Terms of Reference: Accelerate

Diversity, equity & inclusion (DE&I)	
Vision	Diversity in talent is known to contribute positively to performance but progress towards it remains stubbornly slow[1]. Moreover, within the context of higher education, it is important to act beyond 'doing the document' to ensure changes are effectively implemented through 'doing'[2]. As evidenced in its Theory of Change (outcomes 2 & 4), VLIR-UOS wants to make a positive contribution to diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) in its network (cf. Leave No One Behind). Moreover, VLIR-UOS aims to strengthen its approach in all dimensions of the portfolio and organisation (building further upon earlier work around gender equality), offering evidence based and effective tools. The theme will be approached in a comprehensive way, making links with interconnected topics (e.g. decolonization, unwanted side-effects of emerging digital technologies, …). With this theme, VLIR-UOS aims to further operationalise its LNOB agenda by accelerating the transition towards 'diversity, equity & inclusion as a norm' and not an exception. The co-implementation process is important because the project should do the 'doing' together with VLIR-UOS and the VLIR-UOS community, which in this case would mean to involve the current gender, diversity & development expert group, responsible for the development of the existing VLIR-UOS policies (gender policy, maternity/paternity/co-parent guidelines for scholars) and/or new thematic fora that VLIR-UOS can foster, e.g. through Accelerate.
Layers and associated outcomes	1. Policy of VLIR-UOS: Deliverable: develop an **updated and integrated evidence-based policy on DE&I**, taking into account all dimensions and their intersectionality (not only gender), together with an associated action plan. As examples, following products might be delivered: stocktaking of existing policies, updated benchmark study, lessons learned and recommendations from this stocktaking and benchmark studies, and updated policy. 2. Policy implementation within the VLIR-UOS network: Deliverable: develop **at least two concrete policy implementation pathways** focused on supporting a better integration of DE&I within the VLIR-UOS portfolio. Proposed pathways should take into account existing best practices available through the network. As examples, following products might be delivered: a series of good practices/impact stories, a checklist on DE&I to be used during the project formulation, selection, implementation and/or evaluation stages; ideas to implement a better leave no one behind policy (e.g. LNOB scholarship fund, scholarships' selection system, improvements to the monitoring & learning systems and cycles, …). 3. Training programme within the VLIR-UOS network and beyond: Deliverable: **develop and implement a train-the-trainer programme on DE&I**. Following products are expected: training guidelines and materials, 2 executed (re-usable) trainings for potential trainers in the network. Activities to share learnings within a network and involve other actors are expected (inspire). As additional product, an online (future) training for potential scholarship holders might be developed. **Networking activities** organised around DE&I are also expected.

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[1]   https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-diversity-equity-and-inclusion
[2] Sara Ahmed (2007): 'You end up doing the document rather than doing the doing': Diversity, race equality and the politics of documentation, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 30:4, 590-609

Target groups	1. Policy of VLIR-UOS: VLIR-UOS and the VLIR-UOS community in Belgium and partner countries 2. Policy implementation within the VLIR-UOS network: ICOS/GEO, DE&I officers and HEI support staff in partner and Flemish HE&SIs; VLIR-UOS project promoters and actors 3. Training within the VLIR-UOS network and beyond: ICOS/GEO and staff of long-running programmes (IUC, ICP Connect) in Flemish/partner institutions could serve as corner-stones to build a trainer network. VLIR-UOS/ICOS/GEO/IUC/ICP Connect staff members/GM coordinators and other HE&SIs staff working with partners in the Global South should be empowered to ensure future trainings within the network. VLIR-UOS scholarship holders, both current and future, can be a secondary target group for future product development, to which the consortium can contribute.
Context	VLIR-UOS recognises the need for proactive strategies to ensure that vulnerable and marginalised populations are included and benefit from higher education partnerships for sustainable development. This is also an important dimension of the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle. VLIR-UOS Theory of Change outcome 2 (HE&SIs provide higher quality and more inclusive education) and outcome 4 (HE&SIs conduct higher-quality and needs-oriented research) both include a component on equity and gender. One instrument for realizing the ambition of enhanced equality and inclusion, is to develop a Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Policy of VLIR-UOS, by expanding/updating the current LNOB, Equality & Inclusion policy, of which only the gender part is currently developed. The current policy is considered as an instrument for conducting a dialogue with partners on gender sensitive issues and for putting gender on the agenda. The policy has a double focus: on interventions (programmes, projects and scholarships) on the one hand, and the organisation VLIR-UOS on the other.
State of affairs of the different outcomes	With regard to **policy**: an Equality & Inclusion policy 2020-2024 is published, for which only the gender part has been developed together with an included action plan. This was partly based on a former gender policy dating from 2015. A first (limited) benchmarking study on diversity policies in higher education cooperation for development has been executed beginning of 2022 but the learnings have not been incorporated into the policy. There is no extended Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policy yet. With regard to **policy implementation**, the following has already been accomplished: ToC and methodological guides on gender and leave no one behind combined with its inclusion in the different project call guidelines; maternity and paternity/co-parent guidelines for VLIR-UOS scholars; women are more fairly represented on the VLIR-UOS BUOS, the management team, the selection committees, and project teams; operational guidelines calling for gender balance when selecting project / ICP Connect scholars; a LNOB-fund framework has been developed and a promotional campaign on equality has been developed for use in 2024. Most projects pay attention to fixing the numbers (40-60% gender balance for scholars and project team) however fixing the organisation and content still needs strengthening. There is an existing expert group "Gender, Diversiteit & Ontwikkeling" but its last meeting dates from February 2022. With regard to **training**: there have been basic gender sensitivity trainings by VLIR-UOS for projects (IUC and ITP) in 2021-2022 but these were limited in scope and depth. A training has taken place as well for VLIR-UOS staff itself. Networking activities on the topic are also rare, mostly the topics are picked up during other VLIR-UOS events or matchmakings.

	Uptake, use and impact
Vision	Impact in VLIR-UOS context is the effect of higher education, research and innovation in 'the real world' or society. The process of value creation starts with creating the condition for uptake, effective uptake & use, and ends with societal impact[3], also known as 'creating the conditions for uptake(-use-impact)'. Research and innovation insights are first taken up, for instance by people not affiliated to HE&SIs interested in reading or participating in an event. Subsequently, insights are used in practice, for instance by people applying an innovation in practice, or changing a policy thus leading to societal impact. Societal impact in education can be reached through many pathways, such as community service learning, and leads to the necessary competencies to become both a highly skilled professional and a world citizen. Impact may be big or small, local or global, instrumental (direct change) or conceptual (ideas, feelings), quantitative (products, jobs, revenues) or qualitative. Creating the conditions for uptake-use-impact is a main goal of the VLIR-UOS programme, as evidenced by the focus of outcomes 5 and 6 in its Theory of Change. VLIR-UOS helps create the conditions for uptake-use-impact by implementing knowledge communication, stakeholder engagement, specific uptake capacity building and impact-oriented planning & monitoring throughout its portfolio.
Layers and associated outcomes	1. Policy of VLIR-UOS: Deliverable: guide the process towards deepening and operationalizing the strategy uptake-use-impact. Following products are expected: a brief **policy note on uptake-use-impact strategies** within a VLIR-UOS context, capitalising on earlier work; an uptake-use-impact **M&E framework** that enables to study and document impact mechanisms. 2. Policy implementation development: Deliverable: guide the knowledge and practice exchange process on uptake-use-impact of HES4SD. Following products need to be developed: an **evidence-based toolbox** drawing from the realities of partner institutions, earlier VLIR-UOS practices and existing publications/instruments (VLIR-UOS and beyond) and showcase projects, with special attention for application focused projects from universities of applied sciences and arts; **policy advice on a selection of VLIR-UOS project proposal/reporting formats and procedures**. As a service, advice to member institutions on societal impact analysis (of education, research and innovation) is also expected. 3. Training programme: **develop and implement training of trainers programme** focused on individuals (how to work on uptake within a project) and institutions (how to strengthen the science-society interface, e.g. how to organise efficient tech transfer or how to track impact of research and innovation at the HE&SIs) is expected. Trainees need to be enabled to replicate the knowledge transfer to their own context and environment, creating a trainer network anchored within HE&SIs. A training programme (including training materials) needs to be developed, and implemented at least twice. Activities to share learnings within a network and involve other actors are also expected.
Target groups	1. Policy of VLIR-UOS: VLIR-UOS and the VLIR-UOS community in Belgium and partner countries 2. Policy implementation within the VLIR-UOS network: HE&SI management, project managers of the VLIR-UOS community, VLIR-UOS staff and ICOS/GEO/IUC staff. 3. Training within the VLIR-UOS network and beyond: For elements focused at institutional level: HEI support staff in partner and Flemish HE&SIs; HEI management. For elements focused at the individual project level: ICOS/GEO, project support staff, HEI researchers and academics. A particular focus needs to be given to potential uptake-use-impact

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[3]   [Creating research impact: the roles of research users in interactive research mobilisation in: Evidence & Policy Volume 11 Issue 1 (2015) (bristoluniversitypressdigital.com)](bristoluniversitypressdigital.com)

	ambassadors, e.g. promotors or project members who focus on uptake-use-impact in their projects. In addition also staff from JSF partners. VLIR-UOS, ICOS/GEO and staff of long-running programmes (IUC, ICP Connect) in Flemish/partner institutions could serve as cornerstones to build a trainer network.
Context	Based on a definition provided by the Department for International Development (DFID, 2016) adapted to the specific context, VLIR-UOS defines uptake as 'the use of research, education and innovation results of HEIs by non-academic actors, stakeholders and society at large (policy-makers, NGOs, private sector, citizens)' and creating the conditions for uptake-use-impact as 'all activities or processes that facilitate and contribute to the application of research, education and innovation evidence or other results emanating from the insights of HEIs'. Creating the conditions for uptake is a main goal of the whole VLIR-UOS programme, as evidenced by its Theory of Change (outcome 5: HE&SIs create enhanced conditions for uptake of new knowledge, applications and services & outcome 6: HE&SIs and their stakeholders engage in knowledge driven science-society interactions). In literature, many terms are used to reflect (parts of) this concept: knowledge transfer/brokering/mobilization, getting research into policy & practice, research valorisation, etc. Potential processes supporting uptake-use-impact are: - Continuously engaging with stakeholders (incl. potential end-users) *by* communicating knowledge effectively (synthesizing and repackaging insights for non-expert audiences) - Creating value addition for policy makers *by* supporting the design and effective implementation of innovative policies - Organising private sector and startup development support *by* research & innovation valorisation, the creation of spinoffs and support for intellectual property processes - Ensuring impact of insights on the society at large *by* capacity building of both users and producers, and *by* raising commitment of stakeholders
State of affairs of the different outcomes	**Policy**: no specific policies exist on the topic, though the concept of uptake is integrated in many documents such as the FYP2 and the call documents. Related to policy development, in December 2019, we published the evaluation report 'Creating the conditions for impact'. It focused on a sample of concluded VLIR-UOS projects. As one of its objectives, it aimed to develop a clear conceptual framework clarifying different potential strategies linked to creating the conditions for uptake of new knowledge, services and/or applications generated through our projects. The evaluation identified a number of (pre-)conditions and mechanisms which are conducive to the uptake of new knowledge, services and applications outside the academic context. By identifying and validating these preconditions and mechanisms, the evaluation has provided VLIR-UOS with invaluable input on uptake strategies. With regard **to policy implementation**, this evaluation allowed us to develop a "brochure" with the potential to help promoters and projects create conditions for uptake-use of research results and eventually: societal impact. These results were also shared during an ECOOM conference. The brochure was developed in consultation with an academic working group. As of 2020, VLIR-UOS has integrated the lessons from this brochure in its formal framework (FYP), its Theory of Change, and implicitly in all its formats. Still, the brochure is far from a toolbox, while the need still exists. Research shows that a majority of promotors do not feel equipped/trained on how to approach the "uptake" challenge. Furthermore, the current brochure lacks both depth (going into the specifics of potentially good practices) and breadth (capturing the diversity of approaches). Developing this topic further is a clear expectation from DGD, and an area of mutual learning for the thematic Joint Strategic Framework. **Trainings** on research communication have been delivered in the past, but trainings focused on creating the conditions for uptake-use-impact are still lacking. Networking activities on the topic have been limited, but the topic has been discussed during several VLIR-UOS events and matchmakings.

	Higher education management

Vision	As evidenced in its Theory of Change (outcomes 1 & 3), VLIR-UOS finds itself in a unique position to develop policies for higher education management within its network. Research shows HE&SIs are sometimes left to catch up in terms of generic and subject-specific skills development, as well a technological innovation and adoption[4], both within their curricula as well as within their own management and policy practices. With this theme, VLIR-UOS also aims to accelerate the advanced skills transition, both (a) in terms of transversal and soft skills programmes within higher education aimed at students, researchers and lifelong learners as well as (b) in terms of higher education management skills needed to steer HE&SIs towards higher quality and more equity while at the same addressing increasing demand. The exact identification of the targeted skillset is part of the process and will be based on co-creation, but a first selection is provided here:
	
	 - *Data management skills:* Skills to effectively analyse, showcase and use data (in all activities of HE&SIs). How to create data management plans? How to manage data in a sustainable way? VLIR-UOS could use this material to nudge HEI staff to enhance data based decision making.
	
	 - *Effective research skills*, including skills needed to ensure:
	
	    * *Responsible research integrity:* How to ensure responsible research? How to support equal partnerships and integrate IPR, GDPR and Nagoya regulations in different domains? Can the EU Code of conduct on Research Integrity be ada(o)pted? VLIR-UOS could use this experience to further integrate ethical principles in the grant cycle and to link the decolonization discussion to these topics.
	
	    * *Open science:* Good practices or risks related to Open Access publishing? Skills to negotiate Open Access deals and waivers with publishers? VLIR-UOS could use this experience to understand the next generation of best practices and implement policies.
	
	    * *Research leadership:* How to effectively manage a research group, department or (research) institution?
	
	 - *Project proposal development and management skills*: Which skills do students and staff need to effectively develop a scientific or cooperation for development project? E.g. how to manage effective (online/live/blended) workshops? What are essential management skills to effectively run projects? The VLIR-UOS community could use this experience to develop a service offer for its network.
	
	 - *Digital skills:* Which skills are needed in a digital society? How to effectively ensure students and staff apply their digital skills in a HE context? What digital skills frameworks could be used to evaluate this (e.g. EU DigiComp 2.2). VLIR-UOS could use this experience to ensure effective digital skills policies in the portfolio (see this example).
	
	 - *Education research & development*, including integrating digital learning and community service learning into education trajectories.

Layers and associated outcomes	1. Policy of VLIR-UOS: Deliverable: **VLIR-UOS policies on relevant topics** such as open Science and research integrity. 2. Policy implementation within the VLIR-UOS network: Deliverable: develop **at least two concrete policy implementation pathways** focused on the chosen topics. For example: develop an integrated toolbox on research integrity and open science; advise and support negotiations with open science journals for reduced fees; develop a toolbox to ensure adequate digital skills for higher education management; … .

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[4] Steering Tertiary Education : Toward Resilient Systems that Deliver for All (World Bank, 2022)

	3. **Training within the VLIR-UOS network and beyond**: Deliverable: develop and implement modular structured trainings and support to the HE&SI community. At least two editions of a training should be executed, including training materials and a train-the-trainer component with the goal to create a trainer network anchored within HE&SIs. Activities to share learnings and involve other actors are also expected.
Target Group	1. Policy of VLIR-UOS: VLIR-UOS and the VLIR-UOS community in Belgium and partner countries 2. Policy implementation within the VLIR-UOS network: HE&SI support staff in partner and Flemish HE&SIs, HEI management; ICOS/GEO, project support staff, HE&SI researchers and academics. A particular focus needs to be given to HE&SI decision makers. 3. Training within the VLIR-UOS network and beyond: HE&SI researchers and academics, HE&SI support staff in partner and Flemish HE&SIs, HE&SI management; ICOS/GEO, project support staff.
Context	"Building and transforming tertiary education systems today and tomorrow happens in an extraordinarily and increasingly dynamic context."[4] This is due to current trends in society, such as demographic changes, continuing rapid urbanization, increasing worldwide competition for talent, and the twin (green & digital) transition. The current context translates into a continued increase in demand for high quality, innovation-based higher education. Another consequence of these trends, are increasing requests for skills needed for non-routine tasks, such as knowing how to adapt; communication, negotiation and digital skills. Not only is integrating these skills in a practical way necessary in initial higher education curricula (at every level, from technical higher education up to academic education and PhDs), but integrating skills support also becomes increasingly important in lifelong learning. This in turn widens the role of HE&SIs in lifelong learning schemes. The resulting growing organizational complexity of HE&SIs creates the need for a wide range of skills for HE&SIs themselves. Next to the disciplinary specialization of more traditional academic roles of lecturers, researchers, and administrators, professional support staff are taking up specialized roles. Taken together, these trends urge us to rethink skills integration within HE&SI education to support a future of decent work and at the same time professionalize skills needed for HE&SI management practices and policies. Achieving VLIR-UOS Theory of Change outcomes 1 (individuals apply relevant co-created knowledge, skills and attitudes) and 3 (HE&SIs make use of improved organisational systems, processes and structures) is in both cases reliant on developments of this theme.
State of affairs of the different outcomes	With regards to **policy**, the outcome depends on the chosen focus. For instance on research ethics or open science, no central policies exist for VLIR-UOS. With regards to **policy implementation**: within VLIR-UOS partnerships, many different topics have been addressed that are related to organizational development or HE&SI policies. Examples are the development of libraries/library services, offering assistance in the setting up of doctoral schools, the installation of central research information systems (CRIS) and institutional repositories, etc. These implementations were supported by expert groups facilitated by VLIR-UOS, such as the library and ICT groups, who also mapped skills needed to support their respective fields of interest (e.g. a mapping on advanced digital/ICT skills). An advanced skillset is actively developed in many VLIR-UOS projects and subsequently a new culture of practice is often indirectly introduced as well. For example: researchers able to develop their own institutional repositories also develop the potential to start self-archiving and publish in Green Open Access. Institutions that install doctoral schools, start professionalising support to PhD researchers, leading to changes in thinking about researcher careers and the ways academic collaboration is valued and accredited (research integrity and responsible research assessment practices), curricula integrate skills needed in the workplace for a particular field of expertise, … . Policy supporting initiatives directly targeted at standardizing and

	updating these practices beyond the individual project level, however, are still missing.
	Structured **trainings** across the portfolio are mostly still missing, existing trainings are mainly organised on a per-project basis (e.g. doctoral schools within IUCs, NETWORK or TEAM projects, digital skills trainings within specific projects, …). Networking activities on these topics are also rare, mostly the topics are picked up during other VLIR-UOS events or matchmakings.