International Good Practices Report

Work Package 4 - Activity 4.1

EQUNI project

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Algarve, December 2025

Project:

Title: Implementation of effective practices for the development of students' emotional intelligence with particular emphasis on anti-discrimination activities at European universities

Acronym: EQUNI

No: 2022-1-PL01-KA220-HED-00089417

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1. Introduction

Inclusivity and equity are becoming increasingly relevant in an increasingly globalized society. This also applies to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It is important to recognize the impact emotional intelligence (EQ) has on fostering an anti-discriminatory environment. This Best Practice Guideline focuses on cultivating EQ to combat discrimination within HEI and other institutions.

It is for students and academic staff alike, since they together form the basis for a psychologically safe environment, bringing the focus on diversity, equity and inclusion in the academic community. Anti-discrimination affects everyone, which is why a holistic approach is best suited to achieve the goal. This guide is intended for leaders, administrators, and practitioners within HEIs, as well as other organizations committed to creating inclusive environments, who are seeking practical methods to enhance emotional intelligence and prevent discrimination. It introduces the concept of emotional intelligence, provides background information on discrimination in the academic context and presents a variety of best practice examples.

Best practice is defined as a practice, standard or set of guidelines, known to provide good results. Best practices can be evidence-based and grounded in research, or they can be the result of a natural process of trial and error. Implementing effective practices is an effective way to support your own institution on its way to a non-discriminatory environment.

2. Background Information

2.1 The definition of EQ

What is emotional intelligence (EQ)?

Emotional intelligence, also known as emotional intelligence quotient (EQ), is the ability to perceive one's own emotions and those of others and to manage them appropriately. Although there is no standard definition of emotional intelligence, it can generally be broken down into two categories: personal and social intelligence.

Personal intelligence refers to the ability to recognize and express one's own emotions in an appropriate manner, as well as being able to use those emotions for own motivation, to reach goals or be creative.

Social intelligence refers to the ability to understand and manage emotions in others. This includes empathy and handling relationships.

Who thought about emotional intelligence first?

The term emotional intelligence was coined by Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1990 but gained public recognition through Daniel Goleman's book "Emotional intelligence" a few years later. Even though research on non-cognitive aspects of intelligence had already been conducted earlier than this, most definitions of intelligence focused solely on cognitive aspects, such as problem solving and decision making.

Why is EQ important?

IQ, the common measurement for cognitive intelligence, is not the only or even main predictor of success (as has been thought for a long time). A high EQ goes hand in hand with communication skills and conflict management. Those skills are essential for effective teamwork and therefore a great outcome. At the same time, unchecked emotional reactions can undo the positive impact of IQ on the quality of work, as they negatively impact rational thinking and problem solving.

In conclusion, in order to be able to work effectively in teams, both IQ and EQ are equally important. EQ also has a huge impact on personal lives, since emotional intelligence does not only play a significant role in business relationships, but also private ones. Thankfully, emotional intelligence can be learned and developed.

In short:
- Emotional intelligence consists of five elements: Self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, social skills
- A high EQ predicts strong interpersonal skills, essential for successful and respectful interaction
- EQ plays an important role in every type of relationship, professional and personal
- Emotional intelligence can be learned

2.2 The definition of discrimination

What exactly is discrimination?

In his ground-breaking work "The nature of prejudice", Gordon Allport (1954) (cited in Mummendey & Otten, 1998) defined discrimination as any behaviour that is influenced by differences based on social or natural categories, that have nothing to do with an individual's merits, abilities, or personal actions. This can be due to age, race, religion or belief, disability, and many other group affiliations.

Next to direct discrimination by less favourable treatment, there are also other forms of discrimination. Indirect discrimination occurs when rules or practices that apply to everyone put certain groups at a disadvantage. Harassment and bullying can also be a type of discrimination if it is

based on the mentioned social or natural categories. Another form of discrimination is victimisation, which occurs when someone is treated less favourably because they have called out discriminatory behavior or complained about it.

In short, discrimination is an unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, or sexual orientation.

And as can be already seen by the definition above, there is not only one reason for or one type of discrimination. And it is also not always easy to spot. A report done as part of the EQUNI project has shown that 10% of responders at the participating Universities weren't even sure if they had been victims of discrimination.

Where does discrimination come from?

A phenomenon called "intergroup bias" is often mentioned in the context of discrimination. It refers to the tendency to evaluate one's own group and its members (ingroup) more favourably than groups and their members to which one does not belong (outgroup). Biases arise due to the tendency of the human brain to categorize things to make sense of the world but are often the source of discrimination. They can be explicit or implicit, meaning some of them are conscious, while others are not. Nevertheless, both types of biases influence our behavior.

Discrimination in the academic context

The EQUNI report mentioned above also discovered which type of discrimination is most prevalent for each specific type of relationship within the academic context. For example, students discriminate against other students mainly based on nationality and age, while among teachers, hierarchical and gender-based biases are most prevalent.

In order to effectively counter discrimination, best practices need to be tailored to different types of discrimination.

In short:
- Discrimination is the unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, or sexual orientation.
- There are different forms of discrimination
- Explicit or implicit biases/beliefs are often the root for discrimination
- The grounds on which people experience discrimination in academic settings vary depending on the type of relationship between those involved

2.3 Why EQ for anti-discrimination?

In efforts to reduce discrimination, emotional intelligence is indispensable. EQ fosters empathy for others and through that creates an understanding and accepting environment. The conflicts arising through discrimination can be navigated more effectively if parties involved have the necessary communication skills, which are directly linked to emotional intelligence. EQ makes it possible for people to be aware of and navigate through biases and prejudice and through that can actively counteract discrimination.

3. Method

3.1 Search for practical examples

In order to identify practices to include in this guideline, a broad search was conducted by members of the EQUNi project team. The internet was searched for suitable best practices using combinations of different search terms, such as the following:

- Best Practices

- Universities

- Higher Education

- Emotional intelligence

- Antidiscrimination

- DEI

- Inclusion

- …

Additionally, websites of HEIs committed to issues such as anti-discrimination and equality were searched for practices and policies addressing the topics of discrimination, inclusion, diversity and equality. Those practices that met the aim of this project were screened using the process described below.

3.2 Selection of practices

Following the search, the best practice examples identified were evaluated according to pre-defined criteria. The aim was to build a guideline with a diverse range of practices that proved to be effective in promoting emotional intelligence and/or addressing discrimination within the academic context. The multi-stage process to select the best practices included in this guide incorporated defined

criteria for inclusion with a prioritization scheme for comparing multiple eligible examples.

All practices considered for inclusion in this guide were evaluated against 13 criteria, grouped in two broad categories: **Necessary for inclusion** and **Refinement criteria**.

These criteria were developed by the project team based on a review of already established best practice guidelines and the needs of the EQUNI project. Each practice was assigned a score based on how well the practice meets the criterion, ranging from 1 (= yes) to 5 (=no). Each criterion was weighted equally.

1. Necessary Criteria

To be considered for inclusion, a practice *must* meet the following minimum requirements:

- **Relevance:** The practice must directly relate to either emotional intelligence or (anti)discrimination.

- **Effectiveness:** The practice must produce a positive effect on outcomes related to emotional intelligence and/or the reduction of discrimination that is measurable.

- **Efficiency:** The practice must produce results with a reasonable investment of resources (time, funding, personnel).

- **Sustainability:** The practice must be designed for long-term implementation, not solely as a one-time initiative. It should be integrated into ongoing institutional processes.

- **Possibility of Duplication:** The practice must be clearly documented to enable replication in other settings.

2. Refinement Criteria

The scoring system was used as a selection framework for a comparative assessment of all eligible practices. The following details the remaining eight criteria used for the comparative assessment:

- **Impact:** The practice should have a measurable impact beyond those directly involved.

- **Individual Focused:** The practice focuses on developing skills and abilities within individuals, supporting proactive behavioral change.

- **Multiple Types of Discrimination:** The practice addresses multiple categories of discrimination.

- **Underrepresented Discrimination:** The practice addresses forms of discrimination that are often overlooked or underrepresented in existing literature and interventions.

- **Accessibility:** The practice should be accessible to all members of the academic community, with minimal barriers to participation.

- **Supported by Science:** The practice is grounded in established theories and research findings, not solely based on anecdotal evidence.

- **Quality Assurance:** There is evidence of systematic reflection, evaluation, or monitoring to ensure the practice's ongoing effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

- **Specific:** The practice is adaptable to be implemented in a manner that is context-specific, recognizing the unique characteristics of different academic institutions.

3.3 Fields of Action

The practices identified in the initial search were categorized into four thematic areas, referred to as fields of action.

- **Surveys**:
  Practices involving the use of questionnaires or assessments to get an overview of the current situation regarding anti-discrimination and/or emotional intelligence practices or to get an understanding of perceptions, attitudes, or experiences related to emotional intelligence and/or discrimination.

- **Policies:**
  Institutional Guidelines or procedures with the goal to prevent discrimination and/or promote an inclusive environment.

- **Affirmative Actions:**
  Practices that address historical and systematic inequities with the goal to counteract discrimination against social groups through creating opportunities for underrepresented groups.

- **Trainings**:
  Practices focused on developing skills and providing knowledge related to emotional intelligence, bias awareness, anit-discrimination and/or inclusive behaviors.

4. Best Practices

For each of the four EQUNI *Fields of Action* - **Surveys, Policies, Affirmative Actions, and Trainings** - a set of practices collected by consortium partners was systematically reviewed using the common evaluation matrix.

- **Surveys:** Five practices were evaluated, including the *Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)* (Scotland), *EUROSTUDENT* (Europe), *TE4I – Teacher Training for Inclusion* (Europe), *Enquête REMEDE – ONDES et CPED* (France), and *Diversity in Educational Institutions Survey* (USA). Based on the evaluation scores, the **EIA** was selected as the best-rated practice due to its strong institutional applicability and measurable outcomes, while **EUROSTUDENT** was retained for its wide international relevance and use of comparable data in monitoring inequalities.

- **Policies:** Three institutional policies were reviewed: the *ETH Zürich Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Strategy* (Switzerland), the *University of Bordeaux Equality and Diversity Plan* (France), and the *European Framework for Diversity and Inclusion*(EU). The **ETH Zürich Strategy** and the **Bordeaux Equality Plan** achieved the highest ratings for sustainability, integration within institutional governance, and clear evidence of accountability mechanisms.

- **Affirmative Actions:** Three practices were analysed: the *Affirmative Action Programme* (University of São Paulo, Brazil), *STEM Scholarships for Women* (University of Tokyo, Japan), and the *Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Programme* (European Union). Only the latter demonstrated both a structured framework and broad accessibility supported by official European Commission documentation. Consequently, the **Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Programme** was chosen as the representative practice for this field.

- **Trainings:** Four initiatives were reviewed: *UQAM Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Training* (Canada), *Workshop on the Impact of Prejudice in Decision-Making* (France), *Good Practices to Promote Inclusion of People with Disabilities* (France), and *Unconscious Bias Awareness Video* (France). The **UQAM EDI Training** was selected as the strongest example due to its scientific grounding, integration into faculty development, and clear link between emotional intelligence competencies and anti-discrimination goals.

Across all fields, practices were selected for their **evidence of institutional commitment, replicability, and emotional-intelligence relevance** - ensuring that each example not only meets technical inclusion standards but also promotes empathy, awareness, and behavioural change within higher education communities.

4.1. Surveys

4.1.1. Best Practice 1 – Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

4.1.1.1. Context and relevance

The **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) – University of Glasgow** is a systematic process designed to **identify, assess, and mitigate unequal impacts** of policies, practices, or services on different protected groups (e.g., gender, age, nationality, disability). Within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the EIA makes it possible to embed empirical evidence – often gathered through surveys and stakeholder consultations – before, during, and after the implementation of any measure. Its cyclical nature ensures continuous improvement and sustainability, aligning with institutional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies and national equality frameworks.

4.1.1.2. Objective

To ensure that new or revised policies (e.g., assessment procedures, student/staff recruitment, support services) do not create barriers or reinforce inequalities, while actively promoting inclusion. In EQ terms, the EIA enhances organizational emotional literacy: it requires teams to recognize the needs, perspectives, and emotions of diverse groups, fostering institutional empathy and self-regulation in decision-making.

4.1.1.3. How it works (application)

1. **Scope definition** – identify the policy or practice to be assessed and the groups potentially affected.

2. **Evidence collection**

   - *Surveys* among students and staff (experiences, barriers, perceptions of fairness/belonging);

   - administrative data (recruitment, retention, progression, complaints);

   - *focus groups* and consultations with student associations or support units.

3. **Impact analysis** – assess risks of **direct or indirect discrimination** and opportunities for **affirmative action**.

4. **Mitigation plan** – adapt the measure (e.g., accessible communication, alternative scheduling, team training, reasonable adjustments).

5. **Implementation and quality assurance** – assign responsibilities, resources, and indicators; include **monitoring** and **review cycles**.

6. **Transparency and replication** – record each EIA in a **standardized template**, enabling reuse and comparison across units.

4.1.1.4. Results and evidence expected

- **Reduced complaints** and fewer inequalities in access or participation (e.g., services, scholarships, programs).

- **Increased sense of fairness and belonging** (measured via climate and wellbeing indicators).

- **Efficiency** – minimal cost when integrated into existing policy design and review cycles.

- **Institutional impact** – more **consistent, defensible, and DEI-aligned decisions**; enhanced **reputation** and **compliance**.

4.1.1.5. Contribution to EQ and anti-discrimination

- **Organizational self-awareness and self-regulation** – recognizing and correcting biases using data.

- **Structured empathy** – systematically including the voices of minority groups in decision processes.

- **Social skills** – fostering interdepartmental dialogue, negotiation, and inclusive communication.

4.1.1.6. Resources / tools

- **EIA template** (checklist + mitigation plan + indicators).

- Short *survey* modules (climate, perceived barriers, belonging, procedural justice).

- **Stakeholder consultation guide** (timeline and feedback loop).

- **Monitoring matrix** (indicators, targets, deadlines, responsibilities).

4.1.1.7. Potential challenges and how to overcome them

- **Limited data** → start with short *surveys* and minimal administrative records; build progressively.

- **Internal resistance** → provide short training sessions on **EQ in decision-making**, highlighting *quick wins*.

- **Workload concerns** → integrate the EIA within existing approval or review processes.

4.1.2. Best Practice 2 – EUROSTUDENT

4.1.2.1. Context and relevance

The **EUROSTUDENT** project is a large-scale comparative survey conducted periodically across European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Its aim is to collect **systematic and comparable data on students' social and economic conditions**, including aspects such as study environment, wellbeing, access to support, and discrimination experiences.

Within the EQUNI framework, EUROSTUDENT represents a model of evidence-based diagnosis: it provides institutions with reliable insights into inequalities that affect students' academic engagement and emotional wellbeing. Because it adopts standardized tools and transparent methodology, it allows HEIs to compare themselves with European peers and to identify areas of hidden exclusion or disadvantage.

4.1.2.2. Objective

To generate reliable, disaggregated information that enables institutions and policymakers to design and monitor inclusive strategies in higher education. Beyond mapping material inequalities, EUROSTUDENT also reveals emotional and relational barriers – such as lack of belonging, perceived unfairness, or stress linked to social background – directly connecting the data to emotional intelligence competencies like empathy and awareness of others.

4.1.2.3. How it works (application)

1. **Survey design and coordination** – the EUROSTUDENT consortium develops a common questionnaire and data collection protocol, ensuring cross-country comparability.

2. **National implementation** – each participating country administers the survey through universities or national agencies, often adding **context-specific modules** (e.g., wellbeing, discrimination, inclusion).

3. **Data analysis** – results are aggregated and made available in an open database; participating institutions can request **micro-data** for internal analysis.

4. **Local adaptation** – HEIs can replicate selected modules to create **institutional mini-surveys** aligned with EUROSTUDENT indicators (e.g., local student wellbeing survey, diversity climate survey).

5. **Dissemination and action** – the data inform **policy planning**, **quality assurance**, and **student-support initiatives**, with feedback loops to students and staff.

4.1.2.4. Results and evidence expected

- **Comprehensive picture** of students' living conditions and wellbeing across social groups.

- **Identification of disparities** (e.g., gender pay gaps in student jobs, unequal access to housing or mental-health support).

- **Increased institutional awareness** of the non-academic factors influencing student success.

- **Benchmarking** and **cross-national learning**, enabling transfer of good practices among universities.

- **Enhanced legitimacy** of institutional DEI actions, as decisions are grounded in robust comparative evidence.

4.1.2.5. Contribution to EQ and anti-discrimination

- **Empathy through data**: by exposing patterns of disadvantage, institutions learn to see their community through the perspective of marginalized students.

- **Self-awareness**: HEIs recognize emotional and social determinants of student performance, avoiding a purely academic focus.

- **Social regulation and communication**: results facilitate **open dialogue** about inequalities and wellbeing, encouraging constructive responses rather than defensive reactions.

- **Motivation and engagement**: students perceive their voices as heard, reinforcing trust and emotional connection to the institution.

4.1.2.6. Resources / tools

- EUROSTUDENT **database** and **comparative reports** (publicly available).

- **Questionnaire modules** adaptable for institutional use (e.g., wellbeing, financial situation, social participation, discrimination).

- **Guidelines for national or institutional replication**, ensuring methodological consistency.

- Interactive **data dashboards** for visualization and communication of findings.

- Templates for **policy translation** – linking data results to institutional strategic plans.

4.1.2.7. Potential challenges and how to overcome them

- **Complexity of data interpretation** → develop basic training in data literacy and inclusive communication for staff.

- **Survey fatigue** → limit replication to key modules and combine with qualitative follow-up (e.g., focus groups).

- **Insufficient local engagement** → share findings with students and staff early, emphasizing the emotional meaning of the results (belonging, fairness, safety).

- **Comparability issues** → maintain transparency about local adaptations and sampling limitations.

4.1.2.8. Example of application

Several European universities have developed **internal EUROSTUDENT-based observatories** to monitor students' wellbeing and equality of access. At the University of Glasgow, for example, findings from national EUROSTUDENT data were used to **revise bursary eligibility criteria** and to **integrate emotional wellbeing indicators** into annual quality assurance reports – a concrete example of EQ principles translated into institutional policy.

4.2. Policies

4.2.1. Best Practice 1 – ETH Zürich: Strategy for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) 2025-2028

4.2.1.1. Context and relevance

The ETH Zürich (Switzerland) has adopted a comprehensive institutional framework titled *"Strategy for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) 2025-2028"*, replacing its earlier gender-specific strategy with a fully integrated DEI agenda. This shift reflects a broader understanding of diversity – beyond gender, to include socio-economic background, ethnicity, disability, life design and other dimensions. The strategy is embedded in the institution's mission to foster innovation and excellence, recognizing that diversity and inclusive culture are key drivers of research quality, teaching effectiveness and organizational wellbeing.

4.2.1.2. Objective

To ensure that diversity, equality and inclusion are **firmly embedded across all levels** of the institution – governance, research, teaching, staff development – and to foster a culture of belonging, respect and equitable opportunity. Specifically, the strategy aims to:

- Promote leadership and accountability at top management level for DEI.

- Cultivate an inclusive culture and communication environment, a safe and accessible space, and good leadership practices.

- Provide **equal opportunities in career development**, especially addressing under-represented groups.

- Support **conditions for a good life-work balance** and psychological wellbeing.

- Encourage **inclusive research & teaching**, embedding diversity dimensions in research content and curricula.

4.2.1.3. How it works (application)

1. **Strategy formulation**: The ETH Board defined the DEI strategy for 2025-2028, covering the "ETH Domain" institutions, including ETH Zürich.

2. **Focus areas**: Implementation is organized around five focus areas (embedding DEI, inclusive culture, career development, life-work balance, inclusive teaching & research).

3. **Implementation at unit level**: Each department and administrative unit is responsible for translating institutional DEI goals into operational measures (action plans, indicators, monitoring). For example, ETH Diversity provides consultancy, mentoring programs, and family-friendly policies.

4. **Monitoring and accountability**: ETH publishes equality monitoring reports and provides interactive graphics to make progress visible and measurable.

5. **Communication and culture change**: Activities include anti-racism resources, inclusive event guidelines, training and awareness-raising.

4.2.1.4. Results and evidence expected

- Improved **representation** of under-represented groups in academic and administrative roles.

- Enhanced **sense of belonging** and psychological safety across the institution.

- Better **retention and progression** outcomes for staff and students from minority or non-traditional backgrounds.

- Increased integration of diversity dimensions into research agendas, curricula and teaching practice.

- Greater **institutional reputation** as inclusive and exemplary for diversity in higher education.

4.2.1.5. Contribution to EQ and anti-discrimination

- Supports **self-awareness** at institutional level: identifying biases, barriers and structural inequalities.

- Fosters **empathy and inclusive leadership**: leadership is required to engage with diverse perspectives and to guide inclusive culture.

- Builds **social competence and organizational emotional intelligence**: by enabling open dialogue, embedding safe practices, and aligning structural policies with emotional-relational dimensions of belonging.

- Advances **anti-discrimination** by creating transparent mechanisms, monitoring systems and structural accountability – making inclusion a systemic rather than incidental feature.

4.2.1.6. Resources / tools

- Institutional strategy document *Strategy for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion 2025-2028*.

- ETH Diversity office services (consulting, mentoring, inclusive event checklists).

- Equality monitoring reports and interactive dashboards.

4.2.1.7. Potential challenges and how to overcome them

- **Operationalizing policy into daily practice**: Strategy documents can remain high-level unless translated into concrete measures at departmental level. Mitigation: link strategy to annual unit plans, assign responsibility and monitor progress.

- **Resistance or inertia**: Some staff may view DEI as peripheral to core functions. Mitigation: highlight research and teaching benefits of diversity; use champions, training, and visible leadership support.

- **Measuring impact**: Difficult to assess emotional, culture-change outcomes. Mitigation: combine quantitative indicators (representation, progression rates) with qualitative feedback (climate surveys, focus groups).

4.2.1.8. Example of application

ETH Zürich embodied this strategy by adopting a modular approach: e.g., the *Sustainable and Inclusive Events* guide links event-planning to diversity and accessibility principles, making DEI visible in operational domains like event management.

4.2.2. Best Practice 2 – University of Bordeaux: Equality, Diversity and Respect Plan / Gender Equality Plan

4.2.2.1. Context and relevance

The University of Bordeaux (France) has committed to an inclusive institutional culture through its *Equality, Diversity and Respect* commitments and the development of a dedicated Gender Equality

Plan (GEP) aligned with European requirements (such as RESET). The University explicitly states that it "rejects all forms of discrimination" and places inclusion and diversity at the heart of its teaching, research and institutional mission.

4.2.2.2. Objective

To foster an inclusive, equitable and respectful environment in which all community members (students, faculty, administrative staff) are valued, barrier-free, and able to participate fully. Key objectives include:

- Combating all forms of discrimination (gender, origin, disability, sexual orientation, cultural background) and promoting diversity as an asset.

- Embedding equality within governance, recruitment, career development and research/teaching practices.

- Enhancing the institutional culture of secularism and neutrality, ensuring equal treatment and freedom of belief.

4.2.2.3. How it works (application)

1. **Audit and evidence base**: The University conducted qualitative and quantitative audits (e.g., of staff compositions, discrimination incidents) in collaboration with the RESET project.

2. **Governance structures**: A Gender Equality Board (Comité pour l'égalité des genres) and dedicated staff (Equality Officer) implement, monitor and steer the GEP.

3. **Action plans**: For example, the University's Plan for Professional Equality between Women and Men (2020+) addresses recruitment, career progression, work-life balance, and harassment prevention.

4. **Integration in institutional contracts**: Equality objectives are included in institutional agreements (e.g., between state and university) and operationalized in unit action plans and performance indicators.

5. **Training, communication and monitoring**: Continuous awareness-raising (e.g., intercultural workshops), clear procedures for reporting harassment/discrimination, and monitoring via published indicators.

4.2.2.4. Results and evidence expected

- Increased **gender balance** in academic staff and leadership positions.

- Enhanced **transparency and fairness** in recruitment and career progression.

- Improved **campus climate** of inclusion, reduced incidents of harassment or discrimination.

- Stronger **research and teaching quality**, as diverse teams and inclusive environments stimulate creativity and performance.

4.2.2.5. Contribution to EQ and anti-discrimination

- Promotes **emotional and relational awareness** across the institution: recognizing how discrimination and exclusion affect belonging and engagement.

- Encourages **inclusive communication and empathy**: tools and training enable members to engage respectfully across differences.

- Supports **structural anti-discrimination** by integrating equality into policy, practice and evaluation, thereby shifting from individual to systemic change.

4.2.2.6. Resources / tools

- GEP documentation (2022-2024) and institutional charter on equity, diversity and inclusion.

- Institutional website on equality and diversity commitments.

- Audit reports, dashboards and indicator systems aligned with national directives (e.g., French inter-ministerial anti-discrimination plan).

4.2.2.7. Potential challenges and how to overcome them

- **Fragmentation of initiatives**: risk of parallel actions lacking coherence. Mitigation: central coordination via Gender Equality Board and integration into institutional strategic framework.

- **Cultural resistance**: deeply embedded stereotypes and institutional habits. Mitigation: inclusive leadership, visible role-models, continuous training and stakeholder involvement (students & staff).

- **Sustainability of change**: Multi-year plans risk losing momentum. Mitigation: embed equality objectives into performance agreements, provide regular reporting and feedback loops.

4.2.2.8. Example of application

Under the RESET project umbrella, the University of Bordeaux engaged in co-design of its GEP, using "world café" methods and stakeholder workshops across the university community to prioritize actions.

4.3. Affirmative Actions

4.3.1. Best Practice – Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Program (European Union)

4.3.1.1. Context and relevance

The **Erasmus+ Programme 2021–2027**, established by the European Commission, places *Inclusion and Diversity* as one of its key horizontal priorities. Its goal is to ensure equal access, diversity of participation, and the removal of barriers for individuals with fewer opportunities to take part in international learning and cooperation.

The *Inclusion and Diversity Strategy* linked to Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps sets out clear mechanisms to guarantee that vulnerable groups - due to economic, social, geographic, cultural, or disability-related factors - can fully benefit from the programme. This initiative represents, within higher education, a model for structured affirmative action designed to strengthen participation, equity, and belonging among students and staff facing structural barriers, aligning with both emotional intelligence (EQ) and anti-discrimination principles.

4.3.1.2. Objective

To ensure that opportunities for mobility, learning, and cooperation supported by Erasmus+ are accessible, inclusive, and equitable, while higher education institutions (HEIs) implement targeted measures to reduce disparities and foster full participation. Specifically, the programme seeks to:

- Broaden the representation of participants with fewer opportunities (e.g., students with special needs, low socio-economic background, migrant or rural origin).

- Develop innovative forms of support, mentoring, and accessibility to ensure not only participation but also a **sense of belonging** and engagement.

- Integrate inclusion and diversity perspectives in the **design, delivery, and evaluation** of all Erasmus+ activities, making inclusion a systemic component rather than an afterthought.

4.3.1.3. How it works (application)

1. **Framework and guidelines** – The European Commission issues *Inclusion & Diversity Implementation Guidelines*, defining how national agencies and HEIs should structure their action plans under Erasmus+ (2021–2027).

2. **Institutional planning** – HEIs develop institutional Inclusion and Diversity Action Plans, identifying underrepresented groups, barriers to access, specific objectives, and progress indicators.

3. **Design of activities** – Every Erasmus+ project incorporates accessibility standards, inclusive communication, tailored support (e.g., mentoring, financial aid, assistive technologies), and monitoring systems for target groups.

4. **Implementation and monitoring** – National agencies and the **SALTO Inclusion & Diversity Resource Centre** coordinate monitoring, collect evidence, and share best practices across institutions.

5. **Evaluation and feedback** – Regular performance reports, case studies, and mid-term reviews ensure that affirmative measures are **data-driven and adaptable**, promoting continuous improvement and sustainability.

4.3.1.4. Results and evidence expected

- **Increased participation** of historically underrepresented groups in mobility, cooperation, and learning programs.

- Enhanced **sense of belonging and inclusion** among participants, reducing perceived discrimination or invisible barriers.

- **More inclusive and resilient institutions**, embedding diversity and equity into organizational culture.

- Generation of **comparable data and indicators** to measure impact, replicate effective practices, and strengthen institutional accountability.

- Reinforced **institutional legitimacy** and public reputation as a higher education actor committed to social justice and equality.

4.3.1.5. Contribution to EQ and anti-discrimination

- **Empathy and perspective-taking** – the program encourages HEIs to understand and respond to the needs of students and staff facing barriers, cultivating *institutional empathy*.

- **Organizational self-awareness** – by tracking participation and outcomes, institutions identify inequities and emotional needs within their own systems, fostering reflective and regulated practices.

- **Inclusive communication and social skills** – the program's collaborative design requires cross-departmental dialogue, participatory engagement, and transparency - all fundamental EQ components.

- **Structural anti-discrimination** – through systematic monitoring, data collection, and inclusion criteria, Erasmus+ operationalizes anti-discrimination as an institutional process rather than an individual initiative.

4.3.1.6. Resources / tools

- **Implementation Guidelines – Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion & Diversity Strategy** (European Commission).

- **Erasmus+ Program Guide** and **open data platforms** on mobility and inclusion.

- **SALTO Inclusion & Diversity Resource Centre**, toolkits and best-practice libraries.

- **DIEM (Diversity & Inclusion in Erasmus+ Implementation)** project resources, including self-assessment tools and institutional audit models.

- National and institutional **Inclusion Action Plans** (templates, self-evaluation frameworks, progress reporting tools).

4.3.1.7. Potential challenges and how to overcome them

- **Identifying and reaching target groups** – some underrepresented groups may be invisible or dispersed. *Mitigation:* combine administrative data with targeted surveys and stakeholder consultation.

- **Balancing mobility and inclusion** – mobility projects can unintentionally reinforce inequalities if not adapted. *Mitigation:* provide additional funding, flexible procedures, and accessible logistics.

- **Ensuring quality beyond access** – participation alone is not inclusion. *Mitigation:* monitor participants' experience, wellbeing, and perceived belonging before, during, and after mobility.

- **Transferring inclusive practices** beyond Erasmus+ inclusion principles should permeate all institutional policies, not only mobility programs. *Mitigation:* integrate inclusion criteria into curricula, recruitment, and internationalization strategies.

4.3.1.8. Example of application

The **DIEM Project (Diversity & Inclusion in Erasmus+ Implementation)**, coordinated by the SALTO Inclusion & Diversity Resource Centre, engages European universities to identify barriers in Erasmus+ mobility and develop innovative support mechanisms. Tools include **inclusion monitoring dashboards**, staff training on inclusive mobility, and **personalised guidance** for students with fewer

opportunities - demonstrating how affirmative action and EQ-based approaches can transform mobility into a genuinely inclusive experience.

4.4. Affirmative Actions

4.4.1. Best Practice – UQAM Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Training (Canada)

4.4.1.1. Context and relevance

The Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) has developed a comprehensive Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Training initiative to strengthen institutional awareness, competence, and accountability in inclusive higher education. (edi.uqam.ca)

This training responds to national requirements established by the Tri-Agency Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (Canada Research Chairs Program), which mandates universities to implement proactive measures for eliminating systemic barriers and promoting equitable participation in research, teaching, and governance.

The UQAM initiative has become a benchmark in francophone higher education, offering both online and in-person modules for faculty, staff, and students, combining scientific grounding in social psychology (bias, prejudice, stereotyping) with emotional intelligence (EQ) development (self-awareness, empathy, social skills).

4.4.1.2. Objective

To **develop inclusive mindsets and behaviors** across the university community and to support leadership and teaching staff in identifying, understanding, and addressing biases, discrimination, and inequities. The training aims to:

- Build awareness of the mechanisms of **implicit bias** and discrimination in academic settings.

- Foster **empathy and emotional literacy** in everyday interactions with colleagues and students.

- Equip participants with **tools for inclusive teaching, research, and communication**.

- Strengthen institutional capacity to implement and sustain **anti-discrimination policies**.

4.4.1.3. How it works (application)

1. **Structured modular format** – training is divided into themed modules:

   o *Understanding EDI concepts* (equity vs equality, inclusion, diversity);

   o *Bias and discrimination in academia* (social identity, stereotypes, systemic inequities);

- *Empathy and emotional regulation* (how emotions influence judgment and relationships);

- *Inclusive pedagogies and leadership*.

2. **Target audience** – mandatory for new faculty and administrative leaders, open to all community members (students, research teams, HR staff).

3. **Delivery methods** – hybrid approach combining online self-paced learning, live workshops, discussion groups, and reflective exercises.

4. **Scientific foundation** – developed by psychologists and sociologists specializing in intergroup relations, diversity, and emotional development.

5. **Integration into governance** – linked to UQAM's institutional *Plan d'action pour l'équité, la diversité et l'inclusion 2020-2025*, ensuring coherence with hiring, promotion, and research evaluation processes.

4.4.1.4. Results and evidence expected

- Increased **awareness and sensitivity** to EDI issues across the institution.

- Reduction in discriminatory incidents and microaggressions through better self-regulation and empathy.

- Higher **participation of underrepresented groups** in academic and administrative positions.

- Incorporation of **inclusive practices** into course design, recruitment, and management.

- Measurable improvement in **organizational climate** and psychological safety indicators.

4.4.1.5. Contribution to EQ and anti-discrimination

- **Self-awareness** – participants identify their emotional triggers and biases.

- **Empathy** – training encourages perspective-taking and compassionate responses in academic relationships.

- **Self-regulation** – exercises help participants manage defensive or judgmental reactions when discussing diversity.

- **Social skills and leadership** – by promoting inclusive communication and active listening, the program builds emotionally intelligent leadership at all levels.

- **Systemic anti-discrimination** – translates EQ principles into institutional procedures (e.g., inclusive recruitment, accessible meetings, equitable mentoring).

4.4.1.6. Resources / tools

- Online EDI learning platform (available in French, with adaptable modules).

- *Guide des bonnes pratiques en équité, diversité et inclusion* (UQAM EDI Office).

- Video lectures and case studies on unconscious bias and microaggressions.

- Reflective self-assessment tools and discussion guides.

- Institutional *EDI Action Plan 2020-2025* and public reports.

4.4.1.7. Potential challenges and how to overcome them

- **Engagement fatigue** – participants may view EDI training as compliance. *Mitigation:* integrate emotional intelligence components, storytelling, and personal reflection.

- **Resistance to change** – some staff may minimize discrimination issues. *Mitigation:* leadership endorsement, peer facilitators, and data-driven communication.

- **Measuring impact** – soft outcomes (empathy, belonging) are harder to quantify. *Mitigation:* combine pre/post self-evaluation with climate surveys and HR metrics.

- **Scalability** – adapting training for different audiences. *Mitigation:* modularize content and provide flexible online access.

4.4.1.8. Example of application

At UQAM's Faculty of Human Sciences, the EDI training was integrated into staff development cycles. Participants applied emotional intelligence techniques to revise course content and feedback practices, reporting **enhanced student engagement**, **reduced conflict**, and **improved collegial communication**. The success of this pilot led to full institutional adoption across departments.

4.5. Case Study: North-West University (NWU, South Africa) – An Integrated Policy Approach to Inclusion, Equity, and Emotional Intelligence

4.5.1. Context and relevance

The **North-West University (NWU)**, a comprehensive South African institution, represents a strong example of an integrated and systemic approach to promoting inclusion, equity, and emotional intelligence in higher education. Guided by its vision *"to be an internationally recognised university in Africa, distinguished for engaged scholarship, social responsiveness, and an ethic of care"*, NWU has developed a coherent policy ecosystem addressing discrimination, harassment, human rights, gender-based violence, and cultural diversity.

Rather than relying on isolated measures, NWU's approach demonstrates how interconnected frameworks - supported by clear governance, accountability, and continuous review - can establish a sustainable and emotionally intelligent institutional culture. This case embodies the *EQUNI* principles by linking structural justice and emotional literacy in the academic environment.

4.5.2. An integrated policy framework

NWU's **policy cluster** comprises several interrelated instruments addressing different dimensions of equity and inclusion:

- **Human Rights Policy (2023)** – Establishes the overarching framework for protecting dignity, equality, and fairness across the university community. It formalizes structures such as the *Human Rights Commission (HRC)*, *Institutional Forum (IF)*, and *University Management Committee (UMC)*, responsible for promoting, monitoring, and reporting on human rights compliance.

- **Gender-Based Violence Policy (2024)** – Sets comprehensive standards for prevention, reporting, and intervention in gender-based violence (GBV), recognizing all gender identities and sexual orientations, including LGBTQIA+ individuals. It requires the development of standard operating procedures, awareness programs, and integrated prevention mechanisms across the *People & Culture*, *Student Life*, and *Protection Services* divisions.

- **Sexual Harassment Policy (2022)** – Provides detailed definitions, procedures, and responsibilities for addressing sexual harassment in the workplace and student environment. It covers physical, verbal, non-verbal, and visual forms of harassment, and establishes clear lines of accountability for prevention, investigation, and sanction.

Together, these three policies form an **institutional prevention and protection system** rooted in human rights law and psychological safety. Each contributes to cultivating empathy, fairness, and responsible behavior - core components of **organizational emotional intelligence (EQ)**.

4.5.2.1. Key features

- **Relevance and coherence:** all policies are anchored in the South African Constitution and national equality legislation, ensuring internal consistency and external compliance.

- **Sustainability:** approved by the University Council, each policy follows a structured review cycle (every 3–4 years).

- **Transparency and accessibility:** publicly available, written in accessible language, and applicable to all employees, students, and external stakeholders.

- **Inclusivity:** explicit recognition of diverse identities, including sexual orientation, gender identity, and cultural background.

- **Accountability:** governance is distributed across specialized committees, ensuring monitoring and continuous improvement.

4.5.3. Affirmative and cultural inclusion

A distinctive component of NWU's inclusive ecosystem is its **Language Policy (2022)**, which operationalizes *affirmative action* principles through **functional multilingualism**. The policy establishes four *languages of choice* - English, Afrikaans, Setswana, and Sesotho - and promotes their balanced use across teaching, learning, administration, and student life.

4.5.3.1. Highlights

- Integrates multilingualism as a **tool for equity and access**, reducing linguistic barriers in academic participation.

- Links the **development of African languages** to student success, cultural identity, and institutional transformation.

- Requires every faculty to develop and annually report on its own *Language Plan*, approved by Senate and monitored by the *Language Directorate* and the *Senate Committee for Language Planning and Advisory Services (SCLPAS)*.

- Encourages **research, translanguaging pedagogies**, and the inclusion of **South African Sign Language (SASL)**.

This policy exemplifies how cultural and linguistic inclusion can become a **structural dimension of anti-discrimination**, supporting both *affective belonging* and *educational equity*.

4.5.4. Training and awareness initiatives

While primarily policy-driven, the NWU ecosystem also embeds **training and capacity-building elements** consistent with the *EQUNI Trainings* field of action.
Examples include:

- Awareness and prevention campaigns under the *Gender-Based Violence* and *Sexual Harassment* frameworks.

- Staff and student workshops on **bias, empathy, and inclusive communication**, coordinated by *People & Culture* and *Student Life*.

- Human-rights education initiatives promoted by the *Human Rights Commission* and *Institutional Forum*.

These initiatives connect **emotional intelligence development** with **compliance and ethical behavior**, building community-wide competence in emotional awareness, empathy, and interpersonal regulation.

4.5.5. Impact and replication potential

The NWU approach demonstrates that institutional transformation requires **multiple, coordinated policies** supported by continuous education and monitoring.

Key impacts include:

- Enhanced **psychological safety** and trust in institutional response systems.

- Development of a **culture of respect and empathy** aligned with EQ principles.

- Strengthened **cross-sector collaboration** between academic, administrative, and student structures.

- A replicable governance model for other universities seeking to integrate **EQ and anti-discrimination frameworks** systematically.

Because of its coherence, longevity, and replicability, NWU's integrated policy model can be considered a **reference case for system-level inclusion strategies** in higher education.

4.5.6. Lessons learned

- **Integration matters:** Sustainable change emerges from aligned and mutually reinforcing policies.

- **Emotional intelligence enhances compliance:** Embedding empathy, fairness, and reflection into policy implementation increases effectiveness and legitimacy.

- **Language is inclusion:** Cultural and linguistic diversity are not peripheral but central to equity and belonging.

- **Leadership and accountability:** Institutional culture shifts only when top management is visibly and emotionally engaged in the inclusion process.

- **Continuous review and transparency:** Regular monitoring, feedback, and public communication sustain trust and progress.

5. Recommendations

The analysis of the selected best practices across the four EQUNI Fields of Action - Surveys, Policies, Affirmative Actions, and Trainings - provides several overarching insights into how emotional intelligence (EQ) can effectively support anti-discrimination and inclusion in higher education. The following recommendations derive from the patterns observed across these practices and are intended to guide institutions in the implementation of sustainable, emotionally intelligent strategies.

First, higher education institutions should aim to **develop evidence-based and emotionally intelligent governance structures**. The integration of emotional intelligence principles - such as self-awareness, empathy, and self-regulation - into institutional decision-making enhances fairness and trust in governance. Examples like the frameworks implemented at ETH Zürich and North-West University demonstrate how diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) objectives can be embedded in strategic governance rather than treated as peripheral projects. Institutions are encouraged to adopt reflexive governance processes, in which policy evaluation considers not only compliance but also perceptions of justice, belonging, and emotional climate within the community.

Second, **data collection and feedback mechanisms must be institutionalised** to ensure that inclusion initiatives remain responsive and accountable. Surveys such as the Equality Impact Assessment or EUROSTUDENT illustrate how structured data can reveal disparities and inform action. Regular monitoring of students' and staff's experiences of discrimination and belonging should be complemented by qualitative methods that capture emotional dimensions of inclusion, such as focus groups and reflective interviews. By combining quantitative and qualitative evidence, universities can more accurately assess the lived experience of equity and the emotional impact of institutional change.

Third, **policies must be translated into live culture**. Policies alone are not sufficient to change behaviour; they must be operationalised through communication, leadership, and daily interactions that embody empathy, fairness, and respect. The integrated policy model of North-West University exemplifies how clear reporting and response mechanisms for harassment or discrimination can strengthen institutional trust. Leadership should be visibly engaged in modelling emotionally intelligent behaviour, ensuring that inclusion becomes a tangible part of organisational identity.

Fourth, **affirmative action measures play a key role in fostering belonging and addressing structural inequities**. Successful practices, such as the Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Programme and the NWU Language Policy, demonstrate that affirmative measures can advance representation and participation while promoting diversity as a collective strength. Institutions should prioritise

actions that expand access for underrepresented groups - whether defined by language, disability, gender identity, or socio-economic background - while ensuring that these measures lead to genuine participation and success rather than symbolic compliance.

Fifth, the **development of training and reflection opportunities oriented toward emotional intelligence is essential for long-term impact.** Initiatives like the UQAM EDI Training show how awareness-raising, reflection, and perspective-taking exercises can transform understanding into practice. Integrating EQ-based learning into academic and professional development equips students and staff to manage emotions, challenge biases, and communicate inclusively. Training should therefore be understood not as a one-time intervention but as an ongoing process that nurtures empathy and social competence within the institution.

Furthermore, **collaboration between universities should be strengthened to encourage exchange of knowledge and mutual learning**. The Erasmus+ framework provides a successful model of international cooperation and shared resources that can be replicated on a smaller scale across partner institutions. By creating networks of practice, universities can accelerate the diffusion of inclusive methodologies and emotional-intelligence-based tools.

Finally, it is essential to **establish robust systems for monitoring and sustainability**. Evaluation of inclusion and EQ initiatives should include both quantitative indicators - such as representation, participation, and progression - and qualitative dimensions related to wellbeing, trust, and belonging. Regular reporting, transparent communication, and recognition of inclusive practices at individual and institutional levels reinforce accountability and engagement. Embedding DEI and EQ structures within governance frameworks, with dedicated resources and periodic review, ensures continuity beyond project cycles.

In summary, the evidence gathered through the best practices confirms that emotional intelligence is not a soft skill restricted to individuals but a form of institutional capacity that can transform higher education environments. When embedded into policies, training, affirmative measures, and feedback systems, EQ becomes a catalyst for empathy-based inclusion, bridging structural justice and emotional awareness. Institutions that commit to data-driven, reflexive, and emotionally intelligent approaches are more likely to build sustainable cultures of equity, respect, and psychological safety - embodying the EQUNI vision of universities that educate not only minds but also emotions and values.

6. Conclusion

Summary of key points

The development of this Best Practice Guideline has shown that **emotional intelligence (EQ)** can serve as a fundamental connector between institutional policy, individual competence, and collective culture in higher education. The systematic analysis of best practices revealed that the most successful initiatives are those which combine **structural measures** (such as policies and affirmative actions) with **affective and behavioural components** (such as EQ-oriented training and communication). Institutions that embed empathy, reflection, and self-awareness into their governance models demonstrate greater capacity to prevent discrimination, strengthen belonging, and promote equity.

Across the four *Fields of Action*, the findings highlight complementary mechanisms:

- *Surveys* provide the data and emotional insight needed to identify inequalities and understand lived experiences.

- *Policies* create structural accountability and reinforce ethical, emotionally intelligent leadership.

- *Affirmative Actions* transform inclusion from principle into practice, ensuring equitable access and participation.

- *Trainings* nurture the personal and interpersonal competences necessary for sustainable culture change.

Together, these elements confirm that **EQ is not an isolated individual skill but an institutional capability**, essential for building psychologically safe and inclusive universities.

Limitations

The process of identifying and evaluating best practices faced certain limitations. A number of potentially valuable initiatives lacked sufficient documentation on design, implementation, or evaluation outcomes, making comparative analysis difficult. Some of the included practices have **recently established** and therefore have limited evidence of long-term impact. Furthermore, information on **stakeholder participation in the development phase -** students, faculty, administrative staff - was often unavailable, limiting the ability to assess how co-creation influences sustainability and acceptance.

These constraints reflect a broader challenge in the field: many higher education institutions are only beginning to integrate emotional intelligence into their DEI and anti-discrimination frameworks. As such, systematic evaluation methods and EQ-sensitive metrics are still under development.

Outlook on future developments

Future progress should focus on consolidating these initial efforts into **comprehensive, measurable, and transferable models**. Institutions are encouraged to:

- Develop **standardized tools** for assessing the emotional and social impact of inclusion initiatives.

- Integrate **stakeholder participation** at every stage of practice design and evaluation, ensuring ownership and legitimacy.

- Strengthen **international collaboration** and knowledge exchange through networks like EQUNI, fostering collective learning and innovation.

- Expand the concept of emotional intelligence from individual capacity to **organizational ethos**, where empathy, fairness, and reflection guide policy and leadership.

By doing so, higher education institutions will move closer to achieving the EQUNI vision: an academic ecosystem where **diversity and emotional intelligence are mutually reinforcing**, leading to learning environments that cultivate both intellectual excellence and emotional wellbeing.

Ultimately, the project confirms that **emotionally intelligent institutions -** those capable of perceiving, understanding, and regulating their collective emotions - are better equipped to promote equality, prevent discrimination, and ensure that every member of the academic community can learn, teach, and thrive with dignity.

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