

VeSte Policy 2020



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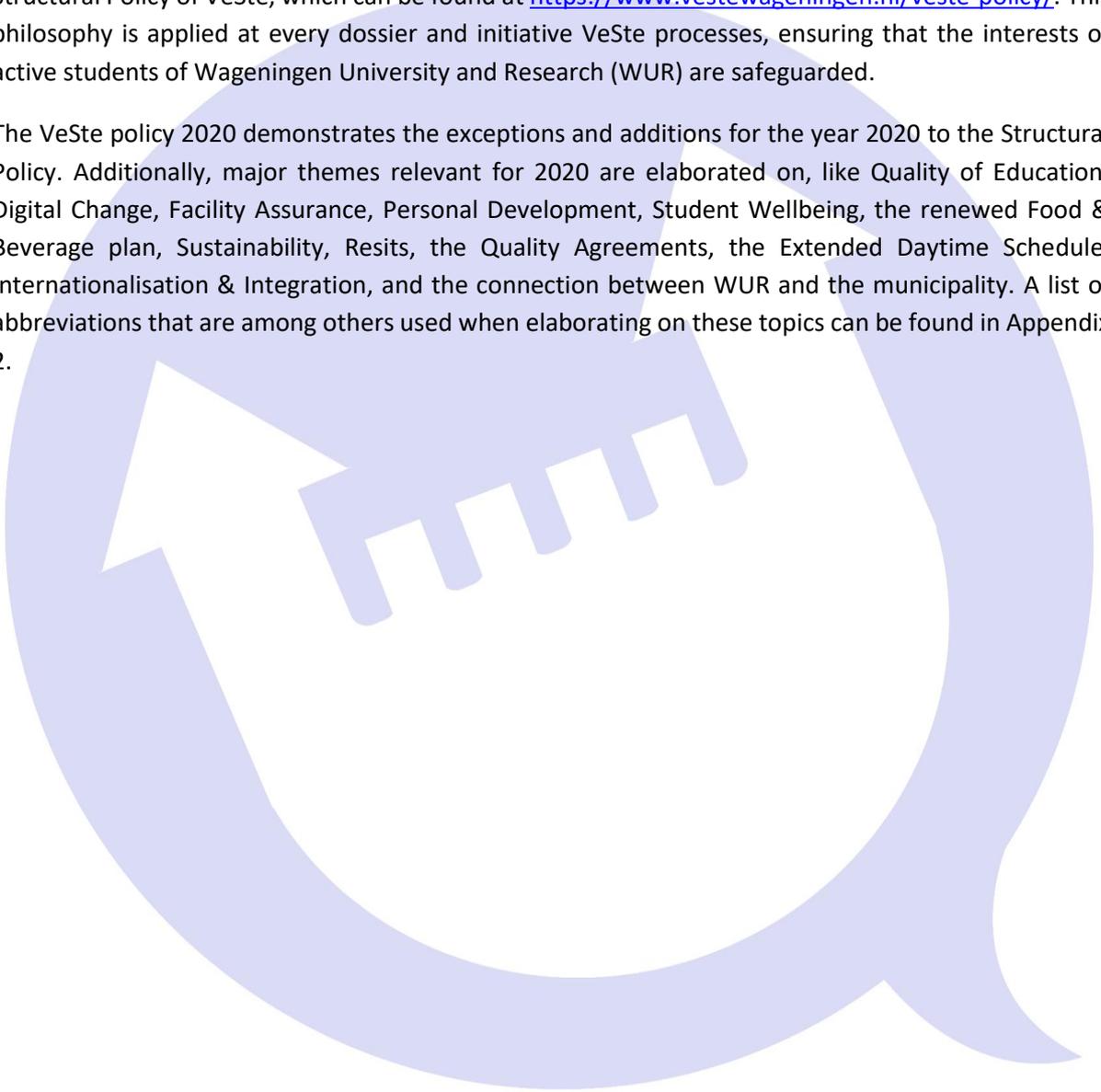
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Introduction

As a party taking place in the Student Council (SC) of Wageningen University (WU) we represent and support active students of WU. In this policy plan, we elaborate on the vision and plan that is at the heart of our efforts.

The policy of VeSte is at all times based on the three core values of VeSte. These are expressed as the three pillars which function as the foundation of the VeSte identity: *World-Class Education*, *Broad Academic Development* and a *Vibrant Student Life*. This solid foundation is elaborated on in the Structural Policy of VeSte, which can be found at <https://www.vestewageningen.nl/veste-policy/>. This philosophy is applied at every dossier and initiative VeSte processes, ensuring that the interests of active students of Wageningen University and Research (WUR) are safeguarded.

The VeSte policy 2020 demonstrates the exceptions and additions for the year 2020 to the Structural Policy. Additionally, major themes relevant for 2020 are elaborated on, like Quality of Education, Digital Change, Facility Assurance, Personal Development, Student Wellbeing, the renewed Food & Beverage plan, Sustainability, Resits, the Quality Agreements, the Extended Daytime Schedule, Internationalisation & Integration, and the connection between WUR and the municipality. A list of abbreviations that are among others used when elaborating on these topics can be found in Appendix 2.



Internal affairs

The internal affairs of VeSte relates to the function of VeSte as a party. The elements of this are the different board functions within VeSte and the various committees within VeSte that ensure the continuity and prosperity as a party. An elaboration on the functions and committees can be found in the Structural Policy. The responsible party member per function until September 2020 is stated in Appendix 1.

The coming year, besides of having a function within VeSte as a party, members of VeSte also hold a function within the Student Council (SC). These include the following: the chair of VeSte is also the chair of the SC, our Secretary is also the Secretary of the SC and the Commissioner Internal Relations is the SC's Treasurer.

An explanation of all individual functions are mentioned in the Structural Policy. VeSte as a party, and its individual members, also have some new spearheads for 2020. Our main objective, and in particular that of the Chair, is looking into strengthening the status of VeSte. Moreover, this year the Commissioner National Affairs wishes to strengthen the cooperation with active student factions of Student Councils of other universities that share similar core values as VeSte. With these factions, best practices can be discussed as concerns understanding context, preconditions and critical success factors. Lastly, our Commissioner Public Relations aims to more intensively use all social media platforms, to inform students better about the developments that take place at WUR and to involve more students in our work.

Internal committees

Acquisition

This year, VeSte again strives for a minimum of €2,000 in acquisition. Moreover, we find that it is also good to focus on acquisition in terms of tangible items, as for example snacks and magazines.

Promotion & Design

This year, the Promotion & Design committee has a special goal to be as content-wise and informative as possible, not only on recent developments, but also on existing policies and facilities of WU. One clear example of this is the creation of new, informative posters with the intention of explaining these university-related policies and facilities.

Events

VeSte organises a variety of events every year. The Structural Policy elaborates on yearly recurring events. Furthermore, together the Promotion & Design committee, the Events committee develops new events.

Training

This year VeSte continues to give training courses to boards. Moreover, VeSte will also offer training courses to large committees to benefit more organising student bodies. Training courses that will be given are the effective meeting and team-building courses. Moreover, this year a time management training will be available as well. To ensure that as many student organisations as possible benefit from our training, VeSte will actively promote them during drinks, lunches and other activities.

VeSte elections

To ensure that VeSte keeps representing the rights and interests of active students in future years, it is essential that as many students feel encouraged to vote for VeSte. It is therefore important that students are well-informed on what VeSte stands for, what our role is in WU and what we have accomplished and can accomplish for students. This is what we strive for throughout the year, but during the election week especially. In order to achieve this, VeSte aspires to focus on more content-wise promotion this year.

External affairs

In 2020, many issues will be discussed in the Student Council, the WUR Council, with the Executive Board and with the municipality. An elaboration on the committees in which these issues are handled can be found in the Structural Policy. The major themes are hereunder described.

Quality of Education

For the fifteenth time in a row, WU has been chosen to be the best university of the Netherlands. According to the National Student Survey, WU scores above average on almost all subjects. Maintaining and improving the quality of education is one of the core values that VeSte is built on. It is our top priority to ensure *World-Class Education* in every decision we make. Therefore it is important to keep in mind that with each subject discussed in this policy quality of education is a great factor influencing the way VeSte assesses problems. As the subject of quality of Education has been our core value for years, an elaboration can be found in our Structural Policy.

Holding the title of best university of the Netherlands does not mean that WU has reached its ne plus ultra; there is always room for improvement. The Quality Agreements facilitate new improvements on the quality of education. It is vital that these investments are being monitored closely and that WU keeps on evaluating these investments. VeSte realises that the different organisational departments of WU can make it difficult to determine the return of these investments, and that the procedures surrounding these plans can be difficult. Nonetheless, VeSte plays an active role in the monitoring and evaluation of these plans and sees to it that they benefit students as much as possible.

Moreover, in order to improve *Broad Academic Development*, VeSte believes that evaluation of one's individual learning path should be amply facilitated. Furthermore, good preparation for interim examinations is of vital importance for improving one's individual learning path. Therefore, it is our goal this year to enhance (individual) examination preparation and education evaluation methods.

The SC Boekel Education Enhancement (BEE), SC Quality versus Quantity (QvsQ), SC Student Charter and the WUR Council Education & Research (E&R) committees take up subjects regarding the quality of education, assessing preliminary decisions of the Executive Board (EB) and on their own initiative.

Digital Change

A continuous process taking place at WU is the increasing digitalisation. In 2020, WUR will invest in several projects that promote digital change. As digital change influences *World-Class Education* and *Broad Academic Development*, it is one of the top priorities of VeSte this year to ensure that these changes affect everyone in a positive way. Hereunder are the main themes within this subject that VeSte prioritises on.

New investments in digital learning environment

The coming year, WU will invest in a variety of digital facilities that promote a digital learning environment. With the implementation of the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy, which is renamed Study Anytime Anyplace (SAA), licenses required for certain study programmes will have a more important role in these investments. Moreover, the implementation of a new student information system called OSIRIS will be on our agenda this year, as well as further development of Brightspace. Serving as a personalised information platform and all-encompassing information provider, WU will be creating a new Student Portal that will replace MyPortal this year. Through the SC IT and Student

Charter committee, it is our main goal to ensure that these new investments are implemented in a way that serves the best interest of all students.

Digital Failures

As a major part of education will become fully dependent on digital facilities, it is crucial that these facilities are always operational and that a policy is swiftly implementable in case of digital malfunctions to ensure upholding our *World-Class Education* and *Broad Academic Development*. Protocols must also be available for when students cannot access their learning materials during self-study and examination periods. This year, through the SC Student Charter committee we will work in collaboration with the Education and Student Affairs (ESA) department, to develop and implement such a policy that ensures solutions when digital malfunctions occur.

Study Anytime Anyplace

The implementation of Study Anytime Anyplace, is one of the clearest examples of digital change. This year, the first implementations of this policy will be executed. It is essential that when these first executions are put into operation, the policy benefits all students. Although we see many benefits of this project, such as the more efficient and multifunctional use of our educational facilities, the easy accessibility of having everything available on one device, and more freedom and flexibility to study anytime at anyplace, the implementation of SAA serves consequences that require close attention. One of these consequences includes an increase of the risk of developing RSI/CANS. It is therefore important that WU invests in the prevention of this and it is a goal of VeSte that this is facilitated as good as possible. This can be done by offering for example RSI/CANS prevention sets, more walking routes on campus, more ergonomic working places and RSI/CANS prevention courses. Furthermore, the risks and consequences of RSI/CANS should acquire more prominence among the student population of WU. In order to inquire into the state of affairs regarding this, VeSte is eager to promote an investigation into this subject the coming year. The SC Student Facilities and IT committees, as well as the ad hoc SAA committee will work closely together with WU to monitor and develop the implementation of the SAA policy.

Facility Assurance

Bottlenecks due to increasing student numbers occur in the available study space. There is a shortage of study and group work places. Besides this, the quality of thesis, study and group work places can be lacking, especially with respect to being ergonomically viable. This year, it is our goal to improve the (ergonomic) quality and quantity of these study places and group work places, for example in the case of ACT group work places especially. On the long-term, with the implementation of SAA and with the opening of the Third Educational building in academic year 2021-2022, some of these problems will be relieved. However, it is of importance that WUR presents plans to solve this shortage on the short-term as well. On the problem concerning thesis workplaces, it is our opinion that the chair groups of WUR should facilitate working places of good ergonomic quality for every thesis student, and that WUR should strive for this too. Moreover, as doing sports is proven to be stress-reductive, VeSte finds it important that the sports facilities expand in accordance with the growing student numbers as well. With the SC Student Facilities and Finance, and the WUR Council "Huisvesting, Arbo en Milieu (HAM)" and Finance committees the feasibility, effectiveness and implementation of more and better facility assurance will be assessed. Moreover, the SC Student Facilities committee prioritises on creating more security against laptop theft this year.

Personal Development

Personal development is a core value of VeSte, as it strongly embodies our three pillars. Every student graduating from WU should've gotten the opportunity to be well prepared for their future with respect to their career, but more importantly: life itself. It is because of this that we divide personal development into two topics: the development of skills and knowledge and career orientation and preparation.

Development of skills and knowledge

By actively partaking in extracurricular activities such as a committee or board of the various amount of student organisations, by doing a sport, or by having a side-job, students train themselves in having effective meetings, working independently, and developing social and soft skills. Moreover, extracurricular activities often entail working together in groups, practising organisational skills, and working with financial budgets and evaluations. As a result of this, students help achieve their personal goals and develop learning goals that WU prioritises on as well. It is one of the goals of VeSte that this is promoted as well as possible. An elaboration on this subject can be found in our Structural Policy.

Accreditation and acknowledgement of extracurricular activities

Nationwide, there is a shift in mentality that promotes student success over study success. Rather than study success, student success acknowledges the value of extracurricular activities combined with curricular activities. Regarding our three pillars, VeSte strongly supports this mentality. However, extracurricular development of students must never result in too much pressure or stress for students. We believe that WU should give every student room to work on their personal development and should accredit students for this. Therefore, VeSte is committed to creating ways for WU to correctly acknowledge students doing extracurricular activities. This includes for example the granting of acknowledgement certificates to student boards. Another option is to integrate more opportunities for personal development in the study programmes, therefore we support flexible studying. Lastly, financial support from WU should aid students as well, also to relieve the stress on doing extracurricular activities. The coming year, VeSte is eager to promote visibility at WUR for the wide variety of extracurricular activities that can be partaken in, for example through our yearly Board Market.

Career orientation and preparation

In context of *World-Class Education* and *Broad Academic Development*, it is essential that students get the opportunity to see what their future career might look like. For this, excursions, guest lectures of academics 'in the field' and internships that suit the students' interests are essential. Additionally, study advisors must be easily approachable for students to discuss their future and what knowledge and skills are needed for achieving their goals. Furthermore, students need to be aware of the (extra)curricular flexibility of their own learning path. Obligatory personal assessment courses, more study advisors and more interactive contact with possible future careers are essential for career preparation. This year, the WUR Council E&R and the SC BEE and Finance committees, as well as the sounding committee involved with the implementation of the Quality Agreements will look for opportunities for improvement within this subject .

Student Wellbeing

With the introduction of the student loan system, student wellbeing has been an increasingly important subject at WU and nationwide. Even though WU has a well-developed structure of student counselling, it is not always clear to students where to go when struggling with personal challenges. This year, it is our mission to improve the student counselling structure, as well as to create more awareness among students on how this structure works. VeSte finds it important that study advisors play a central role in the student counselling systems, and therefore it is our aspiration to see to it that the capacity and quality of study advisors is sufficient. Moreover, VeSte feels it is even more important to prevent poor (mental) health, rather than to solve it. We believe that the ability to discuss personal challenges is the first step towards improving wellbeing. Even though the Surf Your Stress week, of which the organisation is with our collaboration, serves this purpose well, there is room for more improvement. Therefore, this year we plan to create more awareness on student wellbeing and to make this subject more discussable by organising activities related to this subject, as well as by informing students through our social and online network. Moreover, through the SC SF committee, VeSte strives to create more relaxing spots in the current educational buildings, as well as in the new (third) educational building. The coming year, we will be collaborating with Facilities & Services to look into the options available for creating more relaxing spots.

Food & Beverage

The coming year, a new vision on the food & beverage plan of WU will be created. VeSte is actively involved in the working group that revises this plan. Through this working group, we try to look for improvements for the vending and coffee machines, cafeterias and cafes. Sustainability and price are factors that are of great importance in this subject, and VeSte will try to find options that suit these factors in an acceptable ratio. In the revision of this plan, we find it important to hear the opinion of as many students as possible, in order to bring these opinions into the new food & beverage plan.

Sustainability

Sustainability is an aspect VeSte considers with every decision we make, and it is integrated in all three pillars that support our ideology. As WUR is an organisation with sustainability intertwined with every study programme and research domain, it should be a leading example of a sustainable organisation itself as well. For that reason, VeSte will work primarily with a top-down approach when tackling sustainability issues in collaboration with WUR. In 2030, WUR strives to cut waste with 50% and wishes to cut the use of plastics as well. Moreover, with the renewal of the food and beverage plan, we believe that more sustainable options should be selected. As final, the sustainable travelling policy should be promoted, which is something that VeSte initiated. We eagerly work together with WUR in the elaboration and implementation of present, previous and future plans to increase sustainability. This is done on our own initiative, as well as through the WUR Council HAM committee. This year we will in particular be working on the implementation of our Sustainability Fund initiative that helps create more sustainable options for student organisations when organising activities. Moreover, through committee HAM we will work on the environmental multi-year plan of the WUR. Lastly, and most importantly, it is our goal to promote sustainability initiatives among all students.

Resits

In the academic year 2018-2019, a change of the academic calendar was under discussion. It was proposed to move the summer resits to the beginning of the summer break. Ultimately the decision of this proposal was postponed, and it is unsure whether this discussion of changing the academic calendar will start again in 2020. However, when it does, VeSte strives to make sure through the SC Student Charter committee that these plans will not affect students and student organisation in a negative way. One discussion that has started, is the discussion about putting a limit on the amount of resits a student can do. This year, VeSte is actively partaking in the working group that discusses this issue.

Within these two discussions, it is of utmost importance that we keep in touch with as many students and student organisations as possible when handling these discussions, in order to voice the opinion of the students to WU as clear as possible.

Quality Agreements

The Quality Agreements (QAs) are a result of the implementation of the loan system for Dutch students. From this, a large budget from government funding becomes available. Last year, VeSte was closely involved in the creation of these plans, and accordingly in the approval by an external audit panel. VeSte believes it is important that the implementation of the QAs support students to set and achieve their goals in both personal and educational development and that these plans stimulate all three VeSte pillars. The plans include amongst others new possibilities for *Broad Academic Development* via new extracurricular courses, more career preparation, and availability of coaches to support personal development. Also, *World-Class Education* is safeguarded through the optimisation of small-scale education by hiring more teachers and supporting staff and by offering more trainings to them. Supporting *Vibrant Student Life*, budget for mental health support becomes available as well, in the form of a yearly Surf Your Stress-week, in which VeSte is actively involved, and by hiring additional student counsellors and psychologists.

From this year on, VeSte will be closely involved in monitoring the implementation of the QAs through the E&R and Finance committees of the WUR Council, as well as through the QAs sounding committee of WU. Moreover, including students' involvement in modifications of the plans, and communicating the value of these plans to students through social media and events is one of our main goals this year. Through this, VeSte seeks to secure that the QAs will add not only to the university, but to every student.

Extended Daytime Schedule

The Extended Daytime Schedule (EDS) affects the three pillars in various ways. In 2020, a grand topic within VeSte will be the evaluation of the impact of the EDS on the *Vibrant Student Life* during first year after the implementation of the EDS. In the academic year 2018-2019, VeSte has conducted its own research on the effect of the EDS on students and student organisations. The results of this study are described in our EDS report. This report will voice a strong situation description of the effect of the EDS on the *Vibrant Student Life* and gives insight in the consequences students experience on a social level.

However, issues caused by the EDS still emerge and need to be adequately resolved. By acting as a formal and informal link between students and the university, VeSte plays an essential role in this. Individual students can promptly submit their specific remarks about their experiences via the EDS

Contact point (www.vestewageningen.nl/edscontactpoint). These remarks are completely documented and, if possible, immediately put into action. Additionally, VeSte strives to maintain close contact with all student organisations supporting VeSte, to forward updates from WU, as well as to gain input of challenges these organisations face. VeSte sees it as its task to find structural solutions for university-wide problems concerning the EDS. The specially appointed WUR Council EDS ad-hoc committee functions as the central node for the evaluation of the EDS, in which the consequences for both students and staff are assessed and solutions for arising issues are proposed.

Internationalisation & Integration

Vital for maintaining and improving our *World-Class Education* is that every student starting their Masters in Wageningen has at least the same baseline level of skills and knowledge. With the introduction of international Bachelors, this matter is also relevant for these programmes. These skills should at least entail an adequate level of English of both international and Dutch students, as well as basic (laboratory) skills needed for the programmes. VeSte believes that obliging participation of the Science Week, where these skills are trained, for inflowing international, as well as Dutch students (for example students coming in from applied sciences studies) can be a good start to improve this matter. Moreover, the required English level should be reviewed critically, for students, but for staff members as well.

VeSte believes that better integration should always be promoted among international and Dutch students. Adapting to an increasingly internationalising student community requires a proper integration between cultures. To promote this, one of our initiatives includes looking into the possibility of integrating an intercultural communication course into every programme. However, internationalisation and integration also goes beyond our university. It influences the *Broad Academic Development* of students, as communication within organisations will move increasingly to English. Moreover, students are acquainted in their daily lives with other cultures advancing their personal development and *Vibrant Student Life*. We can maintain our *Vibrant Student Life* best if we work together as students and WU for an integrated student population. By cooperating and connecting with different student organisations and exchanging ideas and information on how to cope with internationalisation and integration, VeSte contributes to suitable adjustments to the student population.

Internationalisation takes place the other way around as well, with WU students going on exchange to other universities. VeSte highly promotes students going on exchange, as it promotes *World-Class Education*, facilitates *Broad Academic Development*, and influences students' personal *Vibrant Student Life*. Information and experiences of other students with the same exchange destination are valuable parts of the preparation process before going on exchange. Therefore, VeSte is actively involved in maintaining and improving the accessibility and content of these information platforms.

City and WUR

Connection to the city

The strategic plan 2019-2024 of WUR advocates for more interaction between WUR and the city of Wageningen. VeSte strongly supports this vision. Separation between students and inhabitants of Wageningen negatively affects the *Vibrant Student Life* of Wageningen. More interaction between both groups can be stimulated in a variety of manners. Examples of our own initiatives for stimulating the interaction between Wageningen inhabitants and students which we will work on this year, are

looking into the possibility of creating study hubs in the city centre, as well as organising a thesis gallery and other activities open to students and inhabitants of Wageningen. To achieve this, VeSte keeps in close contact with the municipality, as well as having regular meetings with the mayor. Moreover, we believe that student organisations play an essential role in supporting this idea.

Housing

Housing plays an essential role influencing the *Vibrant Student Life*, therefore it is also included in our Structural Policy. It seems inevitable that students will have to live in cities surrounding Wageningen. VeSte believes that it is important that in these surrounding cities a close community is developed and facilitated in order to create a more *Vibrant Student Life* outside of Wageningen as well and that student organisation can aid in the creation of these student communities.

Epilogue

At the end of this policy, we as VeSte would like to take this opportunity to thank all parties involved with the creation and evaluation of this policy. It is to us very important that we keep in contact with as many students and student organisations as possible in order to voice the belief of a variety of active students as well as possible. Therefore, we appreciate it very much when our supporters give us the valuable input we need to operate as best as we can. Through the input we receive, it is our mission to keep the quality of education of Wageningen University as good as possible and that students experience studying in Wageningen as pleasant as it possibly can be.

Appendices

Appendix 1: party function division until September 2020



Sophie Kuijten
Chair

Ralph van Herpen
Vice-Chair

Lucas Hulsman
Secretary

Rick van der Tol
Treasurer



Kaj van den Heuvel
*Commissioner Internal
Relations*

Camille de Regt-Harvey
*Commissioner National
Affairs*

Larissa van der Zon
*Commissioner Public
Relations*

Appendix 2: List of abbreviations

WUR: Wageningen University & Research

WU: Wageningen University

SC: Student Council

EB: Executive Board

SAA/BYOD: Study Anytime Anyplace/Bring Your Own Device

QAs: Quality Agreements

EDS: Extended Daytime Schedule

BEE: The SC Boekel Education Enhancement committee

QvsQ: The SC Quality versus Quantity committee

E&R: The WUR Council Education & Research committee

HAM: The WUR Council “Huisvesting, Arbo en Milieu” committee

