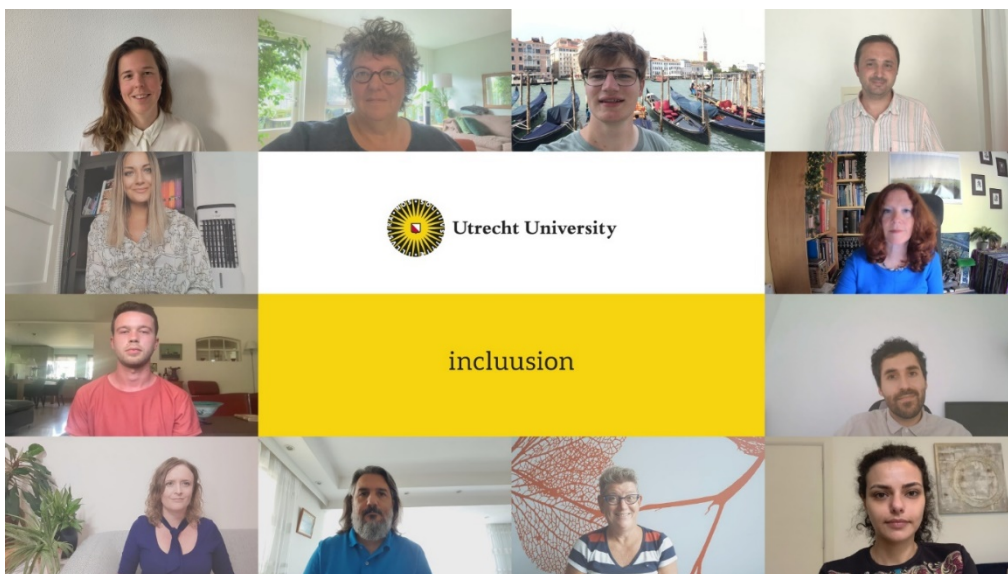




5 Years of Inclusion

Looking Back and Ahead



Check out our **lustrum video** at uu.nl/inclusion

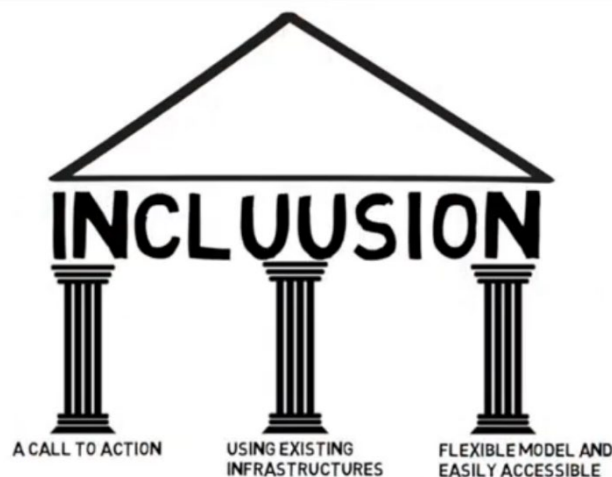
What is Inclusion?

In 2016, at the height of the Syrian war, two UU employees wanted to help out highly educated refugees who were waiting for their immigration procedure in asylum seeker centres throughout the Netherlands. Inclusion is their call to action to make use of this waiting period. Inclusion makes sure that refugees do not need to waste their time waiting, but are able to immediately participate and study at the UU.

Refugee students are selected using a simple intake procedure, checking their academic background, motivation and English level. UU-teachers are asked if they were willing to include a refugee student in their class as an extra participant. This is an easily establishable and efficient way of enabling refugee students to participate, since students are welcomed into already existing courses. During a course, Inclusion students can further develop their academic skills and learn more about the Dutch educational system. Along the line, a buddy system was set up, matching fulltime UU students to refugee students. This enhanced refugee students' social integration as well as their academic inclusion. As for the fulltime UU students, it is a valuable experience that broadens their horizon.

Inclusion started out as a volunteer based organization, but has since that time developed into a programme within the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy and action plan of Utrecht University that does not run solely on donations anymore. The most recent development is that Inclusion now also offers traineeships to 8 refugees per year, through which they gather work experience in the Netherlands. Many refugees want to work, but are unable to: they have no network in the Netherlands and language barriers are often an issue. This new project gives them a chance towards sustainable participation in the job market.

With this document, we want to share what we have done in the past years, what we've learned during that time, and what we'll work on and improve in the future.



What We've Done

Over the years, the number of applications to the Inclusion programme has been steady. We have seen a decrease in Syrian and an increase in Turkish students. Given current events, sadly it is quite likely that the number of refugees will remain at a constant level throughout the coming years, albeit with peaks in differing nationalities.

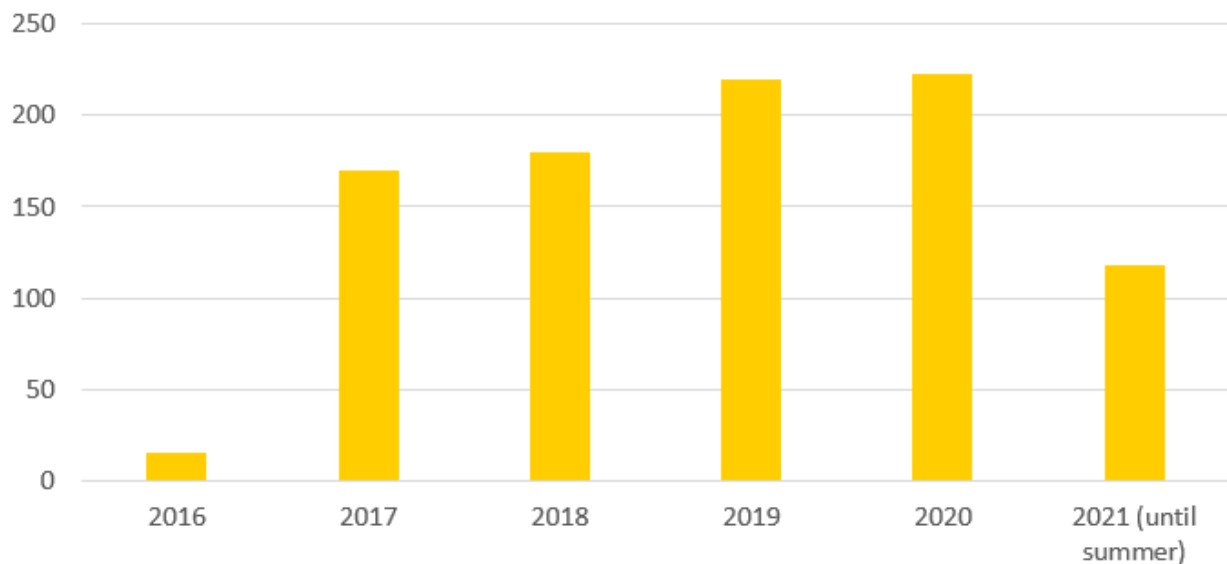
"Following an Inclusion course was a great opportunity. What I liked the most, is that it encouraged me to keep on learning"
Former Inclusion student Yara Aldibhned

Bachelor Courses and Buddy System

More than 900 refugee students participated in courses at the Utrecht University, the Utrecht Summer School and the University for Humanistic Studies through Inclusion. Students are temporarily enrolled at the UU as regular students and as such are able to use the library and can apply to workshops and coaching from the Skills Lab and Career Services.

During their course, Inclusion students are linked to two regular UU students (also known as "buddies"), who show them around the campus and help with their academic and social integration. Inclusion organises social get-togethers for our students and buddies - online since corona - to encourage interaction. At the end of a successful course, students receive a certificate.

Number of Inclusion students



Pilot Inclusion Traineeships

The Inclusion Traineeships are aimed at refugees who are currently unemployed and receiving benefits. Trainees get an unpaid work placement at the UU for 6 - 8 months, during which time they will, apart from gathering work experience in the Netherlands, work on their language skills through a Dutch course and through communicating with colleagues. They build up a relevant network within the Netherlands and can follow a professional development training related to their

field of work. Last but not least, trainees and their colleagues can follow an intercultural awareness training offered through HR.

Four of the five trainees now hold a paid position, of whom three at the UU. The fifth trainee is starting a Master programme. Until the end of 2022 there is budget for 11 more trainees. We recently opened the registration for these traineeships and received over 80 applications, showing that this new programme is in high demand. The value is also reflected in the enthusiastic responses we received from Utrecht municipality, UAF, Vluchtelingenwerk and other organisations working with refugees.

Computer Classes at Asylum Seeker Centre

Inclusion offers weekly computer classes through Plan Einstein at the asylum seeker centre in Utrecht with financial support from the Utrecht municipality. The level of the participants varies greatly: some students have never even used a computer before and are still learning how to type. Other students need help evolving their skills in using a word processing program or presentation software. These differences in background require a personal approach from our teacher(s) for each individual student.

*"I'm most impressed by the eagerness and willingness to learn of all my students."
Teacher computer classes David Schouten*

Other Achievements

The three founders of Inclusion were awarded the Silver Award by the UU in 2019, because Inclusion expresses the mission of Utrecht University: to work towards a better world.

Inclusion has been involved in various projects, such as organising conferences by and for refugee students, an art exhibit about diversity within the UU community, and collaborating with Scholars at Risk.

The Inclusion programme inspired other universities to develop similar programmes, such as WURth-While (Wageningen University & Research), InclUision (Leiden University) and TU/enable (Eindhoven University of Technology).

What We've Learned

Apart from the experiences of the Inclusion team members and stories from the various teachers that we collaborate with, we also sent out a survey to all our former students during the spring of 2021. We asked our students what we do well and what can be improved.

The surveyed students were highly satisfied (4.5 out of 5) with the organisation of the Inclusion programme and also had high levels of perceived social and academic inclusion at the UU. Students from the last academic year did mention the negative impact of distance learning due to COVID-19 on their feelings of inclusion. Their perceived English level was strongly positively correlated to their perceived academic inclusion, showing that students' level of English greatly impacts their integration.

Impact of Personal Situation

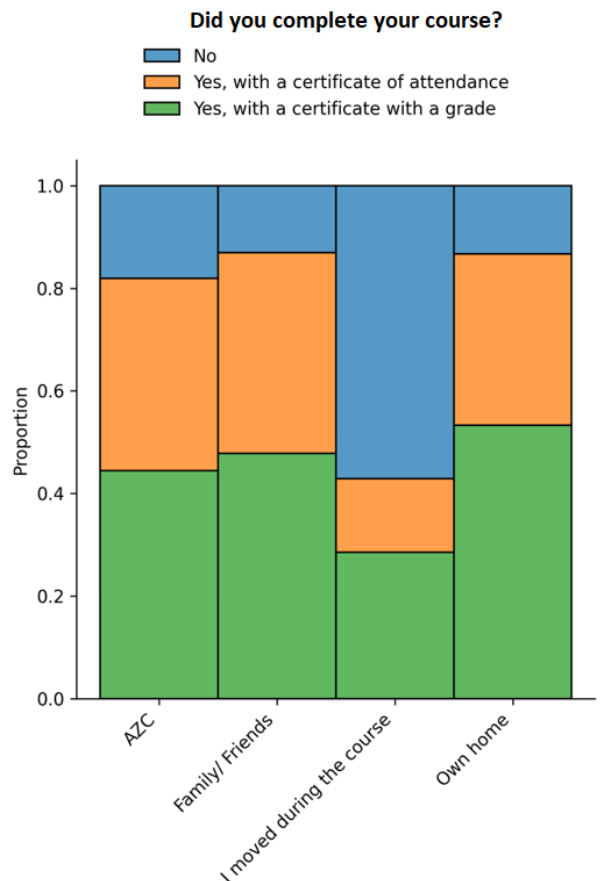
Throughout the years we have heard from our students about challenging living situations in asylum seeker centres, the impact of the instability of their living situation, the uncertainty of their refugee procedure, and their own personal (family) situation. The survey demonstrates a clear link between the successful completion of a course and their living situation (see picture on the right).

This vulnerable position is something to be kept in mind while teaching Inclusion students. It partly explains the relatively high drop-out rate throughout our courses (in 2021-2021 around 29%). On the other hand, when compared to the drop-out rate of first year Dutch university students (~20% annually¹) the number is – perhaps surprisingly enough – not much higher.

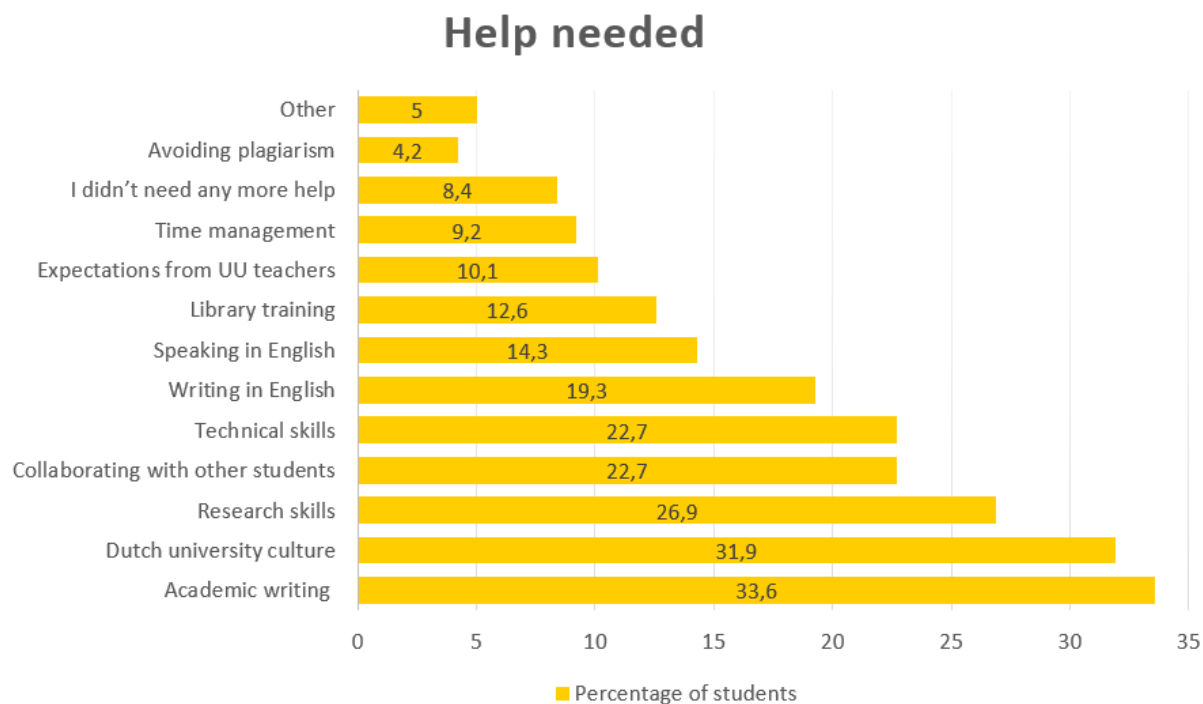
Further Help Needed

We asked the students whether there were things they needed help with during or before they participated in a course. The results (see next page), showcase the need for a better understanding of the Dutch university culture and the expected academic skills. It is striking that 'collaborating with other students' is mentioned so many times, because it is a typical example of how learning methods and expectancies differ per culture.

Moving forward, we will set up a training for Inclusion students preparing them for the Dutch academic culture and expected academic skills. It is important to mention that since we do already provide a library training, it is not surprising that 'avoiding plagiarism' and 'library training' are amongst the least mentioned.



¹ www.vsnu.nl/feiten-en-cijfers-onderwijs.html



The number of students who knew about the Skills Lab and the Career Services of the UU was quite low; only ~20% knew for sure what these services are and only 3 students made use of their services. From now on, we will put more emphasis on communicating about these services to Inclusion students, so we can increase the likelihood of them signing up for a course, training or coaching session when they need it. In addition, Inclusion is also working together with the Online Coaching Center (organised by the Educational Sciences department of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences in collaboration with a former Inclusion student) in the same way.

Time after Inclusion

Usually, there are two future paths for Inclusion students after completing their courses at the UU: continue studying or finding a job. We wanted to know whether students actually enrolled in a fulltime programme at the UU after their time at Inclusion and why (not).

70% of the students stated that they wanted to seek a higher level of education, of whom 48.5% at the UU and 21.5% at another Dutch university. Of the 34 students that applied to the UU, 8 got accepted (see graph on next page). Five students were declined, and the majority of the students (21) said that the procedure was so unclear or complicated that they gave up. Different reasons were mentioned, such as difficulties meeting the administrative requirements, not knowing where to get started, or still having to await their diploma evaluation or even their procedure.

Similar experiences were reflected in other results from the survey: although students' expectations were largely met by the Inclusion programme and the UU, this was not the case in the following areas:

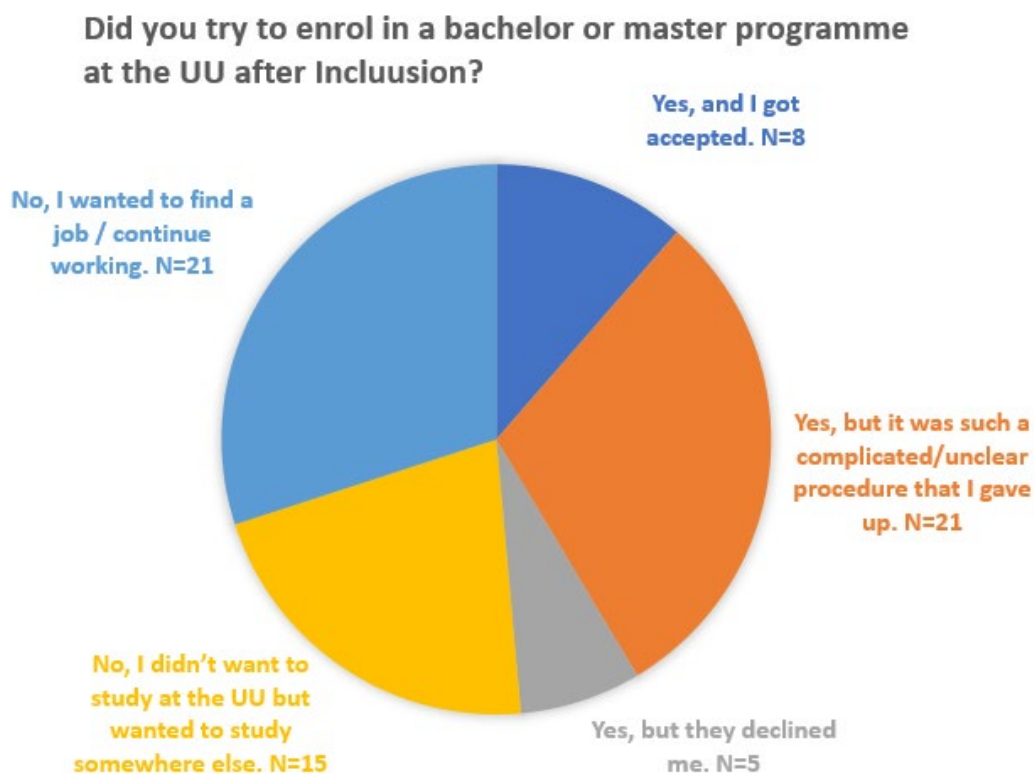
1. Help to enrol in a bachelor or master programme
2. Increase my chances of getting a job

Both were only realised for 31.6% of the students who wanted to achieve this.

Through conversations with Inclusion students and colleagues from the Admissions Office and the Student & Academic Affairs Office, we learned that applications from refugee students to fulltime

programmes are often quite complex, because they include different financial situations, ages, educational backgrounds, and of course programme specific and legal requirements. Paperwork may be partial and is sometimes even completely missing. While applying to a programme at the UU, refugee students also have to deal with many other organisations, such as their municipality, DUO and sometimes UAF. This can make it a confusing and demotivating process. The Admissions Office is working on ensuring that the procedures, at least within the UU, are clear and understandable for refugee students.

As for increasing refugees' chances of getting a job: the pilot of our traineeship programme shows encouraging results that this can be a successful route for job aspiring refugees.

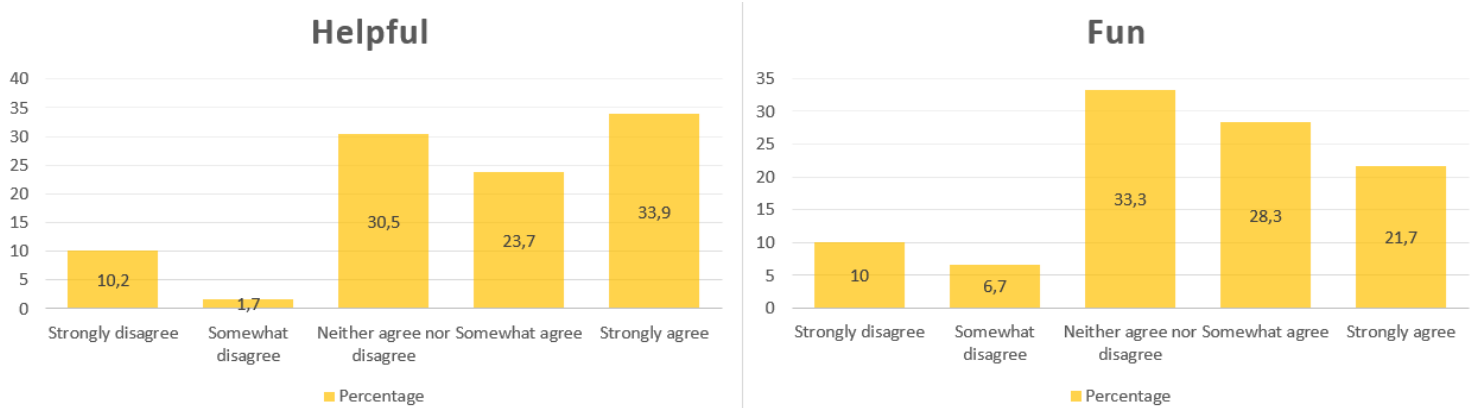


Buddy System

There are many examples of successful matching between buddies (regular UU students) and refugee students. Friendships evolve and the students stay in touch years after they finished an Inclusion course. However, the results from the survey do indicate that the experiences from the students with the buddy system are somewhat mixed. There are many students that state that the buddy experience was both helpful and fun, but also a few who disagree (see next page).

Speaking from our own experience and based on the survey, the buddy system is sometimes hindered by the large age gap between buddies and Inclusion students. Also, different life experiences and cultures can sometimes hinder communication between the paired students. We

want to negate these hindrances and make sure that the buddy system works well for all students (buddies and Inclusion students alike!).



Interestingly enough, around 50% of the Inclusion students indicated that they would like to be a buddy or mentor themselves for a future Inclusion student, or to become part of a (yet to be set up) Inclusion network/community. Over 36% of the students was not sure yet, and only less than 20% preferred not to.

What We'll Improve

The Inclusion programme is societally important, since refugees have less chance of participating in higher education and a worse position on the job market than other migrants. This is called the refugee gap. At Inclusion, we believe that our work makes this gap a little bit smaller.

In the coming years, we will continue to offer computer classes at the asylum seeker centre in collaboration with Plan Einstein and the municipality. We will also continue our collaboration with Scholars at Risk to support scholars in immediate danger. Everything we've learned in the past 5 years, will lead to the further development of the following aspects of our programme.

Pre-Course Training for Inclusion Students

From September 2021 onwards, we will be developing a preparatory training for our students. The aim is to get our students acquainted with the UU and the Dutch academic educational system, before they start a course at the UU. The training will be developed in close cooperation with (former) Inclusion students, to fully understand the needs of the students and to make use of their experiential knowledge.

Inclusion will focus on setting up a training that is useful for all students, regardless of the faculty that they want to study at. We will, however, also collaborate with the Utrecht University School of Governance (USG) in an USO-project. This USO-project aims to create programme-specific workshops and guidance for refugee students that do not just follow one or two courses, but want to enrol for the selective bachelor program of the USG.

The preparation will serve as a foundation for refugee students to increase the likeliness of successful completion of their first bachelor year. On top of the preparatory training offered by Inclusion, the USG students will therefore receive a special coaching program, with individual sessions tailored to their personal and programme-specific needs. The aim overall is an increased study success and an easier transition and integration into the Dutch academia.



Strengthening the Inclusion Community

Inclusion's work is in accordance with the Strategic Plan of the UU, by creating a diverse and inclusive UU workforce and student population. We will work on strengthening the Inclusion community at the UU by improving the buddy system and setting up a network for present and former Inclusion students. The buddies will be better prepared for their volunteer work by following a training. This training will clarify the purpose of the buddy system and teach them about intercultural communication, potential topics to be discussed with their students, and where and when to refer Inclusion students to other facilities or services of the UU (such as the Skills Lab).

The Inclusion network will provide a safe space at the UU for students to study, to discuss each other's (educational and social) experiences and to work on their plans for the future. Their buddy students and teachers are, of course, also welcome to join this safe space.

Collaboration with the Admissions Office

Despite everything Inclusion students achieve during their courses, many find themselves unable to take the next step towards a full programme at the UU, given that the entrance procedures are complicated and the requirements often (slightly or completely) different from their qualifications.

The Admissions Office of the UU is working within an EU project on developing tools that allow the assessment of qualifications and experiences of refugee students, in which knowledge and potential are prioritised over policies and fixed qualifications. Only then can refugee students stand a chance to reach equal footing.

Inclusion will work together with the Admissions Office on this project, in order to improve access to higher education for refugees in the Netherlands as an important step towards employment and security in the future.

Inclusion Traineeships: From Pilot to Programme

The pilot of the traineeships led to satisfactory results for all trainees, but the programme itself is still quite unknown within and outside of the UU. It would be an improvement if the programme is able to offer university wide work placements, rather than only placing trainees in departments that are already involved in Inclusion. Furthermore, Inclusion is working on strengthening its collaboration with the Utrecht (and other) municipalities.

The registration and selection procedures will be professionalised to handle larger numbers of applications in an efficient, fair and thought-out manner. Given the clear societal demand and the positive impact on both the UU and the trainees' employment chances, upscaling the programme should be considered.

*"It is great to see the Inclusion trainees develop in speaking Dutch, in dealing with our culture, and in learning skills as a problem solver and IT professional."
Trainee supervisor Jacqueline van Besouw (Support Manager ITS)*