

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Statements on non- discriminatory and non-biased practice and teaching at Bergen School of Architecture

Introduction

With these statements we want to build awareness and competence to foster an inviting and respectful teaching and working environment at Bergen School of Architecture (BAS). We want to anchor premises of equality and diversity into our curricular practice, teaching, working and overall attitude towards each other and the community we all take part in shaping.

In our teaching, grounded in Open Form approaches, we build experience and awareness on spatial gestures that handle spatial invitations and ambiguous situations. We aim to act responsible and in respect for each other within the spatial realm. With these statements we intend to bridge the attitudes to spatial negotiation with a general awareness on how to shape premises for equality and diversity.

Mandate, process and committee members;

This is the result of a work commissioned by the board. It started with their concern on gender balance amongst the teachers. The board wanted both an action plan to address equality and diversity in recruitment and staff and they wanted an informed discussion to highlight why and how we should address equality and diversity at school. This statement document mainly addresses the latter and is intended to create awareness amongst all stakeholders to premise equality and diversity in all processes and procedures at school.

The school's policy on equality and diversity is grounded in the Strategy plan 2015-2025 where it is written that Bergen School of Architecture *shall enact a recruitment policy that ensures a gender balance amongst students and staff (skal utøve en rekrutteringspolitikk som sikrer [...] god kjønnsbalanse blant ansatte og studenter)*, further it states as an 'action' that there *shall be awareness concerning equality and discrimination in regard to recruitment of staff and in the intake of students (skal være bevissthet rundt likestilling og diskriminering ved rekruttering og studentopptak)*.

According to the Act of Universities and University colleges in Norway (§ 8-1 and § 6-2) the board of the school needs to ensure active, targeted and planned work on gender equality for all categories of employment at the institution. To answer this demand, the school has made a separate action plan on gender equality; '*Handlingsplan for aktivt, målrettet og planmessig arbeid for likestilling og kjønnsbalanse ved Bergen Arkitekthøgskole*' that links to the overall ambitions in this document.

When forming the statements, we started out mapping rules and regulations and collected diversity strategies from other institutions. Our statement document is based and expanded from the *KTH School of Architecture-rules on Gender, Equality and Diversity 2018-2020*, widening the focus to encompass a broader specter of equality and diversity aspects. We looked at the current situation at our school and questioned what praxis to keep, what should be challenged and where to raise awareness. The document is intended to be a dynamic tool where new insights and awareness's should find their place through additions and new nuances along the way.

We hope it will be seen as a living document that is negotiated and revised by the many stakeholders at school in the years to come.

Through an open-call for participants to all the different entities at the school a committed working group was formed, representing the students, teachers and staff. The group with all the interested consisted of Mumtaaz Viaene, student, Anders Rubing, teacher, Hector Pina Barrios, wise rector, Ingrid Kvamsdal, administration, Ingunn Tepstad, administration and Cecilie Andersson, rector. They jointly developed this statement document.

Why should we work for diversity and equality?

BAS is solidly grounded in democratic values. We educate architects based on the conviction that the challenges of our complex and diverse society can be better dealt with through partaking in, and understanding society. It is therefore crucial to our mission and educational task to ensure that the diversity of our society is always reflected in our students, staff and teaching.

BAS acknowledges the lack of access to equal opportunities for all members of society and within the architecture discipline. The school also recognizes the structural discrimination and biases embedded in the architecture discourses. As part of society, BAS is by no means less vulnerable to unconsciously operating from these biases. What can we do as a school to tackle this? In addition to ensuring representation, it is also essential to work continuously at building and maintaining an awareness culture concerning our individual and institutional vulnerability to these biases. BAS aims to ensure a learning- and work environment free from discrimination and inequalities based on privileges or biases. We aim to further develop a culture that offer our students and employees opportunities to work and study on equal terms. These conditions are crucial to the quality and status of our place of learning and to our ability to work together. The work with equality and diversity at the school is therefore based on the needs and expectations of students, staff, and the organization as a whole. The school also encourages the students and staff to work for equality and diversity outside the school's framework.

Diversity

Our society is composed of many different types of people and groups, all being of different ages and having a wide variety of life and economic conditions, physical abilities, ethnical and cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, etc. To BAS diversity means this wide variety of people and groups being included/represented in the life, activities and awareness of the school.

Equality

By equality we mean a fair, impartial, just and unbiased state in which every individual is equal to others in rights, obligations and access to opportunities, regardless of (and not limited to) age, physical ability, economic condition, ethnical and cultural background, religious belief, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, etc., and irrespective of role/status at the school (employee or student).

Biases

are in these guidelines defined as a preference or prejudice for or against one or many groups or persons. Bias is a key term in these discussions since we acknowledge that there are both conscious and unconscious biases within the architecture field and at our school.

How do we bring these statements to life in our activities?

Our statements on equality and diversity apply to management, drafting and decision-making bodies, students and all employees. Our intention with these statements is also to lay the foundations for the requirements we make of visiting lecturers, guest critics, consultants and anyone else who comes into contact with the school.

These statements should be adaptive to the specific needs of various processes and individuals. To foster a reflective approach to the implementation of guidelines there is a need for good communication and self-reflections. We need to never stop questioning whether the learning environment, teaching, teaching material and ways of examining is adapted and oriented towards a diverse student body and study and work environment. Therefore, we want this document to inform the various processes and committee work. We intend the document to be handed to all the committees at school as a reminder before every hiring process and before framing concrete guidelines to ensure that the awareness on equality and diversity is embedded in all structural work at BAS.

The statements should be accessible and communicated to all students and staff.

The statements should be accessible on our web page and be included in the handbook for new employees and the handbook for students. It should be actively used by LMU, SKU and the board in their continuous work to ensure equality and diversity.

To ensure that this statement document is kept updated and relevant we invite all the organisational bodies and all students and staff at BAS to initiate and propose changes. It should be addressed to the board.

Along with the handling of the yearly report the board should address equality and diversity and based on input from all stakeholders it should consider if revisions are needed and if new action plans or focus areas have to be initiated to ensure a constant focus on equality and diversity at the school.

Our focus areas for ongoing activities

Based on the schools understanding and position on diversity, equality and discrimination our key focus areas to build awareness and a culture for questioning are:

- 1 **Unconscious bias** – Our goal is to highlight and challenge those unconscious biases that exist in our culture at school, in the field of architecture and in society at large. In order to bring these biases to the fore front, we need to ask ourselves: How do we reveal norms and unconscious biases so that we can make more considered, conscious choices? How do unconscious biases affect our workplace and us as employees? How do they affect us as an educational institution, as staff or students? How do our biases affect the way we interact ?

Gender and background-balanced references – References are important to us because they both say something about who has created and interfered with places and buildings, as well as who may create or interfere with buildings and places in the future. We work actively to broaden our awareness of diverse references. Our goal is to achieve a rich, inspiring, diverse and balanced representation in our references and examples both in the content of study courses and in participation in teaching. In order to achieve gender and background balance, we need to ask ourselves questions such as: Which references do we display? Whose work

imparts high status? How do we relate to literature from earlier eras that is not gender or background balanced? How do we relate to the multiplicity of societies and cultures from a historical perspective? How do we ensure that the tracks we leave behind within the discourse are appropriate in terms of our goal of balanced references? How can we include different backgrounds than the American-European-centric canon of references?

Building awareness- To counter bias and to include people and processes that do not see this as an urgency the school should suggest inclusive workshops and discussions within and beyond the bodies of school like LMU, SKU, the teacher seminar and SOBAS.

The school should actively seek out a diverse student body and staff, in their enrolment, affiliation, and engagement procedures. The action plan on equality and gender balance (*handlingsplan for aktivt, målrettet og planmessig arbeid for likestilling og kjønnsbalanse ved Bergen Arkitektthøgskole*) highlights the procedures and responsibilities in regard to the aspects of gender balance, but similar awareness on a broader sense of diversity should be promoted.

2 Space to grow –

The students and employees have an obligation to support self-growth and growth of others. The school emphasises the value of collaboration and learning from each other because people that learn from each other, understand each other better. We promote good health and reduced stress, both among staff and students. BAS is intended to provide the space to grow, irrespective of gender, life situation and orientation. In order to actively work to improve health and reduce stress, we ask ourselves questions such as: What is the state of our work environment and how is work allocated? What kind of workloads do we have? Are students and staff able to maintain a healthy work-life balance throughout the whole semester? Are there differences due to genders, parenthood, between student and employees from different backgrounds? How does the staff of the school behave towards students, and how do students behave towards staff? How can we create an ambience of mutual respect on equal premises?

Actions are taken to monitor this through internal and external surveys, evaluations and in the everyday monitoring and feedback from informants to LMU, Verneombudet (safety representative of the employees) SKU and SOBAS. All these bodies can both inform the input through shaping relevant questions and define urgencies and suggest actions to address the situation based on results from the surveys, evaluations and other informants. Establishing dialogue with AFAG and NAL is also relevant to address questions of work environment and study culture in respect to the profession.

3 Communicating our statements – Bas wants to have a positive impact on the community it is part of; to the people at school, the neighbourhood and the broader environment. To ensure that our outreach corresponds to our statements regarding inclusion we should ask: How are we seen to address equality and diversity? Can we give diversity studies a higher profile at the school? How do we communicate how we work with equality and diversity towards both students and employees? How can we attract more diverse candidates for students and staff? How do we communicate in order to reach a diverse audience?

The school should constantly seek to establish an inviting and OPEN culture with OPEN lectures available to the public and a public open library. Hosting high school visits and engaging the community through study projects, design-and-build projects for the common good, public exhibitions and open

source publications are also means to communicate our statements.

- 4 Reflection and Re-Evaluation** - The board and all members of the school community have the responsibility to reflect on how the school and its members can build awareness on equality and diversity and how they use this statement document as a tool to build awareness. This consideration and self-reflection should serve as an evaluation and re-evaluation of the statements. Reflections could be: Is there something that the school can do to facilitate the non-discriminatory, equality and diversity work? Is there something I could do better to strengthen the equality and diversity work at the school in my doings and saying? How am I using the statements in my relation to other members of the school community?

The living document-The statement document will be uploaded to the web page along with a link to propose suggestions for reflections and re-evaluations for everyone to interfere with this document. The proposals will be considered by the board annually. The link to give feedback can be found here:

<https://response.questback.com/stiftelsenbergenarkitekthgskol/4ifd3fyij>

- 5 Training** – All employees and students should in their time at the school be exposed to discussions/training with a focus on equality and diversity.

We imagine this thematic to be raised in workshops, some specifically related to the education, but others with a more open format like Oscar Hansen seminars or Open School seminars arranged by different bodies. We propose the board to initiate the first seminar this autumn as part of the Big Wonderful Experiment and its OPEN phase, putting equality and diversity on the agenda.

Legal anchoring of the statements

The work on equality and diversity at Bergen School of Architecture is based on the legal regulations that apply to all employees and students and all education institutions in Norway. BAS is regulated by the Act relating to universities and university colleges. The act has paragraphs regulating both the students' learning environment (Chapter 4) and appointments (Chapter 6). [Lov om universiteter og høyskoler \(universitets- og høyskoleloven\) - Lovdata](#)

BAS is also regulated by the Act relating to working environment, working hours and employment protection, etc. (Working Environment Act [Lov om arbeidsmiljø, arbeidstid og stillingsvern mv. \(arbeidsmiljøloven\) - Kapittel 13. Vern mot diskriminering - Lovdata](#)) and the Act relating to equality and a prohibition against discrimination (Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act [Lov om likestilling og forbud mot diskriminering \(likestillings- og diskrimineringsloven\) - Lovdata](#)

Bergen School of Architecture views discrimination in accordance with the Norwegian Discrimination Act. The purpose of which is to combat discrimination, whether direct or indirect and promote equal rights and opportunities also regardless of sex, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, cultural background, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation, economic background or age or other criteria.

In relation to the Act relating to universities and university colleges § 4-3 (5) BAS aims to create the best possible conditions for all students. The physical learning environment shall be designed, as far as possible and reasonable, in accordance with requirements for universal design. BAS shall, as far as possible and reasonable, facilitate the pedagogics for students with special needs. The facilitation must not lead to a reduction of professional requirements.