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Diversity at the Department of Urbanism of the TU Delft

Results of the Workshop held on July 3rd 2018 at the Department of Urbanism of the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, TU Delft.

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Diversity at the Department of Urbanism, TU Delft



 **TU Delft**
BK Bouwkunde

 **URBANISM**

Diversity in the Department of Urbanism

RESULTS OF THE WORKSHOP HELD ON JULY 3RD 2018 AT THE DEPARTMENT OF URBANISM OF THE FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT OF THE DELFT UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (TU DELFT)

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diversity

The Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment is changing. Women empowerment, globalization, European integration, the emergence of economies in the Global South, and many other cultural and economic trends mean that our faculty is more diverse than ever. In many ways, we are at the forefront of diversity. But in some areas, we lag behind. Diversity is a big opportunity, but it also comes with a few challenges. It means we need to learn how to work, teach and interact with people who are very different from us. Cultural and other differences mean that we have a valuable multiplicity of worldviews, but it also means that people are sensitive to different things. TU Delft is taking diversity seriously and has a plan. We want to hear from you about what the challenges and opportunities are and find out how we can make our faculty even more inclusive and welcoming to you. In order to discuss these ideas, the Department of Urbanism promoted a workshop on diversity on July 3, 2018. This is a report of the ideas shared during the workshop.

Introduction

TEXT BY ROBERTO ROCCO, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF URBANISM

Diversity is about what makes us different from each other. The dictionary's definition of diversity contains many of the elements we will explore here. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, diversity is **"the condition of having or being composed of differing elements", "variety", and more specifically "the inclusion of different types of people (such as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization" and also "an instance of being diverse; a diversity of opinion"**.

But before we discuss what makes us different and diverse, we should ask ourselves what brings us together. What unites us? For many of us, working at TU Delft is our livelihood: it is about the work that allows us to pay our bills at the end of the month. But for most of us, it is so much more than that. First of all, it is about pride. Despite the pressures of academic life, we derive immense pride in working for one of the best universities in the world. Most of us also seek accomplishment in our work. Different people seek accomplishment in different areas. For some, it is all about prestige and respect. For others, it's about professional influence and societal impact. For many of us, it is all about "changing the world", and having a positive impact. Finally, we are all extremely proud of our students.

And it is with our students that our story of diversity and internationalisation begins. In 2003, there were only 38 international students at BK. This number

rose to 185 in 2010, and to 370 in 2017. In that year, international students from all over the world were more than 50% of the total number of students enrolled in our Masters programme. This reflects our faculty's and our university's rise in prestige and esteem all over the world

But internationalisation of our student body is only part of this story. Our staff has become increasingly internationalised since 2000, and this is also reflected in the internationalisation of subjects being studied at the Department and at the faculty at large.

Again, internationalisation is just part of the story that brings us to diversity. Women empowerment, globalisation, the rise of countries in the Global South, normalisation of LGBT+ persons, increasing diversity in Dutch society at large with increasing immigration, and de-colonization of academic studies; these and other societal, cultural and economic trends mean that our working environment is now incredibly rich and diverse.

Our world is interconnected and we face common challenges that are both systemic and global. For Richard C. Levin, former president of Yale University: **"The 'emerging global university' entails 'a curriculum permeated by awareness that political, economic, social, and cultural phenomena in any part of the world can no longer be fully understood in isolation'"**.

1 Source: <https://news.yale.edu/2013/06/21/his-own-words-presidential-quotations>

The consequences for education and research are clear. We need to draw from a wider pool of talent and knowledge in order to face our common challenges.

But why is diversity a positive force? First of all, diversity entails a multiplicity of worldviews and knowledge. This means that knowledge does not come from one single perspective, but is produced from a multitude of perspectives and experiences. Diverse cultural perspectives can inspire creativity and drive innovation. Diverse perspectives are also a great opportunity for personal growth. It is all about understanding the richness and the variety of the human experience.

But there are challenges ahead. And many of these challenges are "invisible" to those who don't experience them. It is easy to overlook other people's subjective experiences and to normalise behaviours that exclude certain groups.

"Colleagues from some cultures may be less likely to let their voices be heard in a diverse work place. Integration across multicultural teams can be difficult in the face of prejudice or negative cultural stereotypes and professional communication can be misinterpreted or difficult to understand across languages and cultures. There are different understandings of professional etiquette that may lead to conflicting working styles"².

2 Source: REYNOLDS, K. (2017), 13 benefits and challenges of cultural diversity in the workplace. Retrieved from: <http://www.hult.edu/blog/benefits-challenges-cultural-di>

TU Delft recognises all that and has a plan. It focuses on INTEGRITY as a concept that is crucial for academic life. **“TU Delft expects everyone, whether staff, student or guest, to act responsibly with regard to the ethical aspects of their work or study” (...)** **“Our aim is for staff and students to engage in dialogue and dare to call each other to account for their conduct. Managers should create a safe environment in which this is possible. This is not always easy, though.”** (see fig 1.)³

The focus of TU Delft is on integrity as an ethical issue, and some of the issues described in its policy do arise from a diverse environment. However, diversity has a few specific issues to it, because it pertains to the realm of intercultural understanding and communication, a part of a larger sociological and political discussion. As much as the discussion about diversity belongs to these wider fields of study and have an effect on how research and education are performed, their effects are often perceived as “personal issues” and tend to be left out of the discussion about behaviour in the workplace. As much as our personal lives should be separated from our working lives, there are issues in the workplace that affect us all very personally.

One of the biggest problems in the workplace arising from a diverse environment (and maybe also a problem in society at large) are micro-aggressions related to our discomfort about dealing with those who are different from ourselves. For Professor Derald Wing Sue writing for *Psychology Today*,

“Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. In many cases, these hidden messages may invalidate the group identity or experiential reality of target persons, demean them on a personal or group level, communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment.”⁴

One of the commonest micro-aggressions people face in their daily lives is related to “invisibility”. In fact, it is common to hear that women, members of racial or religious minorities and other groups are somehow “invisible” and are regularly ignored in social interactions, as in the example in which a woman is not greeted by a man arriving at a meeting because the man automatically assumes that the woman is a secretary, and hence does not deserve the same deference as other colleagues in the room. I would argue that secretaries deserve to be greeted too. In fact, there is absolutely no excuse for someone not to be treated with the same respect as anyone else because of their gender, race, religion, sexual orientation and ranking in the organisation.

But invisibility is just one of the problems arising in a diverse en-

vironment. Dismissing or not taking someone’s opinion seriously because of their gender, race, nationality or religion is also very common. Further up the scale of possible offences, casual racism is a source of much misery. The group “Racism, it stops with me” defines casual racism as

“...conducts involving negative stereotypes or prejudices about people on the basis of race, colour or ethnicity. Examples include jokes, off-handed comments, and exclusion of people from social situations on the basis of race.”⁵

For the group, casual racism differs from hard-core racism insofar it **“concerns not so much a belief in the superiority of races but negative prejudice or stereotypes concerning race.”** In this sense, believing that all Chinese people are quiet and “good in maths” or that all Latinos are lazy or sensual, and making casual remarks or jokes about it, is a form of casual racism. Although intercultural theory does recognise differences in behaviour connected to national culture, it is wrong to attribute a set of characteristics to a certain race or nationality insofar this tramples over one individual’s dignity and their right to be respected for who they are and for what they do, rather than their race or nationality. This may also apply to perceived “positive” characteristics. While Germans as a people may be recognised for their discipline and persistence, and even be proud about those qualities, an individual may be offended to be classified as “inflexible” and “too serious” based solely on their nationality.

I don’t think it is necessary to

versity-workplace/

3 Source: <https://www.tudelft.nl/en/about-tu-delft/strategy/strategy-documents-tu-delft/integrity-policy/>

4 SUE, D. W. (2010). Microaggressions: More than Just Race. Can microaggressions be directed at women or gay people? *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201011/microaggressions-more-just-race> on 28.06.2018.

5 <https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/what-can-you-do/speak/casual-racism> retrieved on 28.06.2018.

discuss downright racism, which is universally recognised as morally unacceptable. It is useful to remember, however, that current forms of racism are a historical construct, mainly stemming from the economic, cultural and religious dominance of European peoples over colonised territories and peoples, and on the pseudo-scientific belief that the white race is superior to other races, a claim that was accepted as normal until recently (and is still at the core of several political movements in Europe and North America). Racism is certainly not a problem stemming from people of Caucasian origin (whites) only. It exists in other races as well. However, systemic racism in the West is generally an issue stemming from the belief in the superiority of the white race.

But the issue of casual racism brings us to a very thorny subject. Is it OK to make jokes based on racial or cultural stereotypes? Isn't political correctness stifling the conversation?

The rejection of political correctness is so widespread that it is difficult even to bring the expression up. Political correctness is immensely unpopular and some political commentators say that the recent victory of populist leaders in the West can be partly attributed to an entrenched rejection of political correctness and identity politics. It is useful to understand what identity politics is about. It is defined by Merriam-Webster as:

“politics in which groups of people having a particular racial, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity tend to promote their own specific interests or concerns without regard to the interests or concerns of any larger political group”.

Some accuse identity politics of causing divisions in society. However, it is important to acknowledge that some groups may be oppressed in certain societies and they have the right to draw attention to their pleas. Therefore, the “Black Lives Matter” movement in the United States does not imply that ONLY black lives matter. There is no invisible “only” that presupposes that other lives are not as important as black lives. It is rather “Black Lives matter as much as other lives” or “Black Lives Matter, too”.

But the subject of political correctness remains thorny. Some feel that political correctness is boring, patronising, and that it stifles conversation. Others have asserted that “people have the right to offend” others in the name of freedom of expression, and at any rate, they have the right to make “harmless jokes”.

The North Carolina State University defines political correctness as **“the avoidance of forms of expression or action that are perceived to exclude, marginalize, or insult groups of people who are socially disadvantaged or discriminated against”**⁶.

In this sense, rather than being boring or curtailing, what political correctness tries to do is to act as didactic tool, which recognises that seemingly harmless jokes, casual remarks or casual racism might have nefarious consequences for the people who are regularly victims of other forms of discrimination, such as women or people of black African descent.

Having said all that, the message here is that we should strive to make TU Delft inclusive and welcoming of differences and variety,

and should pay attention to the complaints of those who feel discriminated or “not taken seriously” because of their appearance, gender, race, religion, sexuality and many other characteristics that make us human and hence different from each other.

Leadership is the driving force of workplace culture, and our professors and managers should lead by example and be sensitive and appreciative of differences.

They should also make a special effort to listen to those who feel wronged. Leaders set the behaviours standards through their words and actions, along with policies and procedures. But as Dominic Stead⁷ correctly pointed out during the diversity workshop held at the department of Urbanism, **we are all leaders**. We all lead and act as role models for people in different moments of our academic and personal lives. Very frequently, we lead studios, projects, and activities with students and colleagues. So, we all have a responsibility to act and to lead by example in respecting and appreciating each individual's unique characteristics and qualities.

6 Retrieved from <https://www.ncsu.edu/about/>

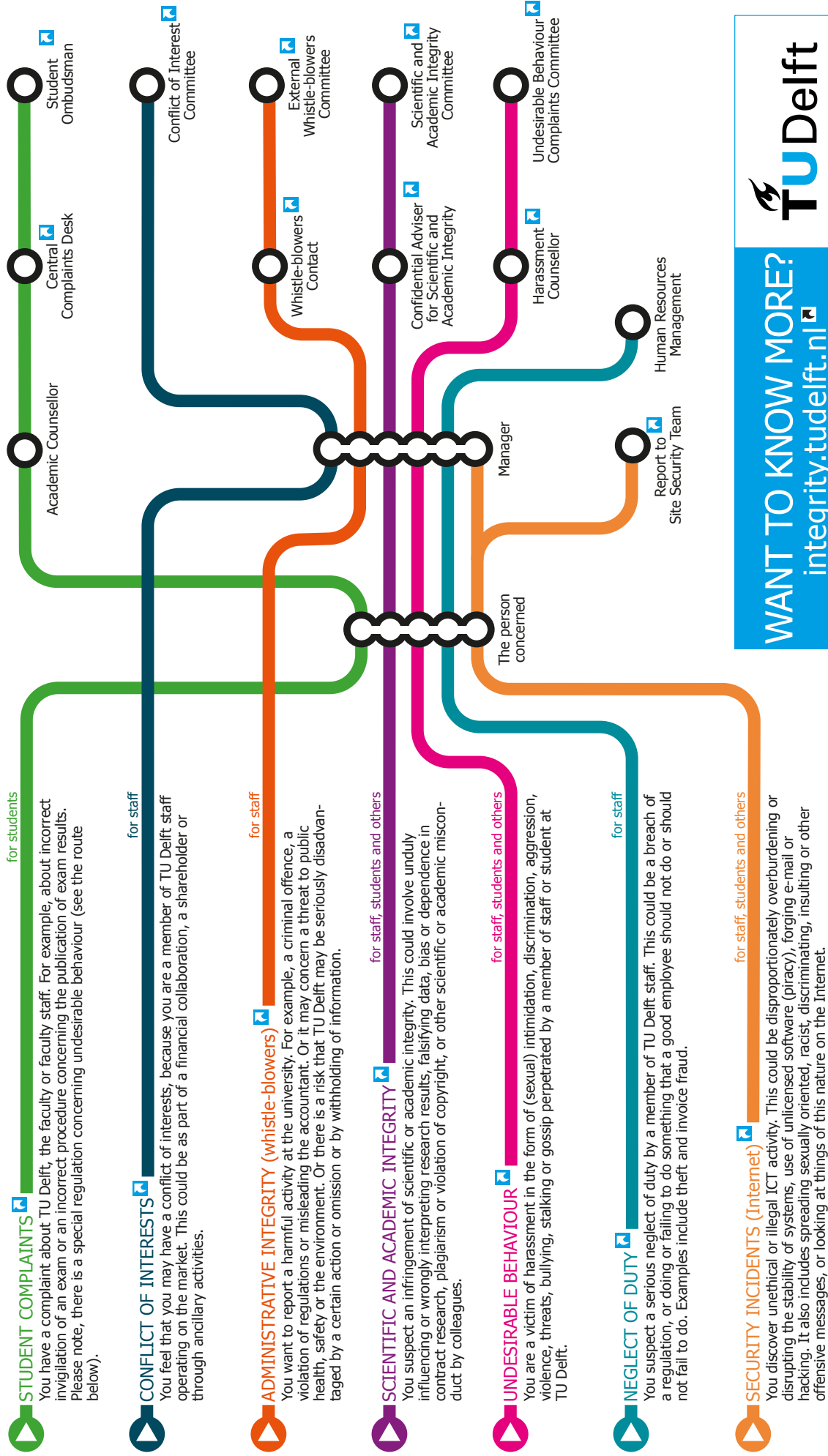
7 Associate Professor at the Department of Urbanism. Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, TU Delft.

INTEGRITY

How do you deal with ethical dilemmas?

TU Delft expects everyone, whether staff, student or guest, to act responsibly with regard to the ethical aspects of their work or study. But what if you suspect a wrongdoing, or something is happening that isn't right, or you find yourself faced with a conflict of interests? This chart shows briefly what you can do in such a situation.

Our aim is for staff and students to engage in dialogue and dare to call each other to account for their conduct. Managers should create a safe environment in which this is possible.



WANT TO KNOW MORE?
integrity.tudelft.nl

Fig. 1: The map of how to deal with ethical dilemmas at TU Delft

Main issues raised during the workshop

GENDER GAP

The gender gap at TU Delft and Bouwkunde in particular continues to be one of the greatest challenges faced by the university in the next years. Several interventions during the workshop pointed at the fact that this is also a very old discussion and little or no progress has been made in the last decade. (Please note that this discussion was held without making reference to statistical data, but the issue is widely recognised as crucial).

The appointment of new professors to the department should certainly take this issue into account, said one of the groups. While short-term solutions can certainly help, it was discussed that the department needs a strategic plan to empower women and break the glass ceilings leading to managing positions (professors and associate professors) very soon, since junior positions are well staffed by women (assistant professors, junior researchers, post and doctoral candidates). This happens in the context of pronounced feminisation of the faculty (a majority of students, or a near majority, is composed by women. This is very different from the male dominated Bouwkunde of 20 years ago).

It is desirable that students see women as role models in leading positions. Maybe as a result of the small number of women in leading positions, one group pointed to the fact that students tend to listen more, and give

more credence, to male teachers.

There were also calls for the establishment of quotas for non-white-female speakers and guest teachers.

There were calls to moderate the use of gendered titles (Mrs, Ms.) in emails and other communications in order to make communication more gender neutral.

There were sweeping proposals, such as to make the daily management board of the department (DB) a gender equal body immediately.

In general, it is acknowledged that too little has been done so far, and urgent action is required, with a concerted strategy.

MICRO AGGRESSIONS

The subject of micro-aggressions was quite salient during the discussion, ranging from complaints about insensitive jokes, to invisibility, to impolite emails.

One important issue raised was the **greeting culture** of the department. While it seems understandable that some people are shy and are reluctant to greet others, it was widely recognised that this raises negative feelings. There was a discussion about who greets first, and one possible conclusion is that all should greet all at all times. Importantly, it was remarked that the cleaning personnel suffers from chronic invisibility and are commonly not greeted. This is a classic example

of invisibility and a burden on people's sense of self-worth.

It is also widely recognised that ranking, class, race or gender do not justify invisibility and other forms of micro-aggression. There were calls to tackle perceived unkindness towards other staff who are lower in hierarchy. Hence, again, all staff must be treated with the same degree of respect and appreciation.

There were calls for people to share their experiences with micro-aggression more often and to have these accounts monitored.

STEREOTYPES (NEGATIVE and POSITIVE)

Stereotyping based on gender, race or nationality is perceived as highly undesirable, with calls for people to be recognised for their own individual capabilities and accomplishments. Stereotyping might affect access to career opportunities and was connected to perceived injustices in promotions and career advancement. Jokes based on stereotypes were particularly discussed as something to be avoided at all costs. As Professor Jantien Stoter remarked: *"Jokes are culturally dependent. And often jokes are a groups-thing, and therefore it is likely that the majority (and not the diverse minority) decides if a joke is okay or not (and decides that others should not feel insulted)"*.

Particular attention was given to Chinese staff, who feel pray

to both negative and positive stereotypes that might hinder the perception of who they are as individuals. The fact that Chinese people are considered “quiet” might be interpreted as positive by some, but this is a generalisation that does not correspond to reality and does not take individual personalities into account.

PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT

An issue closely connected to stereotypes (and casual and non-casual racism) is the issue of professional advancement. Calls were made to investigate the assessment criteria to look for biases in internal promotion and career development. One group remarked that calls for professorship are often written by men, and they contain biases that indicate a preference for men to occupy top positions.

At the same time, there was at least one group who called for acknowledgement of negative aspects of positive discrimination. This means that injustices might be committed in the name of diversity.

In general, however, there were several calls for policy increasing diversity and access to professional development by so-called minorities.

LIFE CHOICES

While life-styles can vary tremendously, more needs to be done to acknowledge the different preferences of staff in terms of meals, with strong calls for more vegetarian options in the canteen menu and in catering for meetings and events. There were also calls to end discrimination against smokers.

LANGUAGE

The issue of language is important in our department. While we work in an international environment where English predominates, we are a Dutch university and it is known that Dutch members of staff would love to see their colleagues speaking Dutch more often. Some groups pointed to the fact that this preference for Dutch might be an important deciding-factor in career advancement and not speaking Dutch fluently might hurt career prospects.

On the other side of the spectrum, it was recognised that Dutch speakers must do more in order to “invite” non-Dutch speaking colleagues to communicate in Dutch, with one participant pointing at the habit of answering people in English if their Dutch is not fluent. This is a problem widely recognised: as Dutch people are generally very fluent in English, both non-Dutch speakers and Dutch speakers tend to find it easier and more pragmatic to communicate in English.

A possible conclusion is that an environment where learning Dutch is desirable, fun and comfortable should be created. At least one person noted that attempts to “make” people speak Dutch might be construed as aggressive or unfair, so an “inviting” approach might be preferable.

AGEISM

The two sides of the spectrum are represented here. While younger people might feel that certain career opportunities are not available to them because of their age, or because they are perceived as “junior staff”, older members of staff also com-

plained that career opportunities are skewed towards younger people. Mentioning one’s age or joking about one’s age were also mentioned as examples of inappropriate behaviour.

FEELINGS OF ISOLATION and LACK OF RESPECT

Calls were made to create a welcoming environment at the department, especially for those coming here for the first time. Staff should welcome newcomers warmly and not let them “simmer” in isolation. Newcomers may occasionally find it difficult to break the ice and introduce themselves. This may lead to isolation and again, it is a burden on people’s sense of self-worth. Part of the development of the department concerns interpersonal development and more should be done to create opportunities for people from different sections to mingle and get to know each other’s work.

This prompted calls for more respect among different working teams, with the feeling that members of staff tend to “bad-mouth” other groups, of which they have little knowledge. Strong calls for respect at all levels were made and suggestions for more group interaction and group development activities were expressed.

KEYWORDS:

RESPECT

SENSIBILITY

CONNECTION

VARIETY and RICHNESS

COMMUNICATION

FAIRNESS and EQUALITY

INCLUSION



URBANISM



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