

Gender Equality Plan of USTP – University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten

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Preamble

USTP – University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten recognises gender equality, women's promotion, and equality at the workplace pursuant to § 2 (5) of the University of Applied Sciences Act (FHG) and the Equal Treatment Act (GIBG; Federal Law Gazette I no. 66/2004). USTP further acknowledges that gender identity is not always binary, and not always as it seems from the outside. Therefore, USTP welcomes a third gender option within the meaning of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR; see Constitutional Court as of 15/06/2018, line 77/2018-9). USTP's Strategy 2025 reinforces this attitude. We always place the human at the centre of our activities. We value every single personality and promote inclusion and diversity. We meet each other respectfully and at eye level and perceive differences as opportunities. We take our social responsibility seriously. Social inclusion, diversity, and gender equality contribute to addressing relevant questions from diverse perspectives and uphold the high quality of the solutions we develop.

This Gender Equality Plan is valid for the year 2026. It was decided on by the USTP Board upon agreement with the provider. It is a continuation of the previous Gender Equality Plan of 2023-2025. Thanks to the Gender Equality Plan 2023-25, good progress was made in terms of equality and diversity, however, further work is still required. The decision to extend the Gender Equality Plan 2023-25 was taken due to an alignment with USTP's strategy rhythm. The year 2026 will be used to come together in a participatory setting and work on a new Gender Equality Plan as part of the strategy revision, thereby implementing further efforts and achieving continuous improvement.

2. Framework Conditions and Analysis

In the academic year 2021/22, almost 3,700 students were studying in 26 degree and continuing education programmes distributed over 6 departments at the institution, which was founded in 1996 and continues to grow. The range of study programmes offered is very broad and heterogeneous, which is why, for example, the proportion of women in the different programmes varies greatly. Due to its proximity to Vienna, the St. Pölten UAS is attractive for students and employees from this area as well as from the greater Lower Austria region. Therefore, measures and offers must take into account that many people commute to St. Pölten and that digital offers and remote work are important. At the same time, the St. Pölten UAS expanded its campus building in 2021 and it is continuously optimised in terms of construction and infrastructure to adapt to a variety of needs such as family friendliness or accessibility.

The legal basis and framework for the Austrian UAS system is the University of Applied Sciences Studies Act (FHStG), which entered into force on 1/10/1993 and is less determinate than the Universities Act. Since 1999, the European Higher Education Area – EHEA (“Bologna Process”) including 48 countries has accompanied the integration of the European higher education policy and thus also the development of the FHStG. The accreditation of Universities of Applied Sciences is primarily regulated by the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG); the accreditation authority is the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria, which is part of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research.

- In terms of research, the focus at universities of applied sciences is primarily on application-oriented research and development. R&D is oriented towards the needs and challenges of companies, society, and practice. The obligation to conduct R&D is specified in the FHG (formerly FHStG). Universities of applied sciences are only accredited if the application-related research and development work required to achieve the objectives and safeguard the principles is carried out by members of the teaching and research staff. In addition, providers are to ensure that teaching and research staff participate in application-related research and development work. Teaching must be carried out by teaching and research staff qualified in terms of science, professional practice, and pedagogy/didactics. There is no basic funding for R&D at universities of applied sciences provided by the federal government. Austrian universities of applied sciences do not have the right to award doctorates.

A broad gender monitoring system exists within the framework of various reports and is continuously developed and expanded. An internally-available annual income report by the Works Council provides insight into the gender ratios of employees and reveals any gender pay gaps. Internal information at the department and study programme levels is provided annually in the form of quality reports. The annual business report (Geschäftsbericht) and the annual report (Jahresbericht) are publicly accessible and provide insight into the gender composition of different groups at the UAS.

University statistical data are also publicly available on unidata, the university statistical information system of the BMBWF.

Overall, the gender ratio among regular students at the St. Pölten UAS is balanced according to the BIS report (provision of information regarding study operations) as of 15/11/2021, with 1,540 women, 2 people who choose the third gender option for themselves, and 1,475 men studying there. Slightly more women and persons who choose the third gender option for themselves study full-time (58%) and in bachelor degree programmes (53%), respectively, slightly fewer study part-time (37%) and in master degree programmes (44%).

There are large differences in the gender ratio between the departments. 76% of women and persons who choose the third gender option study at the Department of Business & Innovation, 73% study at the Department of Health Sciences, and 71% at the Department of Social Sciences. 46% of women and persons who choose the third gender option study at the Department of Media & Digital Technologies, 15% study at the Department of Computer Science & Security, 9% at the Department of Rail Technology & Mobility. 31% women and persons who choose the third gender option for themselves study in STEM subjects overall, while 66% study in non-STEM subjects. In the STEM field, study programmes such as Digital Healthcare, Creative Computing, Data Science, Digital Design, and Interactive Technologies in particular have a fairly balanced gender ratio.

Compared to other universities of applied sciences, the St. Pölten UAS is thus sometimes above or below the average in Austria in the 2020/21 academic year, according to unidata. The deviations amount to a maximum of 9 percentage points, except in the area of business and administration, where St. Pölten UAS, with 81% female first-year students, is far above the average of 51% and has the highest value Austria-wide.

The curricula of the study programmes do not include any modules with explicit gender and diversity relevance, but there are individual courses in this area, such as the optional subject “Austrian Sign Language” for beginners and advanced students.

The gender ratio for employees in administration, teaching, and research is surveyed in several places, for example for the entire UAS in the annual business report as well as in the annual report for AQ-Austria or by department in internal annual quality reports. In addition, an annual internal income report is published on the International Women’s Day by the Works Council and the UAS service unit HR and Legal Affairs, which discloses possible gender pay gaps and breaks down the gender ratios for all function groups individually. An expansion of the existing publications to include further figures on gender and diversity is successively planned and is currently being implemented.

So far, no staff members have indicated to the UAS that they identify with a third gender option, or the internal data situation does not provide sufficient information on this.

According to the income report of the St. Pölten UAS, 39% of managers are female, and the share of women in management positions of the departments, study programmes, and service units is at least 50%. 43% of the full-time academic staff are female, as well as 32% of the part-time lecturers.

However, when it comes to institute and research group heads, the proportion of women is very low at 9%.

In addition, the St. Pölten UAS is currently unable to meet the requirements of the Disability Employment Act (BEinStG) for the employment of persons with disabilities and, therefore, is legally bound to make annual compensation payments.

Qualitative internal surveys such as the survey of staff members as part of the Workplace Health Promotion 2022 or the Peers4You survey of students 2021 also provide conclusions with regard to gender and diversity. For example, it is known that mental health complaints are frequently reported by employees (e.g., 26% of participants in the workplace health promotion employee survey with 71% participation reported a depressive mood in the last 6 months at the time of December 2018 or 27% at the time of April/May 2022, with 58% participation) as well as that the COVID-19 pandemic has posed challenges to students and that sexism and the lack of clear contact persons for complaints are criticised.

Existing Measures on G&D

The St. Pölten UAS attaches great importance to regularly making social commitments to the outside world and also takes continuous steps in-house to anchor the topics of gender equality, diversity, and inclusion in all departments, research institutes, and UAS service units¹. Within the framework of the “Strategy of the St. Pölten UAS 2018-2021”, a detailed document on the social dimension was developed. The national strategy on the social dimension in higher education is thus successively implemented.

The St. Pölten University of Applied Sciences is committed to implementing the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, and in particular the European Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) in order to improve the working conditions of researchers. In this context, action plans are developed and published at regular intervals, including actions on gender and diversity as well as childcare. In the course of this, the participation of the Gender & Diversity Officer in hearings has been consolidated.

At the end of 2020, the working group on Gender Equality and Diversity was launched. Several internal and UAS-wide meetings took place, such as an “Open Forum on Gender Equality and Diversity at our UAS” in February 2021, in which all employees could participate and contribute their ideas. Measures taken by the work group were an in-house survey of all diversity activities at the UAS as well as an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the UAS with regard to diversity. From this, proposals were developed and objectives formulated that have been implemented starting in 2021, such as increasing resources for Gender & Diversity.

Programme items to raise awareness are implemented, for example on Diversity Day, in the course of the “16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence” and around International Women's Day. The Women's Day programme always includes a presentation of the gender-specific in-house

¹ <http://fhstp.ac.at/diversity>

income report given by the Works Council. In terms of raising awareness, the UAS podcast “Campus Talk” also makes an important contribution. Gender equality, diversity, and inclusion were addressed several times, such as in an episode with two female Academic Directors about the importance of programming courses for “women* only”.

In addition, specific further training courses are offered for employees, such as the seminar “Wie ich als Frau meine Entwicklungschancen ergreife” (how to seize development opportunities as a woman), which was specifically designed for women* and is part of the UAS’ in-house seminar programme. Furthermore, the seminar “Basics Gender & Diversity” for all interested employees of the UAS, or the seminar “Betreuung, Beratung, Managing Diversity” (supervision, counselling, managing diversity) as part of the continuing education programme “Hochschuldidaktisches Zertifikat” (higher-education certificate), offered by the UAS service unit LEARN for (new) lecturers. Moreover, the student peer advisors of Peers4You are trained in a sensitive approach by means of the module “Gender, Diversity, Sexual Harassment and Bullying” as part of their training. The “erfolgreich.bewerben” (successful application), a multi-day fair with tips on career planning and job applications, is aimed specifically at female students.

In addition, the St. Pölten UAS offers free childcare for children of staff members aged 3 to 10 on days when schools/kindergartens are closed. A parent-child room is also available to people with care responsibilities at the UAS and can also be used as a retreat space for people with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

In the course of the new construction of building section B, attention was paid to aspects of accessibility, and the building meets the legal requirements for structural accessibility. In addition, each part of the building has a designated all-gender WC.

In addition, consultation/information sessions are held on an ongoing basis with students with disabilities and the responsible Academic Directors or lecturers. We try to make it possible for students with disabilities to study as barrier-free as possible and to support them with any necessary compensation for disadvantages during exams; this is anchored in the Statute, Part 2, Study Law.

In order to make gender & diversity in teaching and research visible and to promote it, a Gender & Diversity Award was offered for the first time in 2022 for final theses (in the two categories bachelor and master thesis) by students and graduates with reference to gender & diversity. The final decision and award ceremony were held in September 2022 on the basis of short pitches by a panel of finalists selected in advance in the context of the European Researchers’ Night.

Since 2022, one contact person per department has been defined for G&D. In addition, in the winter semester of 2022/23, the UAS Board and the Executive Board agreed on “Guidelines for Inclusive Communication” to provide concrete support for the implementation of inclusive language.

3. Objectives of St. Pölten UAS on Gender Equality until 2025

- Gender & Diversity Management is strategically anchored as a cross-sectional issue throughout the UAS and is regularly communicated to the members of the St. Pölten UAS, also within the framework of a Gender & Diversity Reporting. A cross-departmental and cross-

service unit committee composed of participants with knowledge of gender equality has been established and meets regularly.

- Gender & Diversity Management considerations are taken into account in strategic/essential decisions and processes.
- Gender diversity at the St. Pölten UAS is actively promoted. Trans, inter*, and non-binary persons are thus supported to live their gender identity openly at the UAS. As a result, more reliable figures on persons who feel they belong to a third gender option should be available by 2025, and it may be possible to formulate target values for this group. The alignment of gender entries at the UAS should be supported for employees and students so that binary gender data better reflects the lived reality.
- It is anchored in the Statute that women are represented in all organisational units and at all hierarchical levels at 50%, if possible.
- The proportion of women in research is to be increased to 30% by 2025.
- Research group heads and institute heads as crucial leadership positions should be filled with 25% women by 2025.
- As anchored in the Statute, a gender balance in bodies (the UAS Board as well as in committees of the Board) is applied.
- As required by the Statute, at least 45% women are considered in candidacies for the UAS Board.
- In line with the quantitative targets set out in the National Strategy on the Social Dimension, the long-term goal is to have at least 30% female students and at least 30% male students in each field of study by 2030 (or at least 15% in the short term by 2025). Measures to achieve a gender- and diversity-sensitive composition of students in all study programmes are promoted.
- Gender and diversity are to be anchored as competencies of the teaching staff and in the curricula: At least one course should be offered in every department by 2025.

4. Measures for Gender Equality

Management

- At the St. Pölten UAS, a service unit for Gender & Diversity Management was established for an unlimited period of time and is assigned to the Executive Board.
- A Gender & Diversity Committee has been set up to create opportunities for participation, to find multipliers, and to anchor equality measures more broadly. It acts in an advisory capacity and is equipped with an autonomously managed special budget.
- Regular information and participation on gender and diversity issues are provided through a variety of suitable formats and channels.
- A Gender & Diversity Reporting is conducted annually as part of selected public and in-house publications to make inequalities visible and to provide intermediate results on the achievement of UAS target numbers.
- Gender & Diversity is explicitly considered a cross-sectional issue in the quality management system of the UAS.

Gender Equality in Recruiting and Personnel Development

- Job advertisements in all areas and for all positions are addressed to all genders and contain, e.g., an additional paragraph concerning diversity. In fields where women as well as trans, inter*, and non-binary persons are underrepresented, we are using active recruiting via networks and personal address in order to encourage these persons to apply. Wherever possible, women as well as trans, inter*, and non-binary persons are automatically invited to an interview provided that they fulfil the formal criteria and that the invitation is feasible from an operational perspective.
- By participating in hearings, the Gender & Diversity Officer ensures that new staff members have gender and diversity competence and thus contributes to the greater representation of women as well as trans, inter*, and non-binary persons. If the Gender & Diversity Officer is unable to attend, the candidate's gender and diversity competence is ascertained by another member of the hearing committee and subsequently entered into the protocol. In addition, the participants of hearings will undergo their first anti-bias trainings by 2025, which ensures that gender competence can become part of the requirement profile for committees from 2015.
- The St. Pölten UAS has successfully launched the process Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) aimed at attaining the logo for excellence in research and continues to work on this objective.
- The professional paths outlined in a career model create transparent advancement and development possibilities for all categories of functions. In the Staff Regulations, consideration is given to gender-related structural inequalities, e.g., through the recognition of parental leave.
- In collaboration with the Works Council, the UAS issues an annual in-house income report which monitors any gender pay gaps. Measures are discussed and implemented (and appropriately communicated) together with the G&D Officer.
- Career promotion programmes for women as well as trans, inter*, and non-binary persons in the form of mentoring, coaching, seminars, or specialist events are organised at regular intervals, developed further according to needs, and complemented by formats for informal exchange.

Gender Balance in Leadership and Decision-Making

- Vacancies for leadership positions are always advertised with the possibility of working part-time (30-35h) in order to allow for the reconciliation of family and career and to appeal to women with care responsibilities. Alternatively, it is possible to advertise two leadership positions with 20 weekly working hours each in coordination with the department.
- A relocation service as part of the internationalisation strategy facilitates the changeover to the St. Pölten UAS and, again, promotes the compatibility of working and family life. In addition, the UAS is a member of the Dual Career Service Netzwerk Wien – NÖ – OÖ.
- Some further trainings on gender and diversity, especially on the promotion of women in management, are mandatory for staff members in leadership positions. In the long term, gender and diversity competence will be a recruiting criterion for leadership positions.
- Anti-bias trainings for executive staff (and members of hearing committees, see above) take place regularly.

- The Chairperson of the UAS Board has the responsibility to raise awareness for gender equality in the election commission and the electoral regulation of the UAS Board have been amended to include special call obligations for the election official in case that the first call for candidates in the election proposals fails to result in the goal of 45% female candidates as stipulated in § 28 (2) of Part 1 of the Statute of the St. Pölten UAS (based on § 10 (2) FHG).

Gender Equality among Students

- In 2023, a project group analyses the possibilities for the diversity-sensitive branding of study programmes at the St. Pölten UAS.
- The St. Pölten UAS actively engages in activities and programmes aimed at increasing the share of female students in fields where this share is low and illustrating possible career paths in technical sectors to (future) graduates.

Work-Life Balance and Organisational Culture

- A further training seminar on gender and diversity is a standard element in the onboarding plans for new employees and ensures gender and diversity competencies among the staff. The G&D Officer accompanies new staff members on some of their first steps on campus and offers concrete assistance (e.g., regarding the Statute and the Guidelines for Inclusive Communication).
- The document Guidelines for Inclusive Communication lays down principles for gender mainstreaming and inclusive internal communication as well as CI. Workshops on inclusive language use are offered to facilitate its practical application for all UAS staff members. Moreover, there are workshops where employees can learn the basics needed to create accessible documents.
- The St. Pölten UAS promotes any measures that serve the active implementation and realisation of equality in gender and diversity as well as any events and measures for raising G&D awareness. Further awareness measures on the topics of anti-discrimination and sensitivity in didactics towards heterogeneity are currently in the planning stage.
- The UAS commissions experts (through experience) who continuously examine and enhance constructional measures to promote accessibility, family friendliness, and gender diversity.
- The St. Pölten UAS is planning to participate in the audit “hochschuleundfamilie” (higher education and family), thereby implementing measures for more family friendliness that cater to the individual needs of staff members during pregnancy, parental leave, and childcare as well as when providing care for relatives. Another goal is to offer a healthy work-life balance with flexible working time models as part of the company agreement on New Work. Based on the evaluation within the framework of the audit, measures will be taken in collaboration with the project/working group.

Measures against Sexualised Violence

- In its Statute, the St. Pölten UAS pledges to create a respectful, positive environment for working and studying for all staff members and students that is free from any kind of discrimination. To achieve this goal, Part 3 of the Statute (“Equality, Promotion of Women”) outlines measures against sexual harassment and discrimination. The UAS Board provides information in this regard on a regular basis through suitable formats and channels.

- In addition, there is a regular opportunity for staff members to take part in training for the prevention and proper handling of sexual harassment.

Gender & Diversity in Research and Teaching

- Materials for the onboarding process of new lecturers and the module “Managing Diversity” in the Certificate in Higher Education Didactic Competence convey the basics of gender- and diversity-aware teaching. In addition, coachings for teaching staff are organised where necessary.
- The topics of gender and diversity are to find their way into the curricular, for example through a UAS-wide optional subject or through anchoring G&D competencies as Future Work Skills. Moreover, the framework conditions of studying and the examination regulations are to be gradually adapted to ensure gender equality and inclusion.
- A teaching award for diversity-sensitive didactics offers an incentive for lecturers to focus on gender and diversity in teaching and shines a light on good teaching visible at the same time.
- One focus in research is on the promotion of female researchers and the gender-equitable composition of teams. This is supported by mentoring, coaching, and (informal) networking programmes for women as well as trans, inter*, and non-binary persons.
- Consideration for the gender and diversity aspect in research contents is promoted through further training options and can be integrated into qualification agreements as a mandatory element.
- Gender- and diversity-sensitive research is made visible via suitable formats and channels.
- Every year, the Gender & Diversity Award for final theses of students and recent graduates provides an incentive for writing about this topic and puts these young people’s achievements into the limelight. On the same occasion, a “Gender & Diversity Award goes.absolvent*innen” for projects of graduates is given away as well.

This document is valid for three years. It is continuously evaluated and adjusted, when necessary, also based on the Gender & Diversity monitoring. The goals, measures, and progress from the Gender Equality Plan are communicated and made visible on a regular basis.