A learning environment is like a vegetable garden. There must be good grounds for every student to flourish.

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Diversity and student support services

The aim of student support services is to promote equal access to and participation of all students in higher education by improving the basic conditions for studying. (art II, 337 codex HO)

UCLL: support team for students with disabilities since 2017
- Individual, student centered coaching and group training to neutralize thresholds
- Supporting educational programs, case-related advice & information, professionalization

Challenges

- Increasing number of individual questions (& individual solutions)
- Limited target group, threshold for students
- Lack of time to work with educational programs

powerful learning environment for all students
Support4all
What crops should we harvest?
Higher education and diversity

The student population in higher education should be a reflection of the people in the society (Pliner & Johnson, 2004)

→ It is not the case

So, diversity policy

Diversity policy then means, recognizing and accepting the unique qualities, talents of all students (and staff) to enable opportunities for fully developing the potential of students to enter the field of work successfully.
The best manure for the best soil.
How do we do this?

Creating a powerful learning environment for ALL students:
• broad (basic) understanding of the concept of inclusion
• the learning environment is stimulated to make use of student differences

A first lesson in the craft of farming
Creating a powerful learning environment

To create this powerful learning environment we needed to install three important pillars (Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan, & Shaw, 2002)
**Good soil is the first step**

*Creating an inclusive culture*

- Inclusive **values and standards**
- **Open climate** where all students are welcome
- Fellowship in the **concept of diversity**:
  = broad spectrum from the mother with 5 children who wants to obtain a bachelor’s degree, to the student with dyslexia, or the student who is multilingual because of another social cultural background...

**HOW?**

- Sensitizing the entire staff → **educational days**
  - Inspire students and employees with success stories about student diversity
  - Involve diverse role models in student participation
  - Reflect on our own attitudes towards students with a diverse background
- **Tailored trajectories** to further work on shared values

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**The right seeds to grow good plants**

*Implementing inclusive practice*

- Building an inclusive education **community**
- Accessible **services and support** for all students
- Inclusive **student life**

**How?**

- Professionalizing teachers to
  - focus on talents
  - Use inclusive strategies and UDL principles
  - Implement broad evaluation process
- Professionalizing student **counselors & coaches** to work with diverse students and use diverse methods
- Invest in inclusive infrastructure, housing, mobility, catering
The farm where everything comes together

Inclusive policy

• Do not ignore the **challenges** of student diversity → dialogue
• Installing a **broad basic care** for all students

**HOW?**

• Different **expert cells**, team of experts, e.g.:
  - the influx of minority groups in higher education
  - developing talent profiles for students
  - creating a powerful lesson plan based on UDL
  - ...

The managers of these cells - **steering group** - an implementation strategy for practice & anchoring these themes into the **policy plan**

The steering committee also determines which themes are on the agenda
→ both **bottom up and top down** approaches

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**Conclusion**

Working on a diversity based approach
→ take advantage of the unique differences between students
→ create a powerful learning environment for all

Metaphor of a farm

We are harvesting **inclusion** with the main active ingredient being respect for differences. And we see **diversity** as the manure that strengthens us with **universal design for learning** as the rain that our ground needs to grow beautiful plants.