



Brainstorm lunch

Student associations to English?

onder de zinspreuk:



12.30-13.15
February 23rd
C103 Forum

**lunch
included**

The discussion about BSc in English also opens the discussion about the language spoken at the student associations. Associations contribute to the integration of new students and stimulate them to be active. Should we change them to English?

*VeSte organised a brainstorm lunch around
the theme 'Student associations to English!?'
This is a report of the discussion*

Introduction

As described in their strategic plan, Wageningen University has international ambitions, and for more than 10 years already hundreds of new international students are welcomed each year. Last year the Executive Board decided to look into the option of English Bachelor programmes. Starting from the academic year 2018-2019, six programmes might offer a completely English Bachelor, replacing the current Dutch one. The Student Council already discussed some aspects of this topic with the rector in a consultation meeting. In March, a decision on this topic will be made together with the Student Council.

If the English Bachelor plan continues, it might lead to an influx of international BSc students. These students are likely to stay in Wageningen for a longer period of time compared to MSc students. This means that it is important that they feel home in Wageningen. The question is, can we already facilitate those students and if not, do we need to adapt by switching Dutch student associations to English?

In order to find an answer to the question above, VeSte organised a brainstorm session in which all interested students could speak their mind. Next to inviting individual students via personal contacts and social media, the Contractus associations were invited, together with international organisations.

Set-up

17 students and 6 VeSte members were present. These 17 members consisted of four non-Dutch students (including a member from the Indonesian student association, and a member from the Indian student association). The Dutch students present were either interested students or were representatives from student associations or student organisation IxESN.

The brainstorm was organised around two statements. After giving each statement, the attendants were asked to raise hands if they were in favour, against or abstained from voting. During the discussion, questions were raised by the audience and handled in a similar way. The summary of these discussions are displayed below.

Brainstorm

'It is hard for international student to integrate in the Wageningen student life.'

Most people abstain, the opinions are divided.

Supporters to the statement say that it is harder for non-Dutch speaking students to integrate in Wageningen compared to Dutch students. The opponents mention that there are enough possibilities in the Wageningen student life to integrate, such as ESN. They do however agree that it is harder to join a Dutch sports association if you do not speak Dutch. Often mentioned is that we do not know how these future international BSc students would feel and what they will need.

Supporters were asked what factors helped them feel at home in Wageningen. They comment that the association did really help to integrate. Seven out of the nineteen present Dutch students mention that the student association did really help in integrating.

By the representative of the Indonesian student association, it is mentioned that their members feel home in Wageningen since there are other Indonesian students as well. The association organises activities and helps integrating new students. The members are also stimulated to join sports associations. However, some Indonesian students feel more comfortable to spend their free time with other Indonesian students. In a conversation between ISOW and VeSte prior to this brainstorm, it was revealed that an important aspect to spending your free time, is to be surrounded by language and culture-like students.

This cultural aspect was also endorsed by a present Argo board member. Their association has a very Dutch culture. Switching to English will spoil this. Other associations present agree to this being the case.

'Student associations can easily be switched to English.'

No one said yes, everybody said no or abstain.

The general opinion was that there are so many Dutch traditions present at student associations, that switching to English is a threat to the existence of these traditions and the current 'vibe' at associations. Most members view their association as a second home, and this is something that everybody recognizes as something that every student in Wageningen should have access to. As a response, the present member of the Indonesian student association makes the remark that they, and other associations, do not expect their members to talk English. So why should Dutch associations do so?

'Is it necessary that the Dutch associations switch to English?'

21 people responded with no, two abstained, no one responded with yes.

One student which abstained from voting, explained that an association does not have to switch completely to English, but that integration of international students within the Dutch culture should be stimulated. Maybe via an 'international' committee, or a similar structure.

In the past, an international sub-association of K.S.V. Franciscus was founded called San Francisco. This sub-association organised activities for international students and stimulated integration. Later it grew out to IxESN and became independent from K.S.V. Franciscus. Such a structure, a sub-association or international committees which are a part of big associations, can contribute to the integration between international and national students in Wageningen. One remark however, it is likely that a room full of Dutch-speaking students will not all speak English when an international student joins them. This feel excluded and unwelcome and therefore is not a solution.

There is already an existing international student association, called AEGEE. This is an interdisciplinary student organisation which has local departments in over 200 cities including Tilburg, Eindhoven, Utrecht, Delft, Groningen and Enschede. It is suggested that a department in Wageningen can be founded if needed.

'Are international students interested in mixed organisations?'

Currently, IxESN is mostly focussing on master and exchange students. E.g. students that are here for a short period of time. The activities they organise are recurring and aimed at experiencing the Dutch culture. International BSc students are likely to stay in Wageningen for a longer period of time. This means that they could also seek more options to be active themselves. In a mixed organisation, multiple nationalities are present and the foundation is aimed at an intercultural ambiance.

Conclusion

None of the present student desires a Dutch association to switch to English. If English Bachelors will become reality, founding a new mixed organisation or extending an existing one (IxESN) is seen as the best option to fully offer these new BSc students a home in Wageningen.

Next steps

The given opinions and the experiences that were shared will be taken along in constructing a VeSte opinion. In March, the Student Council hopes to receive the preliminary decision of the Executive Board on the English Bachelors. This will be discussed in the consultation meeting of April 4th, which all students are allowed to join. Depending on this discussion, we will take further steps.

All participants are thanked for their contribution to the discussion and the open ambiance that was present. For more information, contact veste@wur.nl.