and universities should allocate funding to cover the costs, ensuring accessibility and participation for all.

## Summary and key takeaways

**Student Involvement:** Ensure students are involved in processes aimed at enhancing ED&I, to ensure relevant perspectives are considered.

**Promote Equal Opportunities:** Actively promote equal opportunities, counter discrimination, and maintain a safe work environment.

**Inclusive Policies:** Advocate for gender-neutral bathrooms, inclusive policies, and support for students regardless of disabilities or economic background.

**Support Diverse Religious Practices:** Provide a safe spaces for any religion

**Alternative Teaching Methods:** Implement Universal Design for Learning and other methods to accommodate diverse needs. We recommend incorporating the use of non-standard teaching methods to be made available.

**Recognition of both visible and invisible disabilities:** It is important that Circle U. and the member universities recognise and act upon disabilities. In this matter it would be recommended to be in contact with relevant interest organisations that can provide key expertise.

**Tools and material:** Circle U. should focus on providing necessary tools to all students, whether or not they have official documentation and design accessible spaces, provide suitable learning materials, and implement inclusive policies. These tools should not be inaccessible to students based on wealth.

## Conclusion

CUSU calls for a comprehensive approach to ED&I within Circle U., ensuring that all students, staff, and community members feel welcome, safe, and supported.

By implementing these strategic priorities, Circle U can strengthen its commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion, reflecting the diverse communities it serves.