

Netherlands – EC-VPL

Institution	EC-VPL
Interviewed Person	Female student from Angola

Introduction note**The University Assistance Fund (UAF)**

The Foundation University Assistance Fund (UAF) is the oldest refugee organization in the Netherlands. The Foundation was set up in 1948 by the Dutch Universities as the University Asylum Fund to support Czech students who fled to the Netherlands after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union. Ever since, the Foundation for Refugee Students UAF has supported refugees in their studies and in finding suitable employment.

The mission of the UAF is expressed in Article 2 of the Statutes. ‘Invoking the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Foundation for Refugee Students UAF aims to provide the necessary material and moral assistance to higher educated refugees from all parts of the world, who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution, have left their countries, and who have shown to have sufficient abilities, with the objective to let them continue and successfully finish their studies in the Netherlands, and to help them find a place in the labour market that matches their education as well as giving information with regard to the above mentioned target groups and activities.’

UAF supports refugees with grants and loans, so that they can attend higher education. These funds are intended only for tuition fees, language courses, books, a computer, travelling expenses and other costs related to their studies.

UAF advises refugees on their choice of study and guides them during their studies and when they apply for jobs. In the initial phase, UAF helps them while they learn the language and develop learning skills. UAF organizes training courses and networking meetings for refugees who are studying and those who have graduated.

Foundation year

UAF built a network of higher education institutes across the country that offers in every region an opportunity to enter higher education by means of a foundation year in which the linkage is facilitated between the individual talents and learning experiences of a refugee and the learning opportunities in Dutch higher education.

A foundation year starts with an individual intake on the formal requirements for entering Dutch HE: Dutch language proficiency and other subject matters on pre-university level, needed for entering a specific HE-programme. The intake helps match with the desired HE-programme. Entry tests are offered for Dutch, English, mathematics and depending on one’s study choice also chemistry and physics.

After this intake, the foundation year focuses on strengthening knowledge and skills on relevant subject-matters for the preferred HE-programme in Dutch, English, mathematics, and if needed for the specific programme also physics, chemistry, biology, and history. These subjects are taught with attention for study skills. Moreover, every student receives personal mentoring.

The outcome of the foundation year is the personal bridging of the gap between the formal and informal requirements and the individual ambition and motivation for a HE-programme.

Such a foundation year is for instance offered by:

- The *Vrije Universiteit (VU)*. The VASVU (Voorbereidend Jaar Anderstalige Studenten – Preparatory year for non-native speaking students) offers courses needed for a future study program.
- The *Hogeschool Utrecht (HU - Utrecht University of Applied Sciences)* offers a foundation year for capacitating migrants/refugees to bridge the gap between their prior learning experiences and the requirements needed for entering a HE-programme.
- *Boswell-Bèta Center for Access Education and Foundation Programmes* offers access courses and exams for students who want to enter higher education in the Netherlands.

All these foundation years offer courses in Dutch, English and mathematics and a variety of specific subjects if needed for the specific programme like physics, chemistry, biology, and history.

The following individual cases are situated in these HE-institutes and exemplify the ways of working in foundation years. Requirement for entering a foundation year is a registration at the UAF.

I – Preparation

Female student from Angola, age: 20. Fled from Angola with her family when she was 3 years old.

Law, academic level, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

II – Awareness

I wanted to become a teacher at first: “I like to help and develop people I always helped my parents when learning Dutch”. I changed my mind to law when I met my lawyer: “I was impressed by her work and the way she filled it in. Her way of arguing, with much strength and control”.

She understood that she needed to be fully integrated into the Dutch learning system. She speaks fluent Dutch.

She is accustomed to the Dutch culture in which a diploma is a gate to a job.

The foundation year helped me with articulating my learning goals and preparing for access (procedure, Dutch and other subjects like English).

She was and still is guided by the UAF.

Opportunities for testing/validating your capacities were part of the foundation year.

III – Starting up

There were tests available for assessing my competences, and skills for meeting the entry-requirements of the bachelor-programme in law.

Knowledge-tests were offered and tests on learning style at university level.

My prior learning experiences were actually Dutch-based experiences. So, they were integrated in the overall testing if I could meet up to the standard of the bachelor-programme.

The testing was personalised.

I was very motivated, and therewith quite certain of my drive to go to university.

I trusted UAF, so I trusted the testing/validating?

The testing/validating was performed in a personally respectful way.

The testing/validating really focused on my personal interests.

IV – Documentation and support

I was guided in documenting my personal learning experiences.

Because of the guidance, it was not very difficult to get together my evidence of learning.

My focus in documenting was predominantly on formal learning, voluntary work, and in my personal sphere my ability to help my family in their capacity-building.

Diplomas, statements.

I made a kind of personal portfolio.

The portfolio looks like a documented and argued CV.

It wasn't hard to do the documentation of my capacities and experiences.

Yes, I also constructed new documentation: statements on my activities that could be supported by others (voluntary work colleagues, family).

In case of testing, I got written instruction and personal guidance.

V – Assessment

I just did the tests and the admission to the university by means of a matching & intake procedure.

I prepared for this with my guide from UAF and my colleagues in the UAF-class.

Did you feel that the assessment was really about getting grip on your personal capacities?

I was informed on the way the intake-assessment at Erasmus University was going to take place.

The assessment was based on the formal requirements for getting access to university.

The assessment performed was in a matching & intake procedure in which my motivation and required capacities in Dutch, English were discussed with kind of mentor from Erasmus University.

The intake was in Dutch.

UAF helped me with getting insight in the standard that was used for the intake.

I would do it all over again in the same manner when I would need a 2nd chance. But, I already started at the Law faculty.

VI – Impact

The outcome of the assessment was that got access to Law faculty.

I was very happy and motivated.

The direct result was access to a qualification-programme at bachelor level.

The offer for further guidance in learning comes from UAF and from the university.

I didn't get an assessment-report or any other kind of statement on my capacities. The formal admission to Erasmus University was this statement.

I agreed fully with the next steps I was offered for learning since that is what I wanted!

I already got my 'propedeuse' after one year with the help from UAF, other students and Erasmus University.