



EQUAL4EUROPE

GENDER EQUALITY PLANS

Position paper and recommendations
for accreditation agencies to
incorporate gender equality as part of
the “ethics and societal contribution”
of the business schools

D8.3

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AACSB – Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business

AMBA – Association of MBAs

DBA – Doctorate in Business Administration

EFMD – European Foundation for Management Development

HRS4R – Human Resources Strategy for Researchers

MBA – Master of business administration

MBM – Master of Business Management

OTM-R – Open, Transparent and Merit-Based Recruitment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The integration of gender equality in the assessment schemes for excellence accreditation and research awards can be a relevant driver to foster the implementation of gender-sensitive measures in business schools throughout the EU.

With this perspective, this position paper (Deliverable 8.3) analyses the current status of incorporation of gender equality in ethics and societal contribution required to business schools, as an element to obtain three of the most important and world leading excellence accreditations (EQUIS of EFMD; Business Accreditation of AACSB; and MBA of AMBA) and the EU HR Excellence in Research Award.

This analysis starts breaking down the ethics and societal contribution of business schools in its four main relevant dimensions, according to international literature and standards: (i) governance; (ii) research and teaching; (iii) community engagement and societal impact; and (iv) workforce management (Section 1).

At a later stage, the position paper outlines the main features of the relevant EFMD, AACSB and AMBA accreditation schemes (Section 2), as well as of the EU HR Excellence in Research Award (Section 3), investigating how they address the aforementioned four dimensions of ethics and societal contribution of applying business schools from a gender-sensitive perspective.

The outcome of this study reveals that gender equality is already partially integrated in the aforementioned assessment schemes for excellence accreditations and awards, through different methodologies. Among them, the most interesting is the one adopted by EFMD and AACSB, that recalls the one employed by EU institutions for gender mainstreaming, and is based on a twin-track scheme (i) dealing with gender equality as a cross-cutting principle that business schools should address in all the narrative included in their application, and (ii) establishing more specific requirements in priority policy areas (Section 4, par. 4.1).

Focusing on these specific requirements, the dimensions of ethics and societal contribution of business schools that they most address are research and teaching – especially for criteria to ensure students a gender-sensitive learning environment and to share with them gender equality values – and workforce management. Conversely, spaces for improvement have been identified for further and different measures, especially relating to gender equality in research and teaching, to governance and community engagement.

Starting from these outcomes, and building on expert advice, on research outputs of the EQUAL4EUROPE project, and on studies of other relevant EU projects and of professional associations, the position paper finally outlines 12 recommendations – dealing with methodology and with specific requirements – to improve and strengthen the integration of gender equality in the ethics and societal contribution required by accreditation agencies and by the EU HR Excellence in Research Award (Section 4, par. 4.2).

1. INTRODUCTION

For many years, improving ethics and societal contribution of organizations has been a priority for EU institutions, aiming at creating a more cohesive society, as well as to foster sustainability and innovation (European Commission, 2023) and to contribute to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2023). These policies often draw more attention when they are directed to business organizations. Nonetheless, higher education institutions are not exempted from this effort, although from a different perspective.

Ethical and societal contribution of business organizations – under the label of Corporate Social Responsibility (European Commission, 2011) and of Responsible Business Conduct (OECD, 2018) – mostly deal with the impact that they have in the surrounding society. For higher education institutions, and in particular for business schools, the role to play is, instead, threefold, and dealing with **education**, to transmit to students those values related to ethical and responsible behaviour that they will bring with themselves and implement when entered in the labour market; with **research**, to contribute to the improvement of policies fostering ethical and societal contribution of organizations, addressing emerging issues; and with the **surrounding society**, aiming at preventing negative impacts of higher education institutions on everyday business, as well as at promoting positive values, like sustainable development, social justice, and human rights (Luangsay-Catelin and Gasner-Bouquet, 2018, pp. 151-153).

The ethics and societal contribution of higher education institutions, thus, closely recalls **the definition provided by the EU-USR project of “University Societal Responsibility”**. That is, the “responsibilities of universities for the impacts of their decisions and activities on society and the environment through transparent and ethical strategies”, which includes promoting among students and staff – even through concrete policies – values as “justice, equality, participative democracy, social responsibility and sustainability”, as well as contributing to sustainable development and to build a “health and welfare of society”, recognizing “expectations from stakeholders”, and complying with “applicable law and international norms of behaviour” (Amorim, Arenas, Burgos et al., 2015, p. 3).

Building on the research conducted by the EU-USR project, on the international standard ISO 26000 providing guidelines for social responsibility, and on related studies adjusted to higher education institutions, this position paper will assume as relevant for the ethics and societal contribution of higher education institutions four areas: (i) governance; (ii) research and teaching; (iii) community engagement and societal impact; (iv) fair workplace practices and workforce management.

Table 1. Outline of the four dimensions of ethics and societal contribution of higher education institutions

Governance	- Main institutional policies, strategies, and processes of business schools (<i>Ibidem</i> , 2015, p. 11).
Research and teaching	- Core academic activities of a higher education institution, like academic curricula, teaching and research practices and recruitment of students (Amorim, Arenas, Burgos et al., 2015, p. 11)
Community engagement and societal impact	- Core academic activities focused on cooperation with external stakeholders, as well as addressing civil society and communities of practices, and supporting the creation of an equitable and diverse community with a good quality of life (Ross, 2013).
Workforce management	- Measures to ensure decent and fair working conditions, and to prevent any form of discrimination (Amorim, Arenas, Burgos et al., 2015, p. 13).

Sources: Amorim, Arenas, Burgos et al., 2015; Ross, 2013.

Adopting a gender-sensitive perspective, **gender equality seems to be cross-cutting among the dimensions where higher education institutions develop their ethical and societal contribution.** Studies carried out by recent EU projects, including EQUAL4EUROPE, indeed show that gender equality can be integrated in the institutional governance, as an example through gender-impact assessments and gender budgeting (Takkenberg, Dijkstra, Kardijk, 2022), as well as in research and teaching – for instance adopting – while carrying out these activities – a gender-sensitive approach contrasting stereotypes (Thege, Schmeck and van Elsacker, 2020; Mihajlović Trbovc and Hofman, 2015). As of workforce management, gender sensitive recruitment and promotion policies, as well as other solutions aimed at removing obstacles of career progression of women academics, could serve this purpose (Vassilopoulou, Takkenberg, Miedtank, 2021; Legisa and Miller, 2018; Salminen-Karlsson, 2016). Finally, also the higher education institutions projection towards the civil society seems suitable for a gender-sensitive dimension, as showed by higher education institutions initiatives to sensitize policymakers on the importance of a further integration of gender equality in the implementation of EU strategies to recover from crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic (Linková, Kolasinska, Cibin et al., 2022).

Combining the two plans, an effective implementation of ethics and societal duties of higher education institutions could also foster gender equality in these organizations, both regarding their internal policies and their external projection.

From a practical perspective, however, a uniform framework of legal obligations for fostering at EU-level a gender-sensitive ethic and societal contribution of higher education institutions is still absent (Luangsay-Catelin and Gasner-Bouquet, 2018, pp. 151-153). Nonetheless, for **business schools**, a significant driver in this sense could come from excellence accreditations, that such organizations pursue for their prestige and to increase their capability to attract students, researchers, and funds. A similar role could play, in the correspondents filed of action, awards relating to human resources practices, like the HR Excellence in Research Award.

With this perspective in mind, this position paper aims to analyse if and how gender equality is integrated in the ethics and societal contribution required to business schools – also as part of a wider sample of eligible organizations, like higher education institutions in general – by some of the most relevant excellence accreditation schemes worldwide providing, when needed, some recommendations to improve it.

For this purpose, the position paper will be divided in four sections. Section 2 and 3 are dedicated to assessing the gender-sensitive dimension, respectively, of the requirements for ethics and societal contribution of business schools included in the main accreditation schemes of three world-leading agencies – EFMD (European Foundation for Management Development), the AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) and the AMBA (Association of MBAs) –, and of the EU Human Resources Strategy for Researchers. Building on this analysis, the following Section is aimed at providing recommendations on how to improve the gender equality dimension integrated in ethics and societal contribution required by these accreditation schemes, explaining their rationale, and establishing benchmarks. Section 5, finally, will provide a brief recap of the main findings of the paper, through an easy-to-use bullet point list summarizing the key recommendations.

2. GENDER-SENSITIVE ETHICS AND SOCIETAL CONTRIBUTION IN EXCELLENCE ACCREDITATIONS

In the framework of actions to mainstream gender equality in higher education institutions, a comprehensive integration of a gender-sensitive dimension in ethics and societal requirements of the most relevant accreditation schemes seems a significant issue. Thanks to the growing importance of such instruments to distinguish business schools and allow them to become more attractive, this could be a significant driver for further efforts to integrate gender equality in internal and external policies of these higher education institutions. Furthermore, the integration of a gender equality dimension in the relevant sections of the most prestigious accreditation schemes could work as a coordination tool, promoting a homogeneous development of such policies in the EU-27 Member States.

The purpose of this section, thus, is to assess the current gender equality dimension of ethical and societal contribution required by the assessment schemes of three excellence and international accreditations for business schools:

- **EQUIS standards & criteria**, that is the accreditation criteria for international business schools established by EFMD, a global membership-driven organisation dedicated to management development, based in Brussels, and counting 977 institutional members, covering 90 countries worldwide (EFMD, 2022, p. 53).
- **The 2020 Guiding Principles and Standards for Business Accreditation** of AACSB, a global membership association for the business education industry operating in the United States, European Union, and Singapore, and providing quality assurance to more than 950 business schools worldwide (AACSB, 2022).
- **The MBA standards of AMBA**, a British entity providing global standards for MBA, Doctoral-level and Master’s qualifications, accrediting programmes from the top 2% of Business Schools in over 75 countries (AMBA, 2023).

In drafting this positions paper, space reasons required to limit the sample of world-leading accreditations for business schools – that also includes, among others, ACBSP (Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs) accreditation framework, CEEMAN IQA (International Quality Accreditation), and the IACBE (International Accreditation Council for Business Education) accreditation framework – to the three mentioned above. This selection has been conducted following three specific criteria:

- **International profile**, covering all EU-27 Member States, as well as countries beyond EU. Indeed, currently, 215 business schools in 45 countries hold the EFMD accreditation (EFMD, 2023), 1003 business schools in 63 countries hold the AACSB accreditation (AACSB, 2023), and 301 business schools in 60 countries have programmes holding at least one of the three AMBA accreditations (AMBA, 2023a).
- **Excellence**, that is high-standing and demanding requirements, confirmed by the fact that just 1% of worldwide business school have been awarded with the three selected accreditations at the same time, the so-called Triple Crown (MBA Today, 2023). So, representing an important achievement, stimulating a wide range of these higher education organizations to try to comply with relevant requirements.
- The presence of a widely recognised **solid and effective evaluation system**, which could set benchmarks also for the less frequent accreditation schemes for higher education institutions that are not business schools. Solidity and effectivity are confirmed by the fact that both the academic context (Jacqmin and

Lefebvre, 2021; Miles, Grimmer and McClure Franklin, 2014) and specialised information channels (MBA Today, 2023), consider EFMD, AACSB and AMBA accreditations as the most prestigious and relevant.

In the light of the above, the positions paper addresses the EQUIS, AACSB and AMBA schemes, without excluding that further studies might enlarge the scope of the analysis, also including some other world-leading accreditations, starting from those ones mentioned above.

From a practical perspective, after an overview on the functioning of each of the three selected accreditation schemes and on its assessment criteria, the following analysis will outline their gender-sensitive requirements in the four areas identified in Table 1 as relevant for ethical and societal contribution of business schools: (i) governance; (ii) research and teaching; (iii) community engagement and societal impact; and (iv) workforce management.

As a general rule, **none of the gender-sensitive requirements currently integrated in the three aforementioned schemes is mandatory, by itself**, to be awarded with the EFMD, AACSB or AMBA accreditation. Nonetheless, **all of them are considered in the assessment of ethics and societal contribution of applying institutions, in the framework of the analysed accreditation criteria**. Furthermore, all three accreditation systems, in spite of their differences, are conceived as **quality improvement systems**, whose fundamental aim is a continuous betterment of the institution. In this view, the final accreditation only represents the visible part of the process, demonstrating to external stakeholders that a school is characterized by certain aspects of excellence. However, the quality improvement process does not stop at the awarding ceremony. When a school is conferred an accreditation (whether as an initial accreditation or a renewal), it also receives a list of suggested improvements on which it will have to report regular progress. **It means concretely that an institution that has obtained an accreditation even though underperforming regarding gender sensitive requirements will be asked to demonstrate, in the future, regular improvements in the domain**. Therefore, increasing or strengthening the presence of gender-sensitive requirements in these accreditation schemes, according to the 12 recommendations outlined in Section 4.2, will increase the likelihood that applying institution will implement effective gender-sensitive policies relevant in the field of their ethics and societal commitment, to have higher chances to get/maintain their accreditations.

2.1. EFMD EQUIS STANDARDS & CRITERIA

The EQUIS scheme of EFMD was launched in 1997, and consists of an institutional accreditation, covering organizations providing business and management education as free-standing business institutions, or as part of a wider entity (like a university or foundation), provided that the unit applying for the accreditation enjoys a meaningful autonomy in setting its agenda and managing its budget, and disposes of a dedicated faculty and administrative staff. Under these conditions, any form of business school – private or public, generalist or focused on a specific segment like executive education – can apply for the EQUIS accreditation. Note that an MBA programme is not a precondition for entry in this assessment scheme (EFMD, 2023a, p. 6).

Table 2. Main features of the EQUIS accreditation scheme

Main eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Being a degree awarding institution operating for at least 10 years. - Have significant recognition in the home market for at least two areas of activity. - International reputation and a programme portfolio including at least two programmes between Bachelor, Master, MBA, PhD, and Executive Education.
Main steps of the evaluation process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report based on a self-assessment carried out by the institution. - Report drafted by a team of peer reviewers after an in person visit.
General assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluation of the academic quality of the business school, based on five main criteria (Programmes; Students; Faculty; Research and Development; and Resources and administration; see EFMD, 2023a, Chapters 2-5, and 7). - Assessment according to three cross-cutting criteria (Internationalization, Connections with Practice, and Ethics, Responsibility and Sustainability; EFMD, 2023a, Chapter 8-10).

Sources: EFMD, 2023a, EFMD, 2023b; EFMD, 2023c. Information contained in this table refers to the proceeding for schools that do not already hold the AACSB accreditation.

Ethics and societal contribution in EQUIS accreditation scheme and its gender-sensitive dimension

From a general perspective, **ethics and societal contribution** of a business school has quite relevant role in the EQUIS scheme. Chapter 9 about Ethics, Responsibility and Sustainability, indeed, has a **transversal nature** across all the accreditation process. In this view, an institution should, in its application, explain its ethical and societal commitment – according to the elements included in Chapter 9 – in the narrative addressing all the other criteria relevant for EQUIS accreditation (EFMD, 2023a, p. 7).

Table 3. Main contents of Chapter 9 about Ethics, Responsibility and Sustainability of EQUIS scheme

Governance and institutional management	Requires an explicit commitment to ethics, responsibility and sustainability in the institutional vision and mission, its active promotion by school’s stakeholders and support by the school of relevant international networks or charters. Furthermore, the applying school is required to ensure that internal operations are developed with respect for sustainability and inclusion.
Student and educational related policies and activities	It consists of integration of ethics, responsibility and sustainability in admission criteria, extra-curricular and non-curricular activities, as well as in the design process of educational offerings of the business school and in the assessment of its programmes.
Research	Refers both to the adoption of research ethic policies as well as to ethics, responsibility, and sustainability as a topic for research production, dissemination, and funding.
Community engagement	Entails outreach activities and collaboration with external stakeholders promoting ethics, responsibility, and sustainability – like NGOs, business, and community-based organizations – and internal stakeholders participating in the public debate, for instance on medias.

Source: EFMD, 2023, pp. 78-80.

As emerges from Table 3, among the elements included in Chapter 9, there is a **wide-ranging gender-sensitive requirement**. Chapter 9 subsection about Governance and institutional management establishes, indeed, that an applying school is expected to show an integration of inclusion in all its internal operations (EFMD, 2023a, p. 78). This requirement seems to **implicitly value the integration of gender equality in any internal policy/operation of the institution, providing, thus, gender equality with a cross-cutting dimension in the framework of the EQUIS scheme**. In this view, if a school can show that it has implemented gender-sensitive policies in any area addressed by the assessment, it will be positively assessed.

More specific gender-related criteria are included in the EQUIS scheme, and deal with the four areas of ethics and societal contribution outlined in Table 1.

- First, the requirement to show “*a growing diverse and inclusive students body*”, “*representing a diversity of backgrounds and nationalities*” (EFMD, 2023a, p. 79), also providing information describing “*the current student population in terms of [...] gender*” (EFMD, 2023a, p. 33, 37) seems relevant for **governance**, as well as the requirement to prevent any risk of discrimination (EQUIS 2023, Section 9, p. 78).
- Furthermore, the gender dimension of EQUIS ethics and societal requirements focus on **workforce management**, and especially on faculty and staff **selection, promotion, and recruitment practices**. Section 9, indeed, requires business schools to have established “*management policies related to staff recruitment and promotions*” which “*demonstrate advancing inclusion, respect for diversity, prohibition of any discrimination*” (EFMD, 2023a, p. 78). Schools should also provide an outline of policies on recruitment and evaluation of faculty members (EFMD, 2023a, p. 41), integrating this information with data on the gender mix of faculty (EFMD, 2023a, p. 39). Moreover, Section 9 address also **fair workplace practices**, considering relevant for accreditation the implementation by schools of a staff wellness plan and of “*adequate infrastructures to support specific needs*” such as “*childcare*” (EFMDa, 2023, p. 78), that seem to have quite a relevant gender equality implication.
- A bridge between gender sensitive ethical requirements in the area of fair workplace practices and those relating to **research and teaching**, finally, is represented by a criterion dealing with faculty workload issue. Here applying schools shall ensure that faculty core member workload is balanced especially in key areas including **direct teaching and tutoring**, as well as programme administration and service to the wider community (EFMD, 2023a, p. 41). This criterion has indirect relevant implications for gender equality because a balanced workload can prevent, for instance, that people from one gender are excluded from some tasks relevant for their career progression, or avoid that they are overburdened with tasks that are not relevant for their career progression (Babcock, Peyser, Vesterlund et al., 2022).

In light of the above, **the gender equality dimension of the EQUIS ethics and societal contribution required to business school has, first, a transversal dimension**, concerning at least all the internal operations of the school. Furthermore, it **seems to specifically embrace three of the four relevant areas outlined in Table 1: (i) research and teaching; (ii) governance; and (iii) fair workplace practices**. As related to the fourth area – that is, **community engagement** – gender equality might have relevance if integrated in the internal policy for societal contribution of the school, as per the effect of the cross-cutting gender-sensitive principle included in Chapter 9. Nonetheless, explicit assessment criteria promoting gender equality in this domain seem absent.

2.2. AACSB 2020 GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS FOR BUSINESS ACCREDITATION

The current AACSB Standards for business schools have been introduced in 2020, and consist of an institutional accreditation, directed to whole higher education institutions – so, covering all of its business degrees at the bachelor’s level or higher – or to academic units as part of a larger organization (AACSB, 2023a, p. 11-12). AACSB

standard adopted in 2020 were the result of a revision process that, among other changes, was especially aimed to integrate diversity and inclusion as core values of the accreditation scheme (AACSB, 2020).

The accreditation process aims to foster quality of education and impactful research, leadership, and support for change, also through engagement with professional context, and commitment to diversity and inclusion (AACSB, 2023a, p. 9). Business schools offering at least a bachelor’s degree in business administration, management or accounting may apply for the accreditation.

Table 4. Main features of the AACSB 2020 accreditation scheme

Main eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Having a sufficient number of full-time faculty – normally at least 16 – to support the mission, strategies and expected outcomes of the school. - Not to be in probation or under an investigation related to a significant legal or ethical breach. - Having a majority of programmes that have produced graduates during two consecutive years.
Main steps of the evaluation process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AACSB appoints a mentor that guides the school through the process. - Self-evaluation report and a strategic plan for the alignment of the institution with the AACSB Guiding Principles and accreditation Standards. - Self-evaluation report on the implementation of the strategic plan. - In-person visit of an AACSB evaluation team, to assess progresses made.
General assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide evidence of the school commitment to the AACSB core values, reflected on the Guiding Principles and Expectations for Accredited School, including Ethics and integrity; Societal impact; and Diversity and Inclusion. - Assessment considering the alignment of the school with Standards for accreditation, structured around three main areas: (i) Strategic Management and Innovation; (ii) Learner Success; (iii) Thought Leadership, Engagement and Societal Impact.

Source: AACSB, 2023a; AACSB, 2023b; AACSB, 2023c. Information contained in this table refers to the proceeding for schools that do not already hold the AACSB accreditation.

Ethical and societal contribution in AACSB accreditation scheme and its gender-sensitive dimension

The AACSB accreditation is structured around a series of Guiding Principles, outlining the ideals to which business school should adhere to, and the Standards for accreditation, that is the specific and principle-based requirements that applying schools are expected to satisfy to be awarded with accreditation. From a general perspective, AACSB criteria includes important elements fostering the ethical and societal contribution of applying business schools, with an integrated gender-sensitive dimension.

First, **Ethics and Integrity, Societal Impact and Diversity and Inclusion** are elements of the AACSB Guiding Principles and Expectations for Accredited Schools (AACSB, 2023a, pp. 17-19), that is the **mandatory and transversal guidelines** shaping behaviours and attitudes of accredited schools, and relevant to be awarded with accreditation.

Table 5. Ethics and integrity, Societal impact, and Diversity and inclusion as described in the AACSB Guiding Principles

Ethics and integrity	The school should have policies attesting a strong emphasis to ethical behaviour by learners, faculty, and staff, as well as mechanisms for identifying and remedying cases of misconduct.
Societal impact	It includes some requirements for making a good contribution to society through business education. Among them, the school is expected to have a curriculum including some components related to societal impact, and to have a contributions’ portfolio dealing with this topic. The applying institution should also promote activities aimed at making a positive societal impact.

Diversity and Inclusion	Given that diversity is a driver to enhance education experience and pave the way to excellence in business education, schools applying for the AACSB accreditation should demonstrate a commitment to advancing diversity and inclusion. Measures to foster awareness, acceptance and respect for diverse viewpoints are relevant to align with this guiding principle.
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Source: AACSB, 2023a.

Contents reported in Table 5 suggest that ethics and societal contribution is a cross-cutting element of the assessment carried out by AACSB. Gender equality, instead, is not directly mentioned in the Guiding Principles. Nonetheless, it could be considered integrated therein as an element of **diversity and inclusion** (Table 5), which valorises diversity as an element which “enhances the educational experience and encourages excellence in every business education program” and encourage schools to adopt measures to “foster awareness [...] acceptance and respect for diverse viewpoints”.

In this way, gender equality becomes a transversal sub-principle that applying schools may consider addressing in all dimensions of their application for AACSB accreditation, to increase their chances to be awarded with the accreditation. Although not formally integrated in the Guiding principles about Ethics and Integrity and of Societal Impact, this transversal nature of gender equality makes it relevant also for the dimensions of ethics and societal contribution of business schools, as outlined in Table 1, Section 1.

Besides cross-cutting principles, more specific criteria promoting the integration of gender equality in ethics and societal contribution of business schools can be found in the Standards for accreditation (AACSB, 2023a, pp. 21-64). In this framework, Table 6 outlines the gender-sensitive elements of the Standards for accreditation as well relevant for the four dimensions of ethics and societal contribution of business schools identified in Table 1, Section 1.

Table 6. Gender-sensitive accreditation criteria in the four relevant dimensions of ethics and societal contribution

Research and teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indicate how faculty is prepared to teach in an inclusive environment (Teaching, Standard 7, pp. 53-54). - Outline measures to support learners from underrepresented population – also in terms of gender – when they are failing to progress towards degree completion (Teaching, Standard 6, p. 51). - Document advances in diversity and inclusion achieved by former post-graduate students, as a witness of the sound background provided by the higher education institution (Teaching, Standard 6, p. 52).
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schools encouraged to describe the solutions adopted to attract and retain diverse students with an inclusive perspective (Standard 6, p. 50).
Community engagement/ societal impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The strategic plan of the school should focus on promoting diversity (Standard 1, p. 25). - The portfolio of intellectual contributions of the institution should include research outputs with a positive societal impact consistent with the school’s mission and strategic plan (Standard 8, p. 59). Therefore, as per the Guiding Principles described above, also promoting of diversity and inclusion.
Workforce management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School shall include documentation on hiring practices and evaluation systems supporting diversity and inclusion (Workforce management, Standard 2, p. 29). - Schools should have implemented (Implicit reference to fair workplace practices, Standard 3, p. 36): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Transparent evaluation and promotion processes o Appropriate workload allocation model (relevant also for Research and Teaching) o Measures about mentoring and inclusive development practices for faculty/staff.

Source: AACSB, 2023a.

In the light of the above, gender equality seems already integrated – at least partially – in ethics and societal contribution required to business schools applying for the AACSB accreditation. First, gender equality has a

transversal dimension, as included in the Guiding Principles for accreditation, even though not expressly but as an implicit element of Diversity and Inclusion. In addition, more specific gender-sensitive requirements are presented in the Standards for accreditation, especially in the area of **workforce management** and of **inclusive learning environment** and **support for students**. References to gender equality addressing governance and community engagements/societal impact are, conversely, more episodic, while they are implicit – but significant – as regards further fair workplace practices.

2.3. AMBA MBA ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

The AMBA accreditation service was established more than 50 years ago to certify those post-graduate programmes of business schools that offer the highest standard of teaching and learning, as well as to demonstrate best practices and reflect changing trends and innovation in postgraduate management education (AMBA, 2022). AMBA accreditation schemes are three, relating respectively to (i) MBA programmes (AMBA, 2023b), (ii) MBM programmes – that is, those post-graduate general management programmes that do not meet the post-experience requirement and outcomes of MBA (AMBA, 2023c) – and (iii) DBA programmes – consisting of doctoral level research-based qualifications in management disciplines (AMBA, 2023d).

The extension of this position paper does not allow to examine in detail all these three accreditation schemes. Therefore, this study will focus on the MBA accreditation, the flagship one of AMBA, providing further details on MBM and DBA accreditations schemes especially regarding gender equality issues.

Table 7. Main features of the AMBA MBA accreditation scheme

Main eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be able to submit to evaluation at least one programme that has been graduating MBA students for a minimum of three years. - Demonstrate to be in conformity with the majority of AMBA’s accreditation criteria for a minimum period of three years before the first assessment.
Main steps of the evaluation process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - File an application (letter of intent agreeing to AMBA terms and conditions + application form). - Self-Assessment Report explaining how the school matches AMBA accreditation criteria. - On-site assessment visit of a peer-review team (AMBA, 2022, p. 7-8). - Self-Audit Report, including more detailed information about school and programmes, and demonstrating how each of AMBA accreditation criterion is met. - AMBA final report, and final decision of AMBA International Accreditation Advisory Board.
General assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessment carried out on a portfolio of MBA programmes offered by the applying school. - Assessment criteria for the programmes included in the portfolio structured around four specific areas: (i) Features of the institution which offers the programmes; (ii) Students cohort experience; (iii) MBA design, curriculum, and assessment; (iv) Impact of the programme.

Sources: AMBA, 2022, AMBA 2023, AMBA 2023b. Notes: The procedure for AMBA accreditation is substantially the same for the MBA, MBM and DBA programmes. Information contained in this table refers to the proceeding for schools that do not already hold an AMBA accreditation.

Ethics and societal contribution in AMBA MBA accreditation criteria and its gender-sensitive dimension.

A further examination of AMBA MBA accreditation criteria can be conducted focusing on the ethical and societal requirements they establish for applying institutions and assessing their gender-sensitive dimension.

In this view, as it emerges from Table 7 above, a first element to consider is that **the AMBA MBA accreditation scheme**, unlikely those examined above, **does not include a transversal section dedicated to ethics and societal contribution of applying institutions, or anyway providing a cross-cutting relevance to gender equality.**

Despite the absence of cross-cutting relevant principles, AMBA MBA accreditation criteria seem to integrate **gender equality, basically as an internal dimension of inclusion and diversity**, in all the four dimensions of the ethics and societal contribution of business schools identified in Table 1, Section 1, through more punctual requirements.

Gender-relevant measures dealing with **governance** address especially students’ selection and enrolment policies, with AMBA MBA Accreditation standards recommending applying schools to adopt strategies ensuring inclusion and diversity among students’ cohorts and yearly intakes (AMBA, 2023b, points 2.7-2.9).

Equality and inclusion, and thus implicitly gender equality, are relevant also in the domain of **research and teaching**, especially relating to the latter item. Indeed, these principles are expected to be part of the **learning outcomes of the MBA programme**, ensuring that graduates can operate in an inclusive environment, also integrating diversity and inclusion in classroom examples and case studies (AMBA, 2023b, point 3.6 and 3.10).

In terms of **workforce management**, AMBA MBA accreditation scheme requires evidence of the adoption of an inclusive hiring and promotion policy for faculty (AMBA, 2023b, point 1.5 and 1.7). A further area of intervention concerns prevention of sexually based assault, harassment, and discrimination, that should be sanctioned through an effective internal and wide-range policy.

Finally, relating to **community engagement**, gender-related issues seem not to have significant space in the competent section of the AMBA MBA Accreditation criteria, that is the one dedicated to Impact. Nonetheless, this issue is partially integrated therein through the requirement to ensure that the measurement of impact of the MBA programmes is realised through an inclusive perspective, considering contribution to society and value creation, especially for responding to stakeholders’ expectations (AMBA, 2023b, point 4.7).

As reported above, thus, gender-sensitive ethics and societal commitment does not have a cross-cutting and comprehensive dimension in the AMBA MBA accreditation scheme. Nonetheless, a more limited relevance of gender-sensitive issues is ensured by more specific criteria, where gender equality emerges mostly as an internal element of the principles of diversity and inclusion. In this sense, the AMBA MBA scheme establishes a requirement for adopting relevant policies/measures in **three of the four dimensions outlined in Table 1 as relevant for ethics and societal commitment of business schools**. That is, relating to **(i) governance, (ii) research and teaching, and (iii) workforce management**. For **community engagement and societal impact**, conversely, AMBA MBA accreditation scheme does not include criteria entailing specific positive actions. Anyway, it gives relevance of an inclusive perspective in its evaluation stage. Therefore, **in this latter dimension the integration of gender equality seems mostly indirect.**

A similar degree of integration of gender equality in the ethics and societal contribution of business schools results from an analysis of the **MBM and DBA accreditation criteria**. None of them mentions any cross-cutting gender-sensitive ethics and societal commitment, while are focused, through more punctual requirements, on ensuring gender equality – sometimes implicitly, as included in the notions of inclusion or of diversity – in some relevant areas outlined in Table 1. This includes **governance** and **workforce management** by means of specific policies

dealing with students and faculty (AMBA 2023c, points 1.5, 1.7 and 2.6-2.8; AMBA 2023d, points 1.6, 1.7, 2.6, 2.8) as well as a requirement to ensure a learning and work context free from any form of sexual misconduct (AMBA, 2023c, point 2.12; AMBA, 2023d, point 2.13). As well, an inclusive view on the *ex-post* assessment of the **societal impact** of relevant programmes is required by both standards (AMBA, 2023c, point 4.7; AMBA, 2023d, point 4.7). Nevertheless, just the MBM accreditation scheme shares with AMBA MBA accreditation also the effort to train learners to work in a gender equal and inclusive environment (AMBA, 2023c, point 3.6), relevant under the profile of **research and teaching**.

3. ETHICS AND SOCIETAL CONTRIBUTION AND GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN THE HRS4R SCHEME

A further driver for integrating gender equality in the ethics and societal contribution of business schools consists of institutional international accreditations open to a wider range of higher education institutions, recognizing best practices in the academic context, and integrating a gender equality perspective (SAGE, 2017). This sample includes important accreditation schemes, like Athen Swan, Project Juno, and the HR Excellence in Research Award.

This analysis will focus on the **HR Excellence in Research Award** (hereinafter, also the HR Award), because its specific relevance at EU-level and for the EU framework for gender equality in academia, being the only accreditation scheme – among those mentioned above – implemented by the EU Commission.

It consists of an award recognized by the EU Commission to those higher education institutions, funding organizations and companies who get aligned with the 40 principles of the European Charter for Researchers and of the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (hereinafter also the “Charter and Code”) (European Commission, 2023a). That is, the documents establishing the fundamental EU-wide principles and requirements for adopting strategies and systems for developing sustainable careers for researchers, and to ensure an attractive, open and gender-balanced labour market for such category of workers (European Commission, 2005).

Higher education institutions which obtained the HR Excellence in Research Award can use it in their institutional website and promotional materials. Showing to have obtained a prestigious achievement and becoming, thus, more attractive for researchers, funds, and students (HRS4R, 2023, p. 4).

The procedure to obtain the HR Excellence Research Award is outlined in the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R, 2023), which includes different stages allowing the European Commission to assess the alignment of business schools to the Charter and Code and/or their continuous progresses in this sense.

According to the main steps of the award granting process outlined in Table 8, a higher education institution is not required, to be awarded with the HR Excellence in Research Award, to already be aligned with the 40 principles of the Charter and Code when it submits its first application. However, to obtain the HR Award, the application of the institution will have to include a meaningful Action Plan outlining concrete actions to get aligned with the 40 principles. The implementation Action Plan will be periodically evaluated, during and at the end of the period of validity of the HR Award, through a peer-review assessment, that includes the possibility to address to the higher education institutions specific recommendations. **The actual compliance with the gender-sensitive principles and requirements of the Charter and Code analysed in the following paragraphs, thus, should be read as a requirement not to be awarded with the HR Award for the first time, but rather to maintain it** at the end of the implementation period of the Action Plan. Furthermore, the HR Award shares, with excellence accreditations addressed in Section 2, the nature of a **quality improvement system**, with higher education institutions required to carry out a further analysis of their alignment with the Charter and Code, to present a related Action Plan and meet possible peer reviewers’ recommendations, when applying to renew the accreditation. Strengthening the gender dimension of the principles of the Charter and Code, thus, could induce higher education institutions to intensify their efforts in this field, in order to maintain or renew the HR Award.

Table 8. Main features of the HRS4R recognition scheme

Main eligibility criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be a higher education institution, a funding organization, or a company. - No geographical limits (the HR Award can be granted also to organizations outside EU).
Main steps of the award granting process (“Initial” phase)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Send a commitment letter to the EU Commission, endorsing the 40 principles of the Charter and Code. The EU Commission has to verify and approve the letter. - Submit to the EU Commission an application including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Gap Analysis, providing a clear picture of needed improvements to align with the 40 principles of the Charter and Code. o OTM-R Checklist, a self-assessment tool on the implementation of an Open, Transparent, Market-Based Recruitment policy. o Action Plan, explaining how the school intends to overcome the existing/emerging gaps in aligning to the 40 principles. - If the application is positively reviewed, the HR Award is granted to the applying institution.
Assessment further to the award granting (“Implementation” and “Renewal” phase)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementation phase: (i) The school send to the EU Commission a report on the status of the implementation of measures included in the Action Plan (24 months after obtaining the HR Award); (ii) The EU Commission provides feedback to the school, including recommendations for further implementing the Action Plan, and warnings in case the progresses are insufficient (during this stage, the school is not in jeopardy to lose the HR Award). - Renewal phase: Similar to the Implementation phase (Internal Review + peer reviewers on site visit every six years) but including the risk for the school to lose the HR Award if the EU assessment is negative. It starts 36 months after the organization has obtained the HR Award.
General assessment criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The main assessment criteria are the 40 principles of the European Charter for Researchers and of the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. - For this purpose, the HRS4R has reorganised the 40 principles in four main thematic headings: (i) Ethical and professional aspects; (ii) Recruitment and selection; (iii) Working conditions and social security; (iv) Training and development (Euraxess, 2023).

Sources: Euraxess, 2023; HRS4R, 2023.

Ethics and societal contribution in HR Award accreditation criteria and its gender-sensitive dimension

An analysis of the ethical and societal contribution that institutions aiming at obtaining the HR Excellence in Research Award has to show should take into account, first, that the scope of the assessment integrated in the HRS4R is different from the one concerning the accreditation schemes examined in Section 2. The latter, indeed, are schemes aimed at analysing excellence of business schools with a wide-range perspective, going from the administration of the institution to quality of faculty, student cohort, and learning outcomes of the relevant programmes. The assessment based on the 40 principles of the Charter and Code, instead, is focused on researchers, and on measures that higher education institutions – included business schools – can adopt to ensure to them an attractive, open, and sustainable labour market. Therefore, the ethic and societal contribution required to higher education institutions by the HRS4R deals mostly with duties, rights, and employment conditions of researchers, leaving on the background the other areas covered by the EQUIS, AACSB and AMBA accreditation criteria.

In the light of the above, it is possible to carry out an analysis of ethics and societal contribution established by the HRS4R scheme for applying organizations and of the relevant gender equality dimension.

First and foremost, it is possible to point out that the HRS4R scheme does not include cross-cutting principles to be addressed by schools in the narrative regarding all aspects of their activity. The 40 principles of the Charter and

Code, instead, can be read as requirements dealing with specific aspects of the working and scientific life of researchers, to which an institution wishing to obtain the HR Award should demonstrate to comply with.

This assumption can be clarified looking at the heading about “Ethical and professional aspects” identified by the HRS4R and gathering the principles of the Charter and Code relevant in this field (Table 9).

Table 9. Assessment criteria for granting the HR Award – Ethical and professional aspects

<i>Ethical and professional aspects</i>	
Ethical principles, professional obligations, and accountability	It includes solutions to ensure freedom of research – even though within limits like those resulting from particular research circumstances or ethical practices and standards – as well as that researchers are familiar with goals governing their job, with funding mechanisms and more in general with their working rights, and that they are aware and fulfil accountability obligations – for instance relating the utilisation of funds – and adopt safe research practices.
Dissemination and public engagement	Further measures should focus on the correct dissemination of research results by researchers, and on encouraging their public engagement and that research activities are made known to society at large in a language understandable by non-specialist.
Non-discrimination and independent evaluation	Finally, applying institutions must adopt organizational arrangements to prevent any kind of discrimination regarding researchers, as well as evaluation/appraisal systems for assessing researchers’ performance operating in a transparent and independent manner.

Source: European Commission, 2005; Euraxess, 2023.

As confirmed by the Table 9 above, this section dedicated to ethics and societal contribution of business schools includes only specific principles, addressing three main areas of researchers’ experiences: (i) professional obligations and accountability; (ii) dissemination and public engagement; (iii) and evaluation, that should be free from any bias risking to cause discrimination.

The absence of cross-cutting principles does not exclude that the Charter and Code and the HRS4R scheme could integrate gender-sensitive specific requirements relevant for the areas of ethics and societal commitment of business schools outlined in Section 1, Table 1.

Nevertheless, unlikely the schemes for excellence in research examined in Section 2, the attention given to gender-sensitive ethics and societal contribution of applying schools seems quite less extended in the Charter and Code. It falls, basically, just in a couple of areas outlined in Table 1. That is, **workforce management** and **governance**.

- More in detail, in the field of **workforce management**, the principle of the Charter and Code relating to working conditions requires applying institutions to ensure **work-life balance** for researchers, mentioning a wide range of conciliation measures they could implement, that includes flexible working-hours, part-time and telework (European Commission, 2005, p. 17).

Fair workforce management is also addressed by the principle of the Charter labelled “**gender balance**” (European Commission, 2005, p. 18) which commits research organizations and founders to ensure **equal representation between women and men on all staff levels**, especially through *ad-hoc* policies for recruitment and promotion, including an equal composition of relevant committees. An orientation confirmed by the principle of the Charter and Code about “**selection**”, which stresses the importance of diversity – also in terms of gender – among the members of **selection committees**, as well as the need to

combine various selection practices – such as expert assessment and face-to-face interviews – to further reduce bias (European Commission, 2005, p. 25).

- The area of **governance** is characterised basically by one gender-sensitive principle. That is, the one labelled “non-discrimination”, aimed at ensuring that organizations wishing to obtain the HR Award have implemented adequate policies to avoid any form of discrimination (European Commission, 2005, p. 16).

The regulatory scheme for granting the HR Award, thus, seems to actively integrate gender equality in the ethical and societal contribution of applying institutions **just in two of the four relevant areas outlined in Table 1 (workforce management and governance). For the other two remaining dimensions (research and teaching and community engagement/societal impact), the HRS4R scheme does not require schools a proactive behaviour to ensure equality between women and men, or the adoption of specific positive actions, but just to avoid discriminations.**

This lack or relevance of gender equality in the domain of research and teaching and of societal contribution of research may be due basically to the seniority of the Charter and Code, adopted in 2005, that is a period in which the focus of gender equality policies was still more centred on work organization and work environment, and on discrimination issues. In summary, this leaves spaces for possible improvements, that will be explored through the recommendations included in Section 4.

4. INCORPORATING GENDER EQUALITY AS PART OF ETHICS AND SOCIETAL CONTRIBUTION OF BUSINESS SCHOOLS

The purpose of this position paper is to provide a set of policy and operational suggestions for all accreditation agencies in order to comprehensively integrate gender equality as part of the ethical and societal contribution required to business schools aiming at excellence or research awards.

In this view, a first step is to assess if and how gender equality is already part of the assessment criteria of the four accreditation schemes analysed in Sections 2-3, to further focus on possible recommendations for improvement.

4.1. CURRENT STATUS OF INTEGRATION OF gender equality IN ETHICS AND SOCIETAL CONTRIBUTION OF BUSINESS SCHOOLS

By crossing information reported above about EQUIS, AACSB, AMBA and HRS4R accreditation criteria, it emerges that **a gender-sensitive dimension is already partially integrated in the ethical and societal contribution required to applying institutions.**

Indeed, most of the analysed accreditation schemes include some forms of gender-sensitive requirements for all four dimensions of ethical and societal contribution of business schools: (i) governance; (ii) research and teaching; (iii) community engagement and societal impact; and (iv) workforce management.

As reported in Table 10, this integration is realised through different solutions.

Table 10. Gender equality in the ethical and societal dimension of EQUIS, AACSB, AMBA and HRS4R accreditations

	Research and teaching	Governance	Community engagement and societal impact	Workforce management
EQUIS scheme	Detailed requirements + transversal principle	Detailed requirements + transversal principle	Addressed through a transversal principle	Detailed requirements + transversal principle
AACSB scheme	Detailed requirements + transversal principle	Detailed requirements + transversal principle	Detailed requirements + transversal principle	Detailed requirements + transversal principle
AMBA MBA scheme	Detailed requirements	Detailed requirements	Assessment at the reporting stage	Detailed requirements
HRS4R scheme	No gender-sensitive requirements	Detailed requirements	No gender-sensitive requirements	Detailed requirements

Source: Author’s own elaboration of contents reported in Sections 2 and 3 (see above, also for bibliographic references).

More in detail, half of the analysed schemes structure their assessment around **gender equality as a transversal principle, as well as around detailed requirements.** This twofold approach recalls the one endorsed by the EU for mainstreaming gender equality in all of its policies and activities, and considered particularly effective since it is “not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women but mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality” (Commission of the European

Communities, 1996). It seems, thus, a benchmark to particularly consider **in outlining the recommendations at the end of this position paper.**

In this framework, adopting **gender equality as a transversal principle** means that applying schools are expected to valorise gender equality in the narrative relating to all criteria and requirements addressed in their application, as part of the assessment relating to inclusion in the domain of their ethics and societal contribution (EQUIS), or as an internal element of diversity and inclusion (AACSB). Conversely, two other accreditation schemes do not adopt gender equality, or a wider concept including it, as a transversal principle (AMBA MBA scheme and HRS4R), addressing this topic just through specific criteria.

Furthermore, **detailed requirements** are a common methodology to integrate a gender equality perspective in the ethical and societal dimensions of accreditation schemes that may coexist or not with cross-cutting gender-sensitive principles. These detailed requirements – that establish guidelines to frame policies/measures that applying institutions are expected to adopt – seem considered particularly reliable by all accreditation schemes, that use them in 12 of 16 cases analysed in Table 10. Furthermore, all analysed accreditation schemes utilise detailed requirements to integrate gender equality in **governance and workforce management**, while relating **research and teaching** just HRS4R does not employ them. **Community engagement and societal impact**, conversely, is the dimension of ethics and societal commitment of business schools where detailed criteria are less employed. That is, just by the AACSB scheme.

Moreover, the AMBA MBA scheme employs also a specific methodology relating to community engagement/societal impact. It consists of not setting specific and positive obligations about gender equality, but to require the institution to include, in the **periodical assessment and reporting stage about this policy area, if and how it addresses inclusion**, that implicitly encompass gender equality.

In this context, the only accreditation scheme that does not integrate one of the aforementioned kinds of gender-sensitive requirements in all areas relevant for ethics and societal contribution of business schools – that is, with a lack of criteria relating to research and teaching, and to community engagement/societal impact – is the HRS4R scheme for excellence in research. A shortcoming that seems linked, basically, to the seniority of the Charter and Code, adopted in 2005 when studies about gender equality were less advanced, and mostly focused on non-discrimination and job-related issues, rather than on promoting a comprehensive and effective equality in higher education institutions.

Going deeper into the analysis, the information collected in Section 2 and 3 allows also to assess what **detailed criteria and guidelines** are more popular, among the analysed accreditation schemes, to integrate gender equality in each of the four dimensions of the ethical and societal contribution of business schools outlined in Table 1.

Governance

The analysis of the criteria relating **governance** shows a prevalent focus on **students** (Table 11).

Table 11. Measures to integrate gender equality in governance

Governance	
Prevention of discrimination	- Prevent risks of discrimination, including the one based on gender (HRS4R).
Students' enrolment policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Show a diverse and inclusive students' body, also providing specific data and/or information describing the current student population in terms of gender (EQUIS). - Describe students' enrolment policies adopted to attract and retain diverse learners with an inclusive perspective (AACSB). - Have adopted students' selection and enrolment policies ensuring inclusion and diversity among students' cohorts and yearly intakes (AMBA).

Source: Author's own elaboration of contents reported in Sections 2 and 3 (see above, also for bibliographic references).

More specifically, **the AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS accreditation schemes** consider that a key aspect of an ethical and gender sensitive governance is to have **policies to attract, select and enrol cohorts of students characterised by diversity and inclusion**. And so, as a consequence, also by a balanced presence of women and men.

A relevant but less popular assessment criteria in this field, concern **preventing discrimination**. In particular, HRS4R establishes a wide-range requirement expecting applying institution not to show any form of discrimination – not just based on gender – during the assessment process.

Research and teaching

Table 12 reports the most relevant criteria identified in the four accreditation schemes to integrate gender equality in the research and teaching dimension of the ethical and societal contribution of business schools.

Table 12. Measures to integrate gender equality in research and teaching

Research and teaching	
Faculty organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that faculty core members' workload is balanced regarding direct teaching and tutoring (EQUIS; relevant also for workforce management, Table 14). - Having adopted policies for an appropriate workload allocation model (AACSB; relevant also for workforce management, Table 14).
Ensuring a gender equal learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indicate if and how faculty are prepared to teach in an inclusive environment (AACSB). - Indicate measures in place to support learners from underrepresented population – also in terms of gender – when they are failing to thrive or progress towards successful degree completion (AACSB).
Transmission of gender equality values to students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adopt measures to document advances in diversity and inclusion achieved by former students in a post-graduated stage, as a witness of the sound background provided by the higher research institution (AACSB). - Equality and inclusion are expected to be part of the learning outcomes of the MBA programme, ensuring that graduates are able to operate in an inclusive environment (AMBA). - Diversity and inclusion should be integrated in classroom examples and case studies (AMBA).

Gender equality in research outputs

- The portfolio of intellectual contributions of the institution should include exemplars of research and publications that have a positive societal impact also in the field or promoting diversity and inclusion (AACSB; relevant also for community engagement, Table 13).

Source: Author’s own elaboration of contents reported in Sections 2 and 3 (see above, also for bibliographic references).

In this context a transversal measure, common to all accreditation schemes, seems absent. Nevertheless, particular attention is given to the **transmission of inclusive values to students and learners**, implicitly including a gender-sensitive dimension and focusing especially on learning outcomes and practices. Furthermore, a relevant group of criteria deals with ensuring that **students can enjoy a gender equal learning environment** and with **faculty organization**. The former covers areas like capability of faculty to operate in inclusive contexts, as well as inclusive support for students in trouble in getting their degree. The latter has a double dimension, of workforce management practices (see below in this Section) and of requirement relating to teaching and research and that can contribute to **ensure (also) gender equality in workload distribution of faculty duties**.

Finally, just one relevant criterion deals with **research outputs**. Although mostly aimed at ensuring a positive societal impact of research and publications – and for this reason more likely to be framed among criteria for community engagement (see below in this Section) – it seems relevant also in this dimension, encouraging schools to increase their research outputs dealing with diversity and inclusion.

Community engagement and societal impact

Community engagement and societal impact – as results from Table 13 – is the dimension of the ethical and societal contribution of business schools less addressed by specific criteria.

Table 13. Measures to integrate gender equality in community engagement and societal impact

Community engagement and societal impact	
Strategic level	- The relevant strategic plan of the school should focus also on promoting the diversity of people and ideas (AACSB).
Research outputs	- The portfolio of intellectual contributions of the institution should include exemplars of research and publications that have a positive societal impact also in the field or promoting diversity and inclusion (AACSB; relevant also for Research and Teaching, Table 11).
Learning outputs	- The measurement of impact of the MBA programmes is realised through an inclusive perspective, considering contribution to society and value creation (AMBA).

Source: Author’s own elaboration of contents reported in Sections 2 and 3 (see above, also for bibliographic references).

Three elements have been identified in this area. One is a **wide-range requirement**, assessing the strategic plan of the institutions to analyse its societal impact and community engagement, generically requiring that it should focus also on promoting diversity.

More detailed assessment criteria dealing with research and learning outputs are included in AACSB and AMBA schemes. The first one is related with the dimension of research (above) and requires the school to show having, in its portfolio of intellectual contributions, publications addressing diversity and inclusion – and so, implicitly, also gender equality – aiming at promoting these values for a positive societal impact.

Regarding **learning outputs**, AMBA requires to applying institutions to have adopted a policy to measure the impact of the MBA programmes and integrating an inclusive perspective. This criterion seems asking that the programme realizes a positive contribution to society. That is, conveying inclusive values not just focusing on students and professors, but also on initiatives putting them in a relationship with the surrounding community, that might include activities directed to the general public, or meetings with business organizations.

Workforce management

Table 14 includes a summary of the most relevant requirements and assessment criteria currently integrated in the analysed accreditation schemes relating to gender sensitive and **ethical practices for workforce management**.

Table 14. Measures to integrate gender equality in workforce management

Workforce management	
Staff composition and selection policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have established management policies related to staff recruitment which demonstrate advancing inclusion, respect for diversity, prohibition of any discrimination (EQUIS). - Provide data on the gender mix of faculty (EQUIS). - Provide documentation on hiring practices supporting diversity and inclusion for faculty and professional staff (AACSB). - Ensure equal representation on all staff levels, especially through <i>ad-hoc</i> policies for recruitment and promotion, including an equal composition of relevant committees (HRS4R). - Adopt a policy to ensure diversity within the members of selection committees (HRS4R). - Provide evidence of the adoption of an inclusive hiring policy for faculty (AMBA).
Career progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have established management policies related to staff promotions which demonstrate advancing inclusion, respect for diversity, prohibition of any discrimination (EQUIS). - Ensure that faculty core member workload is balanced (also) regarding direct teaching and tutoring (EQUIS; relevant also for Research and Teaching, Table 11). - Outline the policy and practice regarding the recruitment of faculty members as well as the process for evaluating them, relating it with information on gender mix of faculty (EQUIS). - Provide mentoring and show the presence of inclusive development practices for faculty and professional staff (AACSB). - Ensure transparent evaluation, promotion, and reward processes (AACSB). - Having adopted policies for an appropriate workload allocation model (AACSB; relevant also for Research and Teaching, Table 11). - Provide documentation on evaluation systems supporting diversity and inclusion for faculty and professional staff (AACSB). - Provide evidence of the adoption of an inclusive promotion policy for faculty (AMBA).
Inclusive work environment and staff wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have a staff wellness plan supporting inclusion (EQUIS). - Show adequate infrastructures to support specific needs such as childcare (EQUIS). - Ensure work-life balance for researchers, through conciliation measures like flexible working-hours, part-time and telework (HRS4R). - Adopt an effective internal and wide-range policy for the prevention of sexually based assault, harassment, and discrimination, banning these conducts and establishing adequate sanctions (AMBA).

Source: Author’s own elaboration of contents reported in Sections 2 and 3 (see above, also for bibliographic references).

As results from above, **the dimension of ethics and societal contribution of business schools (Table 1, Section 1) dealing with workforce management is the one in which the integration of gender equality is more extended.** On 30 gender sensitive assessment criteria identified by this position paper¹, 17 relate – implicitly or explicitly – to this context.

In this field, one of the most frequent requirements is relating to **recruiting and hiring policies supporting equality or inclusion** for faculty and/or professional staff (Table 14, section “Staff composition and selection policy”). This is present in all the four analyzed accreditation schemes. Other gender sensitive and relevant assessment criteria are those requiring that applying institutions provide data showing the gender mix of faculty (EQUIS), as well as to ensure diversity within selection committees (HRS4R).

Furthermore, having adopted **an inclusive evaluation policy for faculty** – or at least effective measures to address (gender) bias in this process – is a requirement common both to the area of gender sensitive recruiting, and to the one aimed at fostering **equality in career progression** (Table 14, section “Career progression”). It is another common element, integrated – with diverse wording – in the three accreditation schemes for excellence in research (EQUIS, AACSB, AMBA). Other practices that, in this context, are relevant for the assessment, are those relating to the presence of inclusive mentoring (AACSB) and of career development/induction programs (AACSB and EQUIS).

Finally, in the context of inclusive work environment and staff wellness there is not a dominant gender-sensitive assessment criterion. Nonetheless, the analysis conducted above indicates as relevant requirements to be awarded with excellence accreditations the adoption, by the applying institution, of **measures dealing with work-life balance, aiming at promoting conciliation between working life and childcare, and preventing sexually based assault, harassment, and discrimination.**

Given the outcome of the cross analysis conducted, and concerning four of the most relevant accreditation schemes, it is possible to draw some conclusions, that will be useful also in elaborating the recommendations outlined in Section 4.2.

First, two of the analyzed schemes – EQUIS and AACSB – seem to prefer **structuring the gender-sensitive assessment relating to ethical and societal contribution of business schools as a twin-track strategy.** That is, combining a **cross-cutting dimension** requiring to address this issue in the narrative concerning all the other criteria relevant for accreditation, and **more detailed policy requirements focused on specific topics.** Adjusting, thus, a benchmark already followed by EU institutions relating to gender mainstreaming (Commission of the European Communities, 1996).

Focusing on specific requirements, they mostly deal with fair **workforce management**, and with **students** as the addressees of policies in the field of **governance** and **teaching.**

Among solutions for workforce management, all four schemes include specific requirements to ensure **recruiting and hiring policies supporting equality or inclusion** for faculty and professional staff, while an **inclusive evaluation**

¹ Criteria and principles common to more than one dimension of ethics and societal contribution of business schools are counted as one.

policy – or the adoption of measures to reduce biases therein – is required by three schemes (EQUIS, AACSB, and AMBA MBA; Table 14).

Regarding **students**, the most developed gender sensitive requirements in the field of **teaching** concern the adoption, by applying institution, of **policies for the transmission of gender equality values to learners**, and to ensure them a **gender sensitive learning environment** (Table 11). As to **governance**, a positive assessment in the accreditation process is related to the presence of **policies to attract, select, and enrol cohorts of students characterised by diversity and inclusion** (Table 12).

The topics mentioned above are, thus, already covered by a well-structured framework of policy criteria dealing with gender equality. For these reasons, the recommendations drafted in Section 4.2 will aim, mostly, at systematizing these policies, to ease their integration in all accreditation schemes, also beyond those addressed in this position paper.

Areas in which the incorporation of gender equality in the ethical and societal contribution required to business school by accreditation agencies seems weaker, instead, are **community engagement/societal impact**, and **research and teaching and governance**, save for requirements relating to students.

Specific criteria dedicated to community engagement are present in just two of the accreditation schemes analyzed, and seem to focus mostly on learning outcomes – with the criterion valorising that **MBA programmes are characterised by an inclusive perspective, also in relation to its impact on the society (AMBA)** – and on a dimension shared with research, asking that an applying institution shows a portfolio of **intellectual academic contributions also aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion in the society (AACSB)**.

Proceeding with **research and teaching**, besides the just mentioned gender-sensitivity in research output, the only further criterion dealing with faculty is present in two of the analysed schemes, and deals – through different perspectives – with a more balanced and equal distribution of workload, however not related just with gender equality issues.

Finally, specific guidelines for the integration of gender-sensitive principles of ethics or relevant for societal contribution of business schools in **governance** – again, with a wider perspective that the one limited to students – are limited to requirements asking to avoid risks of discrimination.

The ethical commitment of business schools in the field of **research and teaching and governance** – beyond students – and the wider domain of **community engagement and societal impact are, thus, the areas offering more space for proposing further solutions for integrating a gender equality dimension in accreditations schemes**. These proposals will be outlined and detailed in the following section.

4.2. RECOMMENDATIONS TO FURTHER INTEGRATE GENDER EQUALITY IN ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

Accreditation agencies can play a powerful and complex role in fostering the implementation of gender equality in business schools.

Building on expert advice (Hart, 2023²), it is possible to state that accreditation criteria may have a significant conditioning power, because they are at the basis of an assessment process for which business schools wish a positive outcome, to obtain prestigious awards relevant for their academic and research activity. In this sense, well-structured accreditation criteria can contribute to make more gender-sensitive the structure, organization, and policies of business schools, as well as working as guidelines for those higher education institutions approaching for the first time to a specific accreditation scheme.

Nonetheless, this exercise is not simple. First, because integrating gender equality in the ethics and societal contribution of an institution is always a sensitive issue, that can arise obstacles and resistances, even when it relies on a powerful external leverage as a prestigious accreditation scheme. Furthermore, this effort is complicated because gender equality is an evolving matter, that requires to continuously adjust criteria along with the development of relevant studies and the evolution of society. Finally, because accreditation schemes operate worldwide, but not all countries and communities are at the same level of elaboration relating to gender equality issues.

Therefore, the drafting of these recommendations has been conducted following four preliminary assumptions:

1. Gender-sensitive change is intended as an effective process to transform applying institutions.
2. Accreditation criteria does not only work as an assessment instrument, but also as a reference for business schools starting to implement gender equality actions.
3. Gender equality is an evolving concept, that changes with the evolution of the society as well as with the progression of studies concerning it.
4. Accreditation criteria should be structured in order to work for business schools located in different parts of the world and at different stages with regards gender equality.

In view of the results of the analysis carried out in Section 4.1, recommendations provided in this section will address **two main areas**.

- First, **methodology and structure of accreditation schemes**, to ensure a comprehensive integration of gender equality in the relevant commitment of business schools. This section will address the space to dedicate to gender equality in accreditation schemes, and the solutions – for instance through a twin-track process including cross-cutting principles and more specific requirements – to ensure the most effective implementation.
- Furthermore, **specific guidelines** to further integrate gender equality in the four dimensions of ethics and societal contribution of business schools identified through the literature review summarised in Table 1: (i)

² Susan Hart is currently Professor Emeritus at Durham University and Associate Director of Quality Services at EFMD.

Governance; (ii) Research and teaching; (iii) Community engagement and societal impact; and (iv) Workforce management.

In this sense, recommendations for innovative solutions will concern especially those dimensions where the analysed accreditation schemes showed more margins for improvement. That is, the areas of **research and teaching** and of **governance** – both for measures not concerning students – and of **community engagement and societal impact**. Conversely, the areas of **workforce management**, and of measures addressing students and relating to **research and teaching** and **governance**, will be addressed through recommendations mostly systematizing solutions already considered by the EQUIS, AACSB and/or AMBA accreditation schemes, with the aim of making them benchmarks for all accreditation schemes.

In addition to building on the analysis conducted in Sections 2 and 3 and on gender equality requirements already included in the addressed accreditation schemes, additional sources of inspiration for these recommendations have been best practices developed by the EQUAL4EUROPE consortium, and research and studies carried out by EIGE, other EU projects and by professional associations.

In dealing with these recommendations, it is important to consider that they are general, indicative, and directed to all accreditation agencies, not especially to the four accreditation schemes addressed in Sections 2 and 3. These recommendations are aimed to provide a comprehensive set of solutions to make accreditations schemes gender sensitive. Therefore, it does not mean that the solutions included in the recommendations are missing – partially or totally – from the accreditation schemes analyzed in this position paper. Conversely, some measures already included in the analyzed accreditation schemes worked as a source of reference for these recommendations.

Finally, going beyond the focus on accreditation schemes, the following recommendations could also become a benchmark for higher education institutions and research centres – also different from business schools – in their effort to improve gender equality.

Methodology and structure of accreditation criteria

Recommendation #1 – Adopt a twin-track methodology for a compulsory gender-sensitive assessment of ethics and societal contribution of business schools, based on a cross-cutting principle and specific criteria.

Recommendation	- Accreditation agencies should integrate in their accreditation schemes a gender-sensitive assessment of ethics and societal contribution of business schools, based on a twin-track methodology. First, ethics and societal contribution, and its gender-sensitive dimension, should be a cross-cutting principle, that applying institutions are requested to address in the narrative they provide for all sections and chapters of the accreditation scheme. Furthermore, the accreditation scheme should include more specific gender-sensitive requirements, aimed at ensuring the implementation of measures identified as a priority. In this framework, accreditation schemes should always expressly mention gender-equality when they refer to diversity and/or inclusion, without leaving it as an implicit element of the latter.
Relevance	- Complying with this twin track scheme in the application should be mandatory for business schools seeking to obtain the relevant accreditation.
Rationale	- The analysis carried out in Sections 2, 3 and 4.1 shows that half of accreditation agencies already adopt this twin-track approach. This seems particularly useful to ensure, from one side, that business schools are implementing an effective transformation. And, at the same time, it will

	<p>give accreditation agencies more flexibility in orienting efforts of applying schools in the domain of gender equality towards specific goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Making gender-sensitive ethics and societal contribution a cross-cutting criterion of accreditation schemes ensures that applying institutions provide a qualitative explanation of policies and measures adopted in this domain for all sections and chapters of accreditation criteria, including governance, research and teaching, community engagement and workforce management (Hart, 2023). This will increase the likelihood of business schools improving in their gender policies that fall in the whole scope of accreditation criteria. Therefore, increasing the chances that they start an effective transformation process of the institution, from a comprehensive perspective. - The aforementioned cross-cutting principle can be combined with more specific gender-sensitive requirements, more detailed and aimed to ensure that business school applying for the accreditation have implemented/will implement specific measures identified as a priority by the accreditation scheme. - In implementing this Recommendation, accreditation agencies should take particularly care to always mention gender equality expressly in their assessment schemes, when they refer to diversity and/or inclusion. Although gender equality can be considered an implicit element of the latter, clearly indicating it could provide more strength and relevance to equality instances in the overall economy of accreditation processes.
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Recommendation #2 – Include in the accreditation criteria a specific chapter relating to ethics and societal contribution, with a dedicated subsection for gender equality.

Recommendation	- Accreditation agencies should include, in their criteria, a specific section dedicated to gender equality, as part of the chapter relating to ethics and societal contribution of applying institutions.
Relevance	- Including the information required by this gender-sensitive section in the application should be a mandatory requirement to obtain the relevant accreditation.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dedicating to gender equality a specific subsection in the accreditation criteria would lead business schools to sum-up, while addressing it, all the gender-sensitive measures and policies implemented in the institution (Hart, 2023). - This exercise may be complementary to Recommendation #1, allowing applying institutions to reflect on gender-sensitive measures from a different perspective. That is, as an organic framework of policies, while in Recommendation #1 they are addressed as part of each specific section of accreditation criteria, and/or as specific measures that applying institution must demonstrate to have implemented. - This approach should ensure that applying institutions address gender equality in a more comprehensive way. Furthermore, guidelines and assessment criteria included in the section dedicated to gender equality could work as a road map for those institutions that have not already implemented such policies, but they would like to take a first step.

Governance

Recommendation #3 – Integrate the adoption by applying institutions of a gender equality or an equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) plan as a mandatory requirement to obtain the accreditation/award.

Recommendation	- Accreditation agencies should include, as a mandatory element to obtain the accreditation/award, that applying institutions demonstrate in their application to have adopted a gender equality plan or an EDI plan, intended as a framework of policies to promote these values in the institution, based on an internal preliminary analysis of data, and outlining at least the measures going to be implemented, their goals, timeframe and assigned resources.
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Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing information about the adoption of a gender equality plan/EDI plan should be a mandatory requirement to obtain the relevant accreditation.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some of the analysed accreditation schemes (EFMD, 2023a, p. 78) already ask to applying business school to explain how they integrate inclusion in their internal operations. A step forward in strengthening gender-sensitive ethic commitment in the field of governance, would be to include, as a mandatory requirement for the accreditation/award, to have adopted a gender equality plan or an EDI plan. - With specific reference to gender equality plans, they have been defined as public documents, addressed to the entire workforce and setting “<i>corrective measures, designed on the basis of a diagnosis of the situation and aimed at achieving, in a given company or institution, equal opportunities between women and men, eliminating sex-based discrimination</i>” (GEARING ROLES, 2020, p. 5). These plans have proven to be an effective instrument to comprehensively tackle gender imbalances in academia, as confirmed by many EU funded projects that adopted them as a tool to this purpose (see, among others, EQUAL4EUROPE, 2023; SAGE, 2016; SPEAR, 2023; TARGET, 2021), and by their integration, as per the European Commission, in the compulsory requirements to access Horizon Europe research funds (European Commission, 2021). In this view, fundamental elements for effective Gender Equality Plans seem (i) that they are based on a preliminary analysis of the institution relying on sex-disaggregated data (a comprehensive example of indicators for qualitative analysis is available in EQUAL4EUROPE, 2021; regarding examples for quantitative analysis, see EQUAL4EUROPE, 2021b); (ii) that they outline clearly the objectives and measures to tackle inequalities individuated by the preliminary analysis; and (iii) that they include a monitoring plan based on quantitative and qualitative data collections, and a proceeding to update/revise the plan (Avogaro and Ginès i Fabrellas, 2021). - The holistic perspective of gender equality plans or of EDI plans, furthermore, seems complementary with the cross-cutting dimension of gender equality that this position paper suggests in Recommendation #1. It seems, thus, appropriate that gender equality plans or EDI plans are adopted by accreditation agencies as mandatory requirements to get excellence accreditations/awards, with the aim to give a significant impulse to the effective integration of gender equality – as well diversity and inclusion – in the ethics and societal commitment of business schools.

Recommendation #4 – Require applying institutions to provide information about the measures adopted, at governance level, to promote a gender-inclusive organizational culture.

Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Applying institutions should be required to outline in their application which measures they adopted, at governance level, to promote a gender-inclusive organizational culture in the institution.</i>
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The information included in the recommendation, if present in an application, should contribute to an overall positive evaluation of the applying business school. Indeed, it has an impact on improving gender equality, and its presence in an accreditation scheme can act as a nudge for institutions to work on gender equality, in order to implement changes relevant for obtaining the accreditation. Nonetheless, this information refers to specific policies, so it should not be mandatory. That is, the absence of an outline of measures adopted at governance level to promote a gender-inclusive organizational culture should not be sufficient, by itself, to deny the accreditation to an applying institution.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policy adopted at governance level in an institution have an impact on many stakeholders and on the whole teaching and working environment. So, integrating at this level policies to promote a gender-inclusive organizational culture could have a key-role in strengthening the ethic and societal commitment of the applying school towards gender equality.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This requirement should include, thus, to detail those measures adopted by the administration of the business school, like institutional training, communication campaigns, guidelines for gender-sensitive language. - It is important to make this requirement explicit – although many institutions could have already adopted most of these measures by themselves – in order to link to it, in case a business school should not provide any detail, a lower overall score. This will push all applying institutions to make a further effort in this strategic filed for gender equality. - A comprehensive definition of gender-inclusive organizational culture, as well as a list of relevant measures, has been provided by the EU project TARGET (TARGET, 2018, p. 15-17).
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Recommendation #5 – Require applying institutions to provide information about the internal policies adopted to ensure gender equality in decision making bodies and in leadership roles for faculty and administration.

Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accreditation agencies should integrate in the assessment criteria for accreditations/awards an explicit requirement, for applying institutions, to outline the policies adopted to achieve gender equality in decision making bodies and in leadership roles for faculty and administration, as well as a summary of the results obtained so far.
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The information included in the recommendation, if present in an application, should contribute to an overall positive evaluation of the applying business school. Indeed, it has an impact on improving gender equality, and its presence in an accreditation scheme can act as a nudge for institutions to work on gender equality, in order to implement changes relevant for obtaining the accreditation. Nonetheless, this information refers to specific policies, so it should not be mandatory. That is, the absence of this information should not be sufficient, by itself, to deny the accreditation to an applying institution.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The activity of decision-making bodies and of people in leadership position has a deep impact on an entire higher education institution, and ensuring an equal representation between women and men may have relevant implications for the ‘equality’ area of ethics, resulting in more balanced decisions, taking into consideration in a comprehensive way needs and points of view in the organization (EIGE, 2023; Avogaro and Ginès I Fabrellas, 2021, p. 34-38; Buitendijk, Colomer-Revuelta, Corda et al., 2014, p. 17). - In this view, it seems appropriate to integrate in assessment criteria for excellence accreditations/awards of business schools, a requirement to outline the internal policies adopted to ensure gender equality in decision making bodies and in leadership roles for faculty and administration. This could work also to bring to action those organizations that have not yet taken initiative in this field.

Research and teaching

Recommendation #6 – Require applying institutions to provide information on the implementation of measures to integrate gender equality in research activities.

Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accreditation agencies should expressly require applying institutions to provide information on measures they have adopted to integrate gender equality in research activities. In this view they should deal with solutions (i) to ensure equality between women and men in accessing research opportunities, like measures for ensuring diversity in research teams, mentoring programs, sponsoring activities, and specific training for applying for research funds; and (ii) to integrate a gender perspective in the research outputs produced by the institution.
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The information included in the recommendation, if present in an application, should contribute to an overall positive evaluation of the applying business school. Indeed, it has an impact on improving gender equality, and its presence in an accreditation scheme can act as a nudge for institutions to work on gender equality, in order to implement changes relevant for obtaining

	<p>the accreditation. Nonetheless, this information refers to specific policies, so it should not be mandatory. That is, the absence of this information should not be sufficient, by itself, to deny the accreditation to an applying institution.</p>
<p>Rationale</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mainstreaming gender equality in research activities carried out by a higher education institution is a fundamental element to remove barriers to career progression of women, as well as to promote gender equality in society, through gender-sensitive research outputs. - In this sense, the implementation in business schools of direct/indirect incentives to foster diversity in research teams provides women faculty with more opportunities to acquire the expertise needed to access the higher academic ranks, besides producing more effective and creative research (Buitendijk, Colomer-Revuelta, Corda et al., 2014, p. 15, also for reference to further international literature). - As well, an important measure to ensure equal research opportunities to women and men is the implementation, in an institution, of an effective mentoring program – possibly with a gender sensitive perspective (Avogaro, 2023, pp. 14-20) – guiding early-stage researchers in developing fundamental skills, like those to successfully apply for research funds, to achieve their career goals, to teach and carry out research (for guidelines and a roadmap to set-up a gender-sensitive mentoring program, see Avogaro, 2023). For more experienced researchers, a similar help to access research funds can be provided through specific training. Sponsoring activities, helping early-stage researchers enter in academic and professional networks on which they could rely on to develop ambitious projects – that can also be integrated in a mentoring program – are as well important. - From another perspective, integrating a gender-sensitive methodology in research activity carried out in an institution may lead researchers to consider the different implications for women and men of the phenomena they study (European Commission, 2013; Mihajlović, Trbovc and Hofman, 2015; see also EQUAL4EUROPE, 2023b, for a checklist for gender-sensitive research). With a consequential improvement of gender equality in the external society that will apply/use these studies. Moreover, increasing the number of research outputs relating to gender issues that a higher academic institution produces yearly can contribute to increase the relevance of gender equality as a topic of the scientific and public debate. - In this view, it is advisable for accreditation agencies to start requiring applying institutions to indicate if and how they have implemented policies (i) to ensure equality between women and men in accessing research opportunities, and in (ii) integrating a gender perspective in research outputs. Furthermore, accreditation agencies could consider including in the accreditation criteria examples of relevant policies – like the ones mentioned above – also to provide a guide for those higher education institutions that are starting to approach gender mainstreaming, and that are using accreditation criteria as a roadmap in this sense.

Recommendation #7 – Require applying institution to provide details about their measures to integrate gender equality in teaching activities.

<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>- Accreditation agencies should require applying institutions to indicate which policies they have adopted to promote the integration of gender equality in teaching activity of faculty members and of early-stage researchers.</p>
<p>Relevance</p>	<p>- The information included in the recommendation, if present in an application, should contribute to an overall positive evaluation of the applying business school. Indeed, it has an impact on improving gender equality, and its presence in an accreditation scheme can act as a nudge for institutions to work on gender equality, in order to implement changes relevant for obtaining the accreditation. Nonetheless, this information refers to specific policies, so it should not be mandatory. That is, the absence of this information should not be sufficient, by itself, to deny the accreditation to an applying institution.</p>
<p>Rationale</p>	<p>- Several EU research projects (among others EQUAL4EUROPE, see Fábiková, 2022; Baltic Gender, see Thege, Schmeck and van Elsacker, 2020; and GARCIA, see Mihajlović Trbovc and Hofman,</p>

	<p>2015) and professional associations (AdvanceHE, 2023) emphasized the importance to integrate gender equality in teaching activities, to promote among learners the value of equality applied to their studies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This integration can address, first, the methodology adopted for teaching. For instance, training faculty in a gender-oriented utilization of case studies could provide them with advanced instruments to show the different gender-relevant aspects of the topics they are teaching, increasing in their students the capability to work and reason with a gender equality perspective (for some examples of case studies, EQUAL4EUROPE, 2022) - Gender equality can be integrated in teaching also from the substantial perspective, so including in curriculums gender-sensitive topics. An example could be implementing optional courses about gender equality in the MBA curricula. Thus contributing – as pointed out, among others, by the SPEAR project (Bjelskou, 2022, p. 14) – to increase knowledge and sensibility of students to gender equality issues. - For these reasons, accreditation agencies should expressly ask applying institutions if they have adopted policies for promoting integration of gender equality in teaching, from a methodological and/or substantial perspective. Furthermore, as already proposed in Recommendation #6, accreditation agencies could consider including in the accreditation criteria examples of relevant policies to support and guide those business schools that are approaching for the first time gender mainstreaming in teaching, and that might use accreditation criteria as a roadmap in this sense.
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Community engagement and societal impact

Recommendation #8 – Integrate a gender equality perspective in the evaluation of societal impact.

Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accreditation agencies should expressly require applying institutions to provide a narrative about their societal impact also from a gender-sensitive perspective, especially relating to the positive contribution provided by the school for gender equality in the society.
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The narrative mentioned in the recommendation, if present in an application, should contribute to an overall positive evaluation of the applying business school. Indeed, it has an impact on improving gender equality, and its presence in an accreditation scheme can act as a nudge for institutions to work on gender equality, in order to implement changes relevant for obtaining the accreditation. Nonetheless, this narrative refers to specific policies, so it should not be mandatory. That is, the absence of this narrative should not be sufficient, by itself, to deny the accreditation to an applying institution.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - While an assessment of the societal impact of applying institutions is often present in accreditation schemes, usually these organizations are not required to expressly deal with its gender-sensitive perspective. - In this view, accreditation agencies may, for instance, ask applying institutions to detail the initiatives they adopted to provide a positive contribution to the society and having a gender sensitive perspective, and/or to inform if they dealt, in this activity, with external stakeholders operating to promote gender equality in the society. - Although in some assessment schemes the cross-cutting gender equality dimension could encourage applying institution to address this issue also when analysing their societal impact, an express integration of a requirement to deal with gender equality in this context might have relevant effects. For instance, inspiring organizations to focus more on gender equality in their commitment to sustainable development, as required by the United Nations, that included gender equality as the 5th Sustainable Development Goal (United Nations, 2023a). Or encouraging them to be more sensitive in involving gender equality organizations, NGOs, think tanks in their initiatives for community engagement.

Workforce management

Recommendation #9 – Require applying business schools to provide comprehensive information on measures adopted to ensure gender equality among faculty.

Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accreditation agencies should integrate in schemes to issues excellence accreditations/awards a requirement for business schools to provide comprehensive information about measures adopted to ensure gender equality among faculty, including a gender-based breakdown of data about the composition of faculty per academic rank, measures in place to remove barriers to recruitment and career progression of women, and solutions to attract and retain female talent.
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The outline mentioned in the recommendation, if present in an application, should contribute to an overall positive evaluation of the applying business school. Indeed, it has an impact on improving gender equality, and its presence in an accreditation scheme can act as a nudge for institutions to work on gender equality, in order to implement changes relevant for obtaining the accreditation. Nonetheless, this outline refers to a specific policy area, so it should not be mandatory. That is, the absence of this outline should not be sufficient, by itself, to deny the accreditation to an applying institution
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contrasting the so called “leaky pipeline phenomenon” (Dubois-Shaik and Bernard, 2015), that is the issue related to the reduction of quota of faculty women with the increasing of academic rank, is a fundamental goal for gender equality policies in higher education institutions. - In this view, accreditations schemes should be integrated, to increase ethical commitment to gender equality in workforce management, with a comprehensive request of information to applying business schools relating to strategies to ensure gender equality in all the academic ranks. Fundamental elements, in this sense, are first a gender-based breakdown of data relating faculty composing each academic rank, to assess the extension of the leaky pipeline phenomenon in the institution. And, furthermore, two relevant kinds of policies. Those aimed at removing barriers to recruitment and career progression of women, like measures to ensure a gender-sensitive recruitment and evaluation process, mandatory quotas for higher academic ranks, and solutions to ensure an equal distribution of workload between women and men in the institution. And those to attract and retain women talent, including measures relating to flexible working-hours, measures allowing women to concentrate fully on academic research upon returning from parental leave, and leadership programs specifically for women. - Therefore, it is advisable that accreditation agencies integrate accreditation schemes with a comprehensive request of information relating to this field – in line with the guidelines presented above – not limiting themselves to ask data about gender composition of academic ranks (where this requirement is already present). - Useful resources providing further examples of policies and measures to remove barriers to recruitment and career progression of women – that accreditation agencies might consider mentioning in the accreditation schemes to inspire applying institutions – have been provided by the EQUAL4EUROPE project (Avogaro and Ginès i Fabrellas, 2021, pp. 30-34). While solutions to attract and retain women talent can be extracted from the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (European Commission, 2005, p. 17), as well as from specific toolkits, like the one realized by the University of California (WorkLife Law, 2013).

Recommendation #10 – Require applying business schools to provide comprehensive information on measures adopted to ensure gender equality among administrative and non-academic staff.

Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accreditation agencies should integrate in the assessment schemes to issue excellence accreditations/awards a requirement for business schools to provide comprehensive information about measures adopted to ensure gender equality among administrative and non-academic staff, including a gender-based breakdown of data about its composition.
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Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The outline mentioned in the recommendation, if present in an application, should contribute to an overall positive evaluation of the applying business school. Indeed, it has an impact on improving gender equality, and its presence in an accreditation scheme can act as a nudge for institutions to work on gender equality, in order to implement changes relevant for obtaining the accreditation. Nonetheless, this outline refers to a specific policy area, so it should not be mandatory. That is, the absence of this outline should not be sufficient, by itself, to deny the accreditation to an applying institution.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Although when dealing with gender equality in the workforce of higher education institutions the first thought goes to the “leaky pipeline” phenomenon affecting faculty, this topic is relevant also for the rest of people working in these contexts. That is, for administrative and non-academic staff. - In this context, gender equality issues may concern the recruitment and promotion processes, the absence of work-life balance measures, as well as wider causes of gender gap like vertical and/or horizontal segregation. - Therefore, accreditation agencies should require applying institutions to provide information on policies and measures adopted to ensure gender equality also among the workforce not belonging to faculty. Some resources and best practices to implement these policies are included in the ILO GEMS Toolkit (ILO, 2010), while further ones can be obtained adjusting some solutions already proposed for faculty (see, for instance, best practices to remove barriers to recruitment, retention and career progression of women gathered by the EQUAL4EUROPE project, Avogaro and Ginès i Fabrellas, 2021, pp. 31-34).

Recommendation #11 – Require applying business schools to provide information on equal pay policies and/or on gender pay gap and on measures to tackle it.

Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Accreditation agencies should integrate in the assessment criteria for excellence accreditations/awards, a requirement for applying institutions to provide information on their policies to ensure equal pay for equal work between women and men, as well as to disclose data on gender pay gap and to outline measures adopted to tackle it.</i>
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The information included in the recommendation, if present in an application, should contribute to an overall positive evaluation of the applying business school. Indeed, it has an impact on improving gender equality, and its presence in an accreditation scheme can act as a nudge for institutions to work on gender equality, in order to implement changes relevant for obtaining the accreditation. Nonetheless, this information refers to a specific policy, so it should not be mandatory. That is, the absence of this information should not be sufficient, by itself, to deny the accreditation to an applying institution.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Absence of equal pay for equal work and persisting gender pay gap are some of the main factors generating disparity in working conditions between women and men. Tackling them could create better conditions to encourage women to pursue/continue a career in academia. Furthermore, gender pay gap can be caused by many factors – for instance by imbalances in workload and working-time, vertical and/or horizontal segregation (EIGE, 2021, pp. 26-28; Eurofound and JRC, 2021, pp. 67-70) – therefore tackling it could lead to a general improvement of gender equality in the higher education institution. - For these reasons, accreditation agencies should include in the assessment criteria a requirement, for applying institutions, to outline the policies they have implemented in order to ensure equal pay for equal work, and/or to disclose data on gender pay gap and to inform about measures adopted to tackle it. The level of detail for this information request may be adjusted according to the relevance that each accreditation agency would like to recognize to this issue: for instance, information can be required at institutional level, or separately for faculty and administrative staff, or even for each hierarchy rank internal to these two cohorts of workers.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Furthermore, requiring applying institutions to provide information on policies for equal pay for equal work and on measures to tackle gender pay gap would allow to valorise business schools pro-active in such a key field for gender equality. As well as penalizing higher education institutions that do not address these issues, making harder for them to be awarded with accreditation/award, since they will obtain a negative score relating to this specific aspect.
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Recommendation #12 – Require applying business schools to describe their policy to address sexual harassment claims from staff and/or students.

Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accreditation agencies should require applying institutions to inform if they have implemented a policy to prevent sexual harassment and sexual misconduct, also providing further details on procedures and solutions to address relevant claims from staff and students.
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The outline mentioned in the recommendation, if present in an application, should contribute to an overall positive evaluation of the applying business school. Indeed, it has an impact on improving gender equality, and its presence in an accreditation scheme can act as a nudge for institutions to work on gender equality, in order to implement changes relevant for obtaining the accreditation. Nonetheless, this outline refers to a specific policy, so it should not be mandatory. That is, the absence of this outline should not be sufficient, by itself, to deny the accreditation to an applying institution.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many accreditation schemes already ask applying institution to indicate if they have adopted a policy to prevent cases of sexual harassment and of sexual misconduct among staff and students. Nonetheless, it is important, from the ethical perspective, that these policies do not remain “on paper” resulting, at the opposite, effective. In this view, applying institutions should be required specifically to also outline the procedures and solutions they adopted to address relevant claims. - The aforementioned information request could address, for instance, the implementation by the institution of specific measures to ensure privacy of people rising a claim, the creation of a specific and independent body to evaluate complaints, and the integration in internal regulations of a meaningful set of remedies and sanctions. - Information and resources relating to design, implement and improve internal policies to address gender-based violence are included in the specific toolkit developed by the UniSAFE project (UniSAFE, 2023). This information could be a source of inspiration for applying business schools aiming to comply with the requirements included in this recommendation, and for accreditation agencies interested in better detailing relevant criteria to integrate in their accreditation schemes.

5. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the study and the analysis carried out above, this brief section is aimed at providing a recap of the recommendations included in this position paper, and directed to accreditation agencies, to incorporate gender equality as part of the ethics and societal contribution of the business schools.

Methodology and structure of accreditation criteria

1. *Adopt a twin-track methodology for a compulsory gender-sensitive assessment of ethics and societal contribution of business schools, based on a cross-cutting principle and specific criteria.*
2. *Include in the accreditation criteria a specific chapter relating to ethics and societal contribution, with a dedicated subsection for gender equality.*

Governance as a dimension of ethic commitment of business schools

3. *Integrate the adoption by applying institutions of a gender equality or an equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) plan as a mandatory requirement to obtain the accreditation/award.*
4. *Require applying institutions to provide information about the measures adopted, at governance level, to promote a gender-inclusive organizational culture.*
5. *Require applying institutions to provide information about the internal policies adopted to ensure gender equality in decision making bodies and in leadership roles for faculty and administration.*

Research and teaching as a dimension of ethic commitment of business schools

6. *Require applying institutions to provide information on the implementation of measures to integrate gender equality in research activities.*
7. *Require applying institution to provide details about their measures to integrate gender equality in teaching activities.*

Community engagement and societal contribution of business schools

8. *Integrate a gender equality perspective in the evaluation of societal impact.*

Workforce management as a dimension of ethic commitment of business schools

9. *Require applying business schools to provide comprehensive information on measures adopted to ensure gender equality among faculty.*
10. *Require applying business schools to provide comprehensive information on measures adopted to ensure gender equality among administrative and non-academic staff.*
11. *Require applying business schools to provide information on equal pay policies and/or on gender pay gap and on measures to tackle it.*
12. *Require applying business schools to describe their policy to address sexual harassment claims from staff and/or students.*

6. REFERENCES

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