

Inclusion Receives Overwhelming Support from UU Teaching Staff

97.3% recommend Inclusion to other teachers

A recent survey illuminates the breadth of impact the Inclusion programme has on students, teachers, and the university community. A UU teacher notes how Inclusion allows refugee and asylum seeker students to become a “meaningful part of our society”. But Inclusion extends further than the refugee students it is catered for. The programme evidently embodies Utrecht University’s commitment to inclusivity and diversity by allowing refugee students to enrich classroom discourse and enhance learning environments across all faculties, impacting both regular UU students and their teachers.

The support from teachers through this survey highlights the important role Inclusion plays in fostering understanding and empathy among students and faculty alike. It is a welcomed mechanism for driving positive social change and creating a collaborative and inclusive academic environment at Utrecht University. To quote one of the survey respondents, “Kindness is also its own reward.”

Far reaching impact

In order to understand the reality of including Inclusion students, it was necessary to consult the involved teaching staff. In April 2024, a survey was conducted among all UU lecturers involved in recent years (n=98). Not only were we eager to understand the experiences of teachers involved in the Inclusion programme, but we were also curious about the impact and potential benefits of having Inclusion students in the classroom.

To date, Inclusion has facilitated over 1,600 refugee and asylum seeker students to follow Bachelor and Utrecht Summer School courses at Utrecht University. Inclusion students bring a wealth of knowledge, experience, and perspective that has far-reaching consequences for the entire university community. A teacher from the faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences mentions: “Inclusion students are big assets for UU and students, ... I received a lot of positive feedback especially when they work in a group with Inclusion student.”

Broadening worldviews

Teachers highlighted multiple benefits in their responses. Importantly, the Inclusion program enabled the diversification of the university itself. The teachers indicate that the Inclusion students had a noticeable impact on other UU students, including by broadening their worldview, introducing new or different perspectives that the UU students could learn from, and raising awareness of intercultural differences.

According to the majority of UU teaching staff, Inclusion students have a resoundingly positive impact on classroom discussions and help create a more inclusive learning environment for students. One teacher from the faculty of Humanities and Law, Economics and Governance mentioned: “They had a big impact on the group as they had lived less sheltered lives than the average student at UU. It was great to have them.” Another teacher from University College Utrecht echoed this sentiment, stating that “since most Inclusion students are older and have higher degrees and/or working experience, they can serve as role models” for other UU students who are generally younger. In this sense, Inclusion students contribute to the broad development of UU students as global citizens through classroom and peer engagement.

Improving teaching strategies

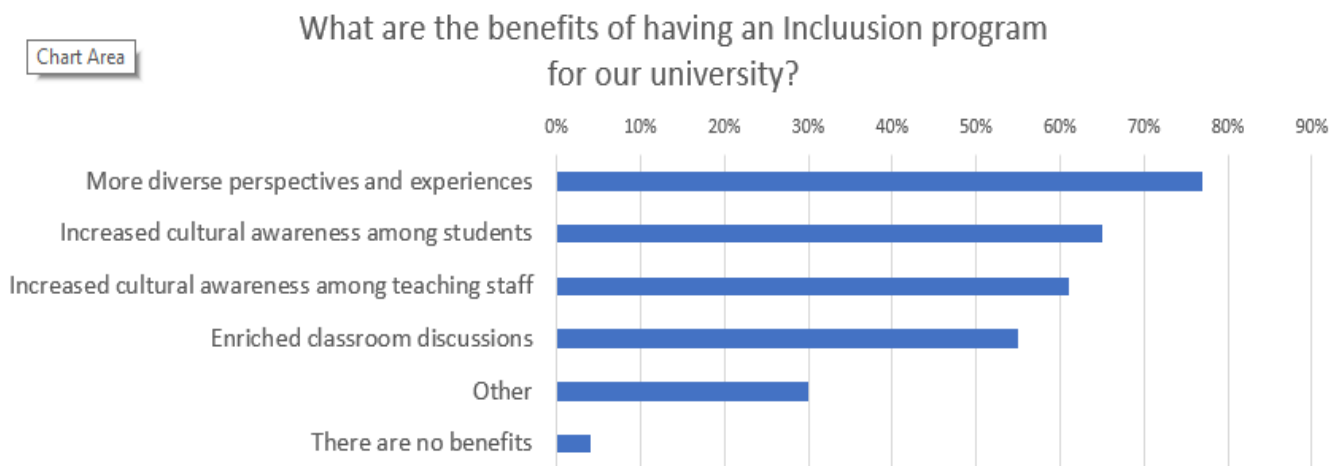
Another benefit that surfaced is the positive impact of Inclusion students on the teachers. Respondents cited that having Inclusion students in their courses raised cultural awareness among teaching staff, through an increased understanding of intercultural differences and therefore improving their intercultural teaching skills.

A Social and Behavioural Sciences lecturer teaching a very large group of students mentioned that it was hard to answer the question about the impact of the Inclusion students, as they were such a small number in a large group. A teacher from Humanities mentioned “the impact on the general teaching situation and other students is not that substantial, as generally my courses have had only one or two Inclusion students, who always blend in very easily and are in fact just students like any others.” These examples show that understandably the impact and influence of having refugee students in the classroom is larger for smaller scale lectures, classes and work groups.

Doing the right thing

When asked about the benefits of the Inclusion program for the UU (see figure below), an additional self-selected answer was surprisingly often given. What is special is that many UU teachers cite value-driven reasons for participating in Inclusion. Solidarity was an important value for UU teachers. “There is also value in doing the right thing and showing that to students, staff, and society at large”, mentions a Humanities teacher. Another teacher from the faculty of Science wrote how through Inclusion, teachers can “fill a social mission, which is an important duty to the university”, while yet another mentioned that “The striving factor in continuing the [Inclusion] program should be to help this vulnerable population”.

Only 3 out of 101 respondents stated they did not experience or see any benefits.



Overwhelming support

Support and satisfaction with the Inclusion programme were overwhelmingly positive. Respondents averaged an 8.1 out of 10 when asked to rate their overall experience with Inclusion and welcoming refugee students into their classrooms. These results are mirrored in a resounding 97.3% of respondents who would recommend fellow teachers to participate in Inclusion. As

teaching staff plays an important role in the functioning of the programme, their satisfaction with and eagerness to expand the scope of Inclusion is an extremely enlightening result.

The vast majority of respondents answered positively when asked if they believed Inclusion should continue after the 2024 review period. Of these, 72% 'strongly agreed' with 17% 'somewhat agreeing' with the continuation of the programme.

English language skills

When asked if there were things that Inclusion students struggled more with on average, when compared to regular UU students, 32% of the teachers concluded that there were no such things. However, 47% and 35% of the respondents mentioned English writing skills and English speaking skills, respectively. This is not surprising: most students were studying in their native (non-English) language in their home country, and it takes time to adjust to being taught in English with the corresponding jargon. It does emphasize the need for our current language entry requirements to regular UU programmes, and the support that refugee students might need in order to reach these requirements.

Similarly, a few teachers mentioned the importance of having a good match regarding academic background. Having underqualified or overqualified students can be demotivational, which underlines the importance of conducting a thorough personal intake interview with each new candidate student.

Practical issues

Some teachers mentioned that the practical issues refugee students face sometimes lead to dropouts. Examples include a student suddenly being moved to an asylum seekers centre far away from Utrecht, having trouble paying for travel costs (since Inclusion can only refund travel costs after they are made), and mandatory check-ins at the asylum seekers centre. Fortunately, most students manage despite these barriers. One teacher from Humanities mentions: "In my experience the Inclusion students are among the most committed and diligent students in my courses. It has been thoroughly rewarding to teach them."

Survey details

The results of this survey are foundational for the future of Inclusion beyond 2024, and integral to ensuring the programme continues to benefit all students, teachers, and the entire UU community. A deeper understanding of UU teacher and faculty perceptions of the Inclusion programme was gained which can be used to shape the programme in the future.

This survey was conducted online via Qualtrics and administered to all teaching staff, course coordinators, and other faculty members who have been involved with Inclusion in the past few years. The survey received 101 respondents. Of those, three were excluded, leaving 98 respondents in total. Respondents held multiple roles within the UU, including teaching staff, course coordinator, and/or teacher at the Utrecht Summer School. The most represented faculties include Humanities (34), Social and Behavioural Sciences (22), Law, Economics and Governance (16) and Science (15). The remaining respondents were associated with the Geosciences faculty (11), University College Utrecht (8), Medicine (2) and Veterinary Medicine faculty (1). The low number of respondents from the last two faculties is due to their limited course offer.

Date: 27-08-2024

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