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INQUIRY CONCERNING THE ORGANISATION OF WORK ENVIRONMENT AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES ACTIVITIES AT UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

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¹ This document has been translated from Swedish into English. If the English version differs from the original, the Swedish version takes precedence.



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1. Assignment

In decision FS 1.1-1292-22 of 1 July 2022, the Vice-Chancellor directed that an inquiry be held into the organisation of work environment and equal opportunities activities at Umeå University. The purpose of the inquiry is to ensure that the University has a fit-for-purpose organisation to work strategically in these areas and to support the University's systematic work environment management and active measures.

The inquiry is to submit proposals concerning how work environment and equal opportunities activities should be organised at all organisational levels (university-wide, faculty and department). During the inquiry, ongoing dialogue is to be maintained with representatives of faculties, Umeå School of Education, University Administration, Umeå University Library, trade union organisations, work environment representatives and student unions.

In addition to the above, the inquiry is to focus specifically on:

- the possibility of merging the Work Environment Committee and the Strategic Council for Equal Opportunities and to report on the pros and cons of doing so;
- the division of tasks, roles and responsibilities for work environment and equal opportunities activities at different organisational levels; and
- how the student perspective can be integrated into the organisation to better effect.

2. Background

On 3 September 2013, the Vice-Chancellor decided on the present organisation for equal opportunities (Reg. No. UmU 300-375-13). Pursuant to this decision, faculties, University Administration and the University Library were required to appoint equal opportunities administrators and the existing gender-equality representatives at departments and units were to be redesignated as equal opportunities representatives. The remit of these administrators and representatives was expanded to include all grounds for discrimination as defined in the Swedish Discrimination Act (SFS 2008:567). These roles were intended to offer support to the Vice-Chancellor, deans, heads of department or equivalent managers.

The *Local collective agreement on cooperation for development at Umeå University* concluded on 12 December 2017 (FS 1.1-2040-17) that the Work Environment Committee forms part of the University's trade union cooperation organisation. The Work Environment Committee's task is to participate in planning and issue guidelines on systematic work environment management and other measures that lead to the fulfilment of work environment goals, and to analyse the results of the measures taken. The Work Environment Committee corresponds to the safety committee set out in the Swedish Work Environment Act (SFS 1977:1160) and Work Environment Ordinance (SFS 1977:1166) and has the tasks and rights described therein.

The University is required to appoint a Strategic Council for Equal Opportunities based on the *Instructions for strategic councils*. This council is intended to provide cross-faculty strategic support for the Vice-Chancellor and University Management on issues concerning



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gender equality and equal opportunities as they affect the University as both an employer and education provider. Where appropriate, the Strategic Council for Equal Opportunities is required to coordinate its work with that of the University's other strategic councils (FS 1.1-1145-21).

Vision for Umeå University declares that the University is to ensure a sustainable working life by creating a good work environment characterised by an inclusive culture where gender equality, diversity and equal opportunities are self-evident to students and staff alike.

An external review of Umeå University's handling of misconduct proposed the merger of the Work Environment Committee and the Strategic Council for Equal Opportunities, as the existing organisation presents a risk that such matters will be fragmented across the various committees and councils currently responsible for dealing with them (FS 1.6.2-2432-21).

3. Approach and reading instructions

Over the course of this inquiry, the investigator has conducted 32 interviews involving just over 50 people. On most occasions, a single interviewee was interviewed, while on others a focus group was consulted. Interviews were conducted with: most of University Management, the Human Resources Director and other representatives of the Human Resources Office, deans, members of the Strategic Council for Equal Opportunities and the Work Environment Committee, work environment and equal opportunities coordinators, the equal opportunities administrators, heads of faculty office, heads of department and office, work environment representatives (AMO/HAMO/HSAMO), equal opportunities representatives, trade union representatives and student union representatives. The inquiry has also considered relevant legislation and agreements, internal governance and policy documents, action plans, agreements and instructions, previous inquiries in the field, supervisory decisions by the Equality Ombudsman (DO), the results of staff surveys and minutes of meetings of the Work Environment Committee and the Strategic Council for Equal Opportunities. At the suggestion of interviewees, the inquiry has also studied websites and various documents from other higher education institutions to gain insight into their systematic work environment management and equal opportunities work. The higher education institutions in question were mainly Lund University, Stockholm University, the University of Gothenburg, Chalmers University of Technology, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Malmö University, Mid Sweden University, Linköping University, University West and the University of Gävle. The Planning Office has contributed valuable administrative support during the inquiry.

The investigator has met with various councils, boards and groups on a number of occasions to present analyses and interim results. On these occasions, it has also been possible to offer opinions and highlight aspects that bear closer examination before continuing with the inquiry.

For the sake of readability, managers with staff responsibility at operational level at Umeå University will hereafter be referred to generally as heads of department (the most common managerial position at the University) in this report. The term *HR* may refer to human resources administrators, coordinators, strategists or specialists.

This report contains an analysis of the pros and cons of the present work environment and equal opportunities organisation, followed by the investigator's recommendations concerning



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how Umeå University's future work environment and equal opportunities activities can be appropriately reorganised.

4. Analysis of the pros and cons of the present work environment and equal opportunities organisation

During the interviews conducted as part of this inquiry, interviewees were asked about the pros and cons of the present work environment and equal opportunities organisation. An overall picture of their evaluation is presented below in broad strokes. The investigator can confirm that all interviewees welcomed this review and are positively disposed to participating in improvement efforts. First, the benefits of the current organisation and good examples are presented, followed by some of its perceived shortcomings.

4.1 Benefits of the current organisation of work environment and equal opportunities activities

Most interviewees agreed that it is positive that the University has a university-wide body such as the Strategic Council for Equal Opportunities. It is considered important to highlight the issue of equal opportunities. That said, there was less agreement concerning how such a council should be developed to have a significant impact.

The Work Environment Committee (Umeå University's health and safety committee) is generally considered to work well, especially on matters related to the physical work environment and systematic work environment management. Many interviewees underlined that this is due to the fact that this statutory committee has been in existence for a long time and has a clear mandate and framework for its activities.

A number of good examples were offered of work environment and equal opportunities activities at faculty level. These included the Faculty of Science and Technology's decision to employ a full-time administrator (albeit on a two-year, fixed-term contract) with responsibility for both work environment and equal opportunity matters to strengthen and consolidate these two areas. Other joint work environment and equal opportunity working groups at faculty level – with a dean, one or two administrators, HR and sometimes other representatives – are also deemed a positive step towards placing work environment and equal opportunities issues higher on the faculty's agenda. These joint groups often focus on responsibility as both an employer and an education provider, something considered to be a strength. Support in the form of workshops, training courses, network meetings and management seminars are also mentioned as positive contributions to the work of departments/offices on these matters.

At departmental level, equal opportunities representatives are presented as positive to gaining support for these issues locally. Knowledge of the local organisation is considered a prerequisite for constructive work environment and equal opportunities efforts. Only on rare occasions was the idea of doing away with equal opportunities representatives mooted; the general view appeared to be that the role should be further developed and strengthened to provide better support to heads of department. Work environment representatives were often



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praised and considered to be doing important work at departmental/office level. Examples of good collaboration on work environment and equal opportunities issues were also offered at departmental level, including at the faculties of Chemistry, Plant Physiology and Social Work, where various groups have been formed with, for example, the head of department, work environment and equal opportunities representatives, HR support and sometimes student work environment representatives to place preventive measures higher on the agenda.

4.2 Shortcomings of the current organisation of work environment and equal opportunities activities

There is broad consensus on a number of shortcomings of Umeå University's work environment and equal opportunities work. Several aspects were mentioned by the majority of interviewees as important to consider when developing a new organisation to conduct this work at the University. The key shortcomings of the current organisation are described below under the headings "General deficiencies", "Deficiencies in the area of equal opportunities" and "Deficiencies in the area of the work environment".

4.2.1 General deficiencies

Weaknesses as an education provider: Interviewees identify major deficiencies in the way the University deals with work environment and equal opportunities in relation to its students. Although the student perspective is integrated, it is given too little space at all levels of the University. While there are student representatives on both the Work Environment Committee and the Strategic Council for Equal Opportunities, issues related to the University's responsibilities as an education provider are underrepresented at these meetings. Much of the responsibility for raising these issues is left to student representatives; however, the lack of continuity in student representation – they are normally appointed for only one year at a time – makes it difficult for student representatives to build up knowledge and confidence to address these difficult matters. Unlike the staff perspective, there is no single function at the University with responsibility for promoting the student perspective. There is thus no obvious ingress for students to more general and strategic work environment and equal opportunities issues in relation to the University's role as an education provider. There is currently one student social welfare group in place, but this is not deemed to function optimally as, among other things, its mandate is felt to be unclear and it lacks faculty representation. There is also uncertainty at faculty and departmental levels concerning where and to whom students can turn with questions about work environment and equal opportunities issues. The fact that most of the University's students read programmes that cross departmental, and even faculty, boundaries makes it even more unclear where the principal responsibility for the student's work environment rests. Is it at programme, departmental or faculty level?

Unclear roles, mandates and support at all levels: There is considered to be too little support for work environment and equal opportunities issues at Umeå University and a lack of resources and/or competence at university-wide level, faculty level and departmental level (with a few exceptions). This includes questions about the roles and mandates of HR and work environment and equal opportunities representatives at departmental level. What does the law have to say, what can Umeå University do about it and what needs exist? These uncertainties must be addressed in any new work environment and equal opportunities organisation.



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Communication problems between levels: Many interviewees feel that individuals have little or no knowledge about the kind of work environment and equal opportunities work being conducted at levels other than their own. Consequently, there is no common thread running through work on these issues in the form of joint goals and strategies and systematic dialogue and communication between levels. As one interviewee put it, when it comes to this work, “the foot and the head aren’t really connected”.

4.2.2 Deficiencies in the area of equal opportunities

The role of the equal opportunities representative is unclear/ill-defined: Interviewees at all levels, including equal opportunities representatives themselves, expressed uncertainty about what the role entails. The role is seen as ill-defined and the title “representative” itself is misleading, as it may lead people to assume that the equal opportunities representative is there to represent the individual employee in the same way as the work environment representative (the latter is a statutory role regulated in the Work Environment Act, while the former is there to support the head of department on equal opportunity matters). The role also appears to lack status and continuity, as equal opportunities representatives are often replaced. Another impression is that heads of department sometimes relinquish all such matters to their equal opportunities representative, something that is deemed problematic.

The Strategic Council for Equal Opportunities is anonymous: Many interviewees consider this strategic council to be important but feel that it has yet to find its true form. Despite its name, it is deemed to lack a strategy, as well as academic links to deans of faculty (only one of whom is a member). While meetings are characterised as positive and pleasant, they act more as a forum for discussion and exchanging experiences than for hammering out policy to define the University’s position on equal opportunities. The education provider perspective also takes a backseat on the Strategic Council for Equal Opportunities. Overall, the council is therefore described as toothless and many people have no idea which initiatives originate in the council’s decisions on goals and strategies.

4.2.3 Deficiencies in the area of the work environment

Uncertainty concerning which issues should and should not be raised on the Work Environment Committee: Interviewees in senior management positions and members of the Work Environment Committee sometimes feel uncertain about the respective roles of the committee and the Central Cooperation Group. At times, it feels that the committee’s work to prepare work environment issues for decision is repeated within the framework of the Central Cooperation Group, something that seems inefficient. Equal opportunities issues often touch on work environment issues – grounds for discrimination and active measures, for example – but are considered by some to be outside the remit of the Work Environment Committee, while others consider them so intertwined with the organisational and psychosocial work environment that they should be addressed by the committee. Interviewees also mention a far too weak integration of the student and education provider perspectives.



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4.3 Summary of pros and cons of the current work environment and equal opportunities organisation

The above account of problems is general in nature and only describes the larger patterns in interview responses. Many other aspects were mentioned and some will play a part in the proposal for a future organisation presented below.

5. Recommendations concerning how Umeå University's future work environment and equal opportunities activities can be appropriately reorganised

Interviews revealed a number of overall aspects that need to be addressed in any proposed reorganisation of work environment and equal opportunities activities. Firstly, Umeå University needs to take a more *holistic approach* to these issues. Different parts/levels of the University need to collaborate on work environment and equal opportunities issues and these issues must be more closely linked to reduce the sense that they exist in two different silos. This includes *clarifying mandates, roles and responsibilities* at all levels, beginning with university-wide functions. Umeå University must create a *unified structure* throughout the organisation, with unambiguous common objectives for work environment and equal opportunities activities. It is important that the University views itself as a SINGLE ENTITY and this is an explicit point of departure for the investigator's recommendations, even if some leeway must be left for local adaption.

Another point raised was that managers at all levels must be knowledgeable and engaged in these issues; above all, if Umeå University is to succeed in truly coming to grips with these issues, *the tone must be set at the top*. This implies that vice-chancellors, deans and heads of department are important role models and ambassadors for serious work environment and equal opportunities work. Managers at all levels need to be *knowledgeable and engaged* in these issues. This aspect will be readily apparent in the draft proposal below.

Another pervasive observation is the need for *resources and support* at all levels. For example, managers at all levels need better/more professional support when dealing with work environment and equal opportunities issues. A more distinct structure, individuals with sufficient time in their duties and the development of competence are therefore other important aspects of the proposed future work environment and equal opportunities organisation.

While most of the ideas contained in the draft proposal come from interviews, they are also drawn from good examples at other higher education institutions and the investigator's deliberations. However, the internal voices heard during the process are the foundation of the proposal.



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5.1 Recommendations at university-wide level

Umeå University should systematise and strengthen support for and the administration of work environment and equal opportunities activities at university-wide level. This could advantageously be achieved by taking the following measures:

- a) *One of the vice-chancellors should have specific responsibility for work environment and equal opportunities issues.*

When this individual leaves their post, it is important that responsibility for the broader area defined in this proposal passes to another vice-chancellor (pro- and deputy vice-chancellors included) in the University Management. This is crucial to making work environment and equal opportunities issues visible, setting the tone at the top and demonstrating that they are taken seriously at the very highest level. This responsibility includes leading the new strategic council described in section 5.1.b.

- b) *Create a new overarching strategic council for work environment and equal opportunities.*

Given the need for Umeå University to reduce the sense that the work environment and equal opportunities exist in two different silos and to improve cooperation and collaboration on these issues, it is proposed that, taking inspiration from Stockholm University, *a new strategic council*, the Strategic Council for Work Environment and Equal Opportunities, be appointed on which overarching, long-term and preventive measures can be broadly discussed and the course of Umeå University's work on these issues plotted. In conjunction with this, the present Strategic Council for Equal Opportunities will be abolished. The new Strategic Council for Work Environment and Equal Opportunities may advantageously combine core values related to the work environment, equal opportunities, gender equality, accessibility and social sustainability, something that can serve to clarify what kind of institution Umeå University wishes to be and how it intends to get there, both from the staff and student perspective. One good example highlighted by many interviewees is the project on core values conducted at Umeå University in 2018/19 (FS 2.9-201-18), which resulted in the book *Everyday Dilemmas*, several brochures, videos, workshops and other working material. Continuing this work is one possible task for the new strategic council. Like other strategic councils at Umeå University, the Strategic Council for Work Environment and Equal Opportunities will have no decision-making powers but will offer advice prior to decisions by the Vice-Chancellor or the University Board.

Two committees will be linked to the new strategic council, one a safety committee (the Work Environment Committee) that fulfils the University's statutory duty as an employer, and one related to its duties as an education provider, including accessibility (the Sustainable Student Life Committee). This is intended to strengthen and clarify these two perspectives. It will also allow matters arising on the Strategic Council for Work Environment and Equal Opportunities that fall within the remit of these two committees to be sent for further, more in-depth discussion on the relevant committee, which may offer recommendations or place the matter on the agenda for more strategic and policy-related discussions on the strategic council. The chairs of the two committees will be ordinary members of the Strategic Council for Work Environment and Equal Opportunities. With regard to the Work Environment Committee, the inquiry recommends only one change at present: that the Chair of the Sustainable Student Life Committee should be a member of the Work Environment



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Committee. However, the ongoing project *Active Measures* may result in further changes. The creation of the new Sustainable Student Life Committee does not affect student representation on the Work Environment Committee, which is a statutory requirement. Finally, it may be necessary to review processes between the Work Environment Committee and Central Collaborative Group in order to streamline systematic work environment management.

So, the proposal to appoint an overarching Strategic Council for Work Environment and Equal Opportunities and two committees is not a recommendation to merge the existing Strategic Council for Equal Opportunities with the Work Environment Committee, as such a merger would risk equal opportunities issues being overshadowed and create a large and unwieldy committee with a sprawling mandate/remit. The function of the Sustainable Student Life Committee is described in more detail in section 5.1.c.

It is recommended that the *Strategic Council for Work Environment and Equal Opportunities* be led by a vice-chancellor with responsibility for these issues (see 5.1.a.). Other members should include: one dean (alternatively, a deputy dean or associate dean) per faculty, the Director of the Umeå School of Education, the Director of the Umeå University Library, the Human Resources Director, one or two work environment and equal opportunities coordinators (see recommendation in 5.1.d) from the Human Resources Office, the Chair of the Work Environment Committee (University Director), the Chair of the Sustainable Student Life Committee and one student union representative. The council's secretary should be an analyst from the Planning Office with work environment and equal opportunities as part of their area of responsibility, to liaise with the Vice-Chancellor. Experts in fields such as gender studies and gender equality should also be co-opted to the council and possibly other relevant functions.

c) A strong education provider perspective

Appoint work environment and equal opportunities coordinators specifically to work from an education provider perspective: Umeå University's handling of work environment and equal opportunities issues related to students has been shown to have major flaws. One of the problems has been the lack of a university-wide function that staff can turn to with questions concerning employer responsibility for ensuring a sustainable student life (the work environment incl. accessibility and equal opportunities). Many other universities have functions at their student services or human resources offices tasked with working with work environment and equal opportunities from an education provider perspective, including the University of Gothenburg and Chalmers University of Technology. It is recommended that Umeå University should also appoint a student work environment and equal opportunities coordinator, preferably based at the Student Services Office or, if not, the Human Resources Office. This function should be the central point of contact for work environment and equal opportunities issues as they relate to students and the University's role as an education provider. Duties should include university-wide communication on relevant matters and chairing the Sustainable Student Life Committee (see below), which will be linked to the Strategic Council for Work Environment and Equal Opportunities.

The appointment of the Sustainable Student Life Committee linked to the Strategic Council for Work Environment and Equal Opportunities: There is currently one student social welfare group at Umeå University that deals with work environment matters concerning students. This group is not however considered to be particularly effective and its mandate is unclear, hence its replacement in this proposal with the Sustainable Student Life Committee.



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The idea of creating a committee focused on the student and education provider perspective (see 5.1.b) is to strengthen the student perspective in the University's overarching work environment and equal opportunities activities. When matters are prepared and developed on the new committee, the student perspective should be strengthened not only on the Strategic Council for Work Environment and Equal Opportunities but also on the Work Environment Committee when it deals with student-related matters. It will also strengthen the education provider perspective, as the Chair of the Sustainable Student Life Committee (also the student work environment and equal opportunities coordinator) is a member of the council alongside the student union representative. As the student representative changes each year, the student work environment and equal opportunities coordinator will naturally provide continuity on such matters. The committee should therefore be more muscular than the existing student social welfare group. In addition to the Chair, the new Sustainable Student Life Committee should have representatives from all student unions, including a representative of doctoral students, those responsible for accessibility and the Student Health Service at the Student Services Office and any other relevant individuals/functions.

Reinforce the Student Health Service in dealing with conflicts within student groups: Should conflicts arise in the workplace in relation to the work environment and equal opportunities, support is available to employees of Umeå University from the Human Resources Office and the occupational health service. However, no equivalent support is available when similar conflicts arise in student groups. The Student Health Service only offers support to students, not to teachers who must deal with conflicts in teaching activities, in student groups and between students. It is therefore recommended that the Student Health Service be reinforced with an organisational psychologist whose priority is to work with conflicts in student groups.

Review the Quality System for Education to further strengthen the work environment and equal opportunities perspective: While student influence, gender equality and sustainable development permeate the *Quality System for Education at Umeå University* (FS 1.1-1324-18), it may be necessary to complement these values with an equal opportunities perspective. The extent to which work environment and equal opportunities issues are addressed in course and programme evaluations, student surveys and external reviews must be ascertained. The Strategic Council for Education should therefore review the quality system from a work environment and equal opportunities perspective, as well as in relation to the *Active Measures* project.

d) *Strengthen and gather resources for work environment and equal opportunities support at the Human Resources Office.*

The importance of a central work environment and equal opportunities strategy and support team: The present strategists at the Human Resources Office provide important support for work environment and equal opportunities issues from an employer perspective, especially in systematic work environment management and work with active measures. These individuals can also offer after-the-fact support to heads of department in cases of harassment, discrimination or victimisation. For preventive purposes, it is recommended that a support team be established at university-wide level (a project to do just this is already underway) similar to the work already done at Lund University (where it is called Systematic Preventive Work Against Discrimination). The question of whether the physical work environment and health and safety should also be gathered at the Human Resources Office requires further investigation.



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Develop/procure a competence development package: The reinforcement of university-wide resources also requires the Human Resources Office to procure and develop a package of comprehensive central training courses, seminars and workshops aimed at staff who support work environment and equal opportunities activities at various levels, as well as to reinforce the work environment and equal opportunities perspective in existing onboarding courses and courses for heads of department and other managers.

- e) Allocate resources at university-wide (and faculty) level to strengthen work environment and equal opportunities resources.*

The recommendations of this inquiry cannot be implemented without additional resources, particularly at university-wide level, in the form of additional staff working on work environment and equal opportunities issues, including some new recruitment and the allocation of more time for existing staff. An increased budget for procuring and implementing training courses, seminars and workshops (and other projects and activities) is also required.

5.2 Recommendations at faculty level

Umeå University should strengthen the support for work environment and equal opportunities issues offered by faculties to departments. This could advantageously be achieved by taking the following measures:

- a) Each faculty should appoint one of its deans to take specific responsibility for work environment and equal opportunities issues.*

This may be the dean themselves or a deputy dean/associate dean. This individual will then represent the faculty on the Vice-Chancellor's Strategic Council for Work Environment and Equal Opportunities (5.1.b) and lead the equivalent group at the faculty (see 5.2.c below).

- b) Each faculty should have administrators with responsibility for work environment and equal opportunities issues.*

These administrators (with increased responsibility, possibly designated as coordinators) should have this responsibility as at least part of their duties. Work environment and equal opportunities responsibility may be shared between two people. Depending on the size and complexity of the faculty, at least 50% (but preferably 100%) of a full-time post should be dedicated to these issues. A good example is provided by the Faculty of Science and Technology, which has a project in which one administrator is responsible for both work environment and equal opportunities at 100% of a full-time post. This has strengthened the area considerably. It would be beneficial to make this project permanent.

- c) Each faculty should create a work environment and equal opportunities group consisting of the responsible dean/deputy dean/associate dean, the faculty's administrator (coordinator) and HR support.*

This group can also be reinforced with experts, student representatives and possibly teacher representatives with work environment (or equal opportunities) responsibility from other councils and committees at the faculty (similar to the organisation already in place at the Faculty of Medicine). The idea behind this group is that it can act as the heart between the



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head and feet, gaining support at faculty level for issues raised on the Strategic Council for Work Environment and Equal Opportunities but also keeping an ear to the ground for questions raised in the organisation/departments that can be referred back to the strategic council. In this way, the perceived gap between the various levels of the University can be bridged. The main task of these faculty groups should be preventive measures, from both an employer and education provider perspective. This includes looking at what specific support the faculty can offer to departments/offices (in addition to the university-wide support organised via the Human Resources Office, see 5.1.d). Examples of what this specific support might look like are given in the next section (5.2.d).

d) Every faculty should support the individuals with work environment and equal opportunities roles and responsibilities at departmental/office level.

In addition to supporting and advising on general work environment and equal opportunities activities and performing preventive work such as planning systematic work environment management and active measures, the support offered by faculties may include specific skills development activities such as network meetings, team meetings (see 5.3.d), workshops, guest lectures and seminars. The Human Resources Office is responsible for overarching training courses related to the work environment and equal opportunities (see 5.1.d).

e) Every faculty should work to improve support for the education provider perspective.

The faculty's Work Environment and Equal Opportunities Groups will also be specifically tasked with supporting the functions/roles at faculty and departmental level that need to monitor relevant issues as they affect the faculty's students. Above all, this involves supporting programme councils, programme coordinators and study counsellors in taking greater responsibility for the work environment and equal opportunities of the students enrolled in their programmes, and similarly heads of department and directors of studies for students on freestanding courses.

5.3 Recommendations at departmental level

Umeå University should clarify roles and responsibilities for work environment and equal opportunities activities at departmental level and create working methods that benefit cooperation on work environment and equal opportunities. This could advantageously be achieved by taking the following measures:

a) Clarify roles and responsibilities for work environment and equal opportunities activities at departmental level.

Each department should appoint one of its management team to take specific responsibility for work environment and equal opportunities issues. This may be the head of department or a deputy head of department. The faculty must not assume the role that should be played by functions such as equal opportunities representatives or local HR staff in supporting heads of department on local work environment and equal opportunities issues. However, the faculty should provide more coordinated and supplementary support. Nor should support for work environment and equal opportunities issues be combined in a single function. The head of department, HR support, work environment representatives and equal opportunities



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representatives need to understand their individual roles, but cooperate in the best interests of the organisation.

- Ultimate responsibility rests with the *head of department*.
- *HR* should support the head of department on work environment and equal opportunities issues, especially when the matter is staff-related and concerns the employer's legal obligation to conduct systematic work environment management and take active measures.
- At departmental level, the *equal opportunities representative* is indispensable and cannot be replaced by HR. The equal opportunities representative provides support to the head of department and contributes to supporting equal opportunities in the University's core operations of education and research, and in matters such as recruitment, staffing, assignments, funding, etc. This implies that, at departmental level, this role should be held by a teacher/researcher. If more than one equal opportunities representative is appointed, one may be a technical or administrative staff member. Gender balance is also to be strived for. Of course, at University Administration both may be a technical or administrative staff member. The number of hours allocated should at least remain at the current level.

PLEASE NOTE! As the role of equal opportunities representative is ill-defined and often misunderstood, it is recommended that the title be changed from "representative" to something else (equal opportunities support, equal opportunities officer, equal opportunities ambassador, or similar). The term *representative* suggests that someone's interests are being represented, such as an employee in the form of colleagues at the department. This is not the task of the equal opportunities representative, whose role is to be aware of important aspects of equal opportunities in the workplace and support the preventive work of the head of department.

- The role of work environment representative cannot be dispensed with as it is equivalent to the statutory requirement for a safety representative in the Work Environment Act. The function of the role should remain the same as it is today. Work environment representatives are appointed by a trade union and are therefore not mandated by the head of department, although they may act as a sounding board for the head of department on work environment issues. However, it is important that these three support functions work together with the head of department to ensure that the department's work with work environment and equal opportunities activities is cohesive.

PLEASE NOTE! Umeå University is conducting the project *Active Measures* in parallel with this inquiry. *Active Measures* is studying how the University's statutory work on the grounds for discrimination and active measures described in the Discrimination Act can be accommodated under the umbrella of systematic work environment management, in which case they may well fall within the future remit of the Work Environment Committee and work environment representatives. The discussion is therefore left at that in this inquiry.

- b) *Strengthen heads of department's knowledge of and engagement in work environment and equal opportunities issues.*



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Heads of department's engagement in and knowledge of work environment and equal opportunities issues can be strengthened by overhauling existing management and leadership training courses, seminars and the like to develop relevant content (see 5.1.d and 5.2.d). Once this knowledge and engagement has been increased, it must be supplemented by good support for heads of department on these issues (see 5.3.c).

- c) Expand and clarify support for heads of department on work environment and equal opportunities issues at departmental (and faculty and university-wide) level.*

Support to heads of department can primarily be strengthened by clarifying roles and responsibilities at departmental level (see 5.3.a), creating work environment and equal opportunities teams (see 5.3.d) and increasing faculty and university-wide support (see under each level).

- d) Create teams to work proactively on work environment and equal opportunities issues at departmental level.*

In the interests of working proactively with work environment and equal opportunities issues, teams should be created at departmental level from individuals with relevant roles, responsibilities and mandates. In addition to the head of department, the team members should include equal opportunities representatives (preferably with a new title), work environment representatives and HR. These teams may be reinforced by student representation (e.g., the student work environment representative), experts or other individuals/functions as necessary. The task of work environment and equal opportunities teams is to work preventively and in the long term at departmental level, from both an employer and an education provider perspective.

PLEASE NOTE! It is suggested that small departments/offices collaborate with other departments or in some other way on work environment and equal opportunities issues, by agreement with the dean (or immediate manager).

5.4 Summary

As this inquiry was specifically tasked with examining the three points below, each point is briefly summarised and commented on, with references to where in the inquiry these aspects are dealt with in greater detail.

- The possibility of merging the Work Environment Committee and the Strategic Council for Equal Opportunities and to report on the pros and cons of doing so.

Section 5.1.b describes how work environment and equal opportunities issues can be integrated in a new Strategic Council for Work Environment and Equal Opportunities, but with the Working Environment Committee preserved in its current form as a committee of the new council. An additional committee, the Sustainable Student Life Committee, is established to strengthen the education provider perspective. The advantage of this new proposal is that the work environment and equal opportunities will be freed from their respective silos and a new unified values-based approach taken to these issues. Another benefit is that the new overarching council avoids the risk of creating a large, unwieldy and sprawling entity by merging the present Strategic Council for Equal Opportunities with the Work Environment Committee. The sense that the tone is being set at the top will also be



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strengthened by the new council, as its members will include the responsible deputy vice-chancellor and deans (or deputy or associate deans) with responsibility for work environment and equal opportunities issues at each faculty. One possible drawback might be that gender equality and equal opportunities will have to share space with more general issues concerning core values, the work environment, social sustainability and accessibility. However, as many of these aspects are interlinked, this drawback should be outweighed by the benefits of integrating work environment and equal opportunities issues.

- The division of tasks, roles and responsibilities for work environment and equal opportunities activities at different organisational levels.

The proposed division of tasks, roles, responsibilities is described in sections 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3. There are also proposals to change certain titles and existing tasks and positions, as well as to create new positions in the field of work environment and equal opportunities. That said, a parallel project, *Active Measures*, is underway that to some extent may affect the content of and division of responsibility for the work environment and equal opportunities. This being the case, it is not possible for this inquiry to deal with the matter in detail. In the next stage, responsibilities and tasks will need to be further clarified in various instructions for the council and committees, etc.

- How the student perspective can be integrated into the organisation to better effect.

This inquiry contributes to strengthening the education provider perspective, and to better integrating the student perspective and student support into the organisation, in a number of ways. Most of this is described in section 5.1.c concerning university-wide measures, although certain aspects are also covered at faculty level in section 5.2.e and departmental level in section 5.3.d. The most comprehensive recommendations deal with appointing a coordinator with specific responsibility for work environment and equal opportunities issues related to the University's duties as an education provider, to be based at the Student Services Office, the creation of the Sustainable Student Life Committee linked to the new strategic council, and reinforcing the Student Services Office with an occupational psychologist to deal with conflicts in student groups.

Umeå, 12 January 2023

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