

Diversity-sensitive education at Ghent University:

We'd love to hear your experiences!

EXPLANATORY TEXT – CONVERSATION GROUP

Dear Student,

We appreciate your interest in this project and look forward to your input! We are happy to explain the set-up of the conversation group.

Reason

Despite its huge size, Ghent University strives to be a place where every student and employee **can feel at home**, in every sense of the expression. This way we want to ensure that the proverbial inhabitants of our house are a reflection of society. Ghent University's ambition to be a place where diversity can thrive and flourish is quite a challenge. The path to those two goals is neither simple nor straightforward.

We believe that these goals can never be reached without involving the students themselves. Every day you are the ones who experience how one lecturer or employee treats you empathically and appropriately, while others fail to empathize with your point of view or environment, let alone adjust their approach accordingly. We want to question ourselves in terms of the content of the curriculum, the different frameworks we use, the teaching- and evaluation practice and our work towards diversity-oriented competences. It is clear to Ghent University that in some places we still have a long way to go before we offer fully **diversity-sensitive and decolonized education**. We are working on this through various initiatives and we also rely on your input.

Project of the Interfaculty Workgroup Diversity-Sensitive Education

One of these recent initiatives is the **Workgroup Divscan**: Where the Faculties of Medicine and Health Sciences, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Arts and Philosophy, Law and Criminology and Psychology and Educational Sciences join forces. **The goal** is:

- develop a tool (a scan, screening or reflection instrument) that can help lecturers and UGent employees to deal with diversity issues in all its aspects;
- set up a coaching process that helps them to use the tool and offers opportunities for mutual exchange.

For this purpose we would like to listen to you by organizing a **conversation group**. We want to hear where our actions, our interactions and the content of the curriculum are not properly aligned with who you are. And of course we also want to hear where this is already the case. We hope to learn from both approaches. Because we think your experiences will be very inspiring, and perhaps also confronting for the lecturers, we want to integrate your experiences anonymously into our coaching process and the development of our tool.

Capturing experiences in a respectful way

During the testimonials, the members of the Workgroup Divscan will guide you and make every effort to capture your experiences in a **respectful, nuanced and honest manner**. We are mainly concerned with what happens, when it happens, how it happens. If you appreciate the lecturers' approach, we want to be able to

grasp this so that we can use these examples as good practice. When things go wrong, we want to understand where the interaction is failing, what we do not see sufficiently or where we miss opportunities. These insights will become particularly valuable for the coaching trajectory that we have in mind for our Ghent University lecturers.

With your help, we'll soon be able to point out the do's and don'ts to our colleagues so they in turn will be able to offer every student **diversity-sensitive education**. And that is where we want and must go, there is no doubt about that.

Practical arrangements

- Your stories are captured but remain completely anonymous.
- In order to give everyone enough space and time, the conversation group is limited to 8 students.
- We appeal to students from different faculties.
- The conversation will take up an hour and a half of your time.
- If needed, you can talk more extensively with one of the organizers afterwards.

The conversation group takes place (corona proof):

- Wednesday 30 June, 10 – 11:30 am, Faculteitszaal, Campus Boekentoren, Blandijn
- Optional (when there are more bookings): Friday 2 July, 1:30 – 3:30 pm, Campus Dunant, leslokaal 2.1

If you would like to know more about this conversation group, you can always contact the coordinator of the Workgroup or the faculty staff member if applicable.

Faculty	
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Ambitions for a diversity-sensitive educational context

Increasing the intake and flow of students from diverse and vulnerable backgrounds is an explicit policy choice at Ghent University. In addition, within the framework of the university-wide policy choices, several faculties set additional, diversity-related ambitions to realize more diversity-sensitive education. Although existing initiatives already focus on the intake of students, too little attention is paid to inflow, student retention and drop-out of students. The drop-out appears to manifest itself mainly in the first bachelor (see figures UGI, international research and experiences of colleagues in several departments). A lack of recognition and involvement or the confrontation with (structural) barriers in the learning environment can already be demotivating and lead to feelings of discouragement. At our university we try to meet this mainly at the individual level of the student (eg follow-up monitoring, individual coaching, study guidance, etc.).

Although individual support and remediation are indispensable, within the university we must also focus on characteristics that are specific to the educational context and eliminate systemic barriers. The university-wide Diversity Policy (2019) sets the following operational objective: "The diversity-sensitive attitude of lecturers is strengthened and lecturers are able to screen and adapt their own learning and source material". After all, a deficit perspective is insufficient to really meet the needs of various students. After all, drop-out (in the first bachelor) can be an indication of a "mismatch" between the student's background and the implicit but dominant norms and expectations in the educational context, such as the learning and source material. As a university with the motto "dare to think", we must critically evaluate this educational context.

It is therefore essential to find a balance between initiatives that start from a deficit paradigm and individual remediation on the one hand and measures that focus on (the elimination of) the systemic / structural barriers. With this initiative "Diversity-sensitive education", we wish to focus on the critical monitoring of our education, including evaluation, and thus make the educational context of diversity more sensitive.