

Student
Alliance
Wageningen

VISION 2021-2026

“To improve the quality of student life”

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BOARD OF STUDENT ALLIANCE WAGENINGEN 2020-2021

INTRODUCTION

Student Alliance Wageningen (S.A.W.) is the local student union of Wageningen. At the moment, S.A.W. is a growing association that is increasingly known by students in Wageningen. The internal structure is increasing over the years and therewith the stability. To maintain the stability of the union it is important that all boards share the same vision on different topics of interest. That makes sure that boards in other years do not contradict each other's actions and decisions. This document provides a brief reference piece for future boards and is based on the input of the 2020-2021 member body and the the ideas of the 2020-2021 board.

Wageningen has a history of student protests. The Wageningen Student Organisation (WSO) was a big organisation. Yet, it came to an end in 2011. Decades ago, union membership was self-evident. Also among students, membership of the Wageningen Student Organisation was common. This societal context has changed. In 2019, Dutch unions membership was at its lowest since the end of the 1980s¹. Meanwhile, union membership regained relevance in recent years. In the aftermath of austerity policies and financial stimulation, a discussion is growing about the type of capitalism that we want, the value of the public sector, and the relationship between capital and labour. Some of these developments are directly relevant for students in Wageningen. As a response to the financial crisis, there have been cut backs on the public sector, including the funding of higher education². At the same time, house prices exploded, pushing pressure on room prices. Capital investments in property are giving high returns, at the expense of students who face increased rents. On top of that, the loan system replaced the grant-system in 2015. The necessity of student unions has become more visible. A unique feature of S.A.W. compared to other existing organizations defending students, is that S.A.W. is not bound to one arena (e.g. the student council or the municipality council), but can defend students' interests in all arena's, including both national and very local policies and practices.

Values

The core mission of S.A.W. is to improve the quality of student life. The union strives to achieve this through its core values: transparency, inclusivity, sustainability and quality of education. These values are implemented in the vision and should be kept in mind in formulating policy, which is understood and checked by everyone, addressing short term issues while keeping an eye on long term developments. S.A.W. implements these values and is the first one to address shortcomings on these topics with other organisations.

Document Setup

This document deals in the main body with the six pillars that are central to putting S.A.W. on the map and ensuring continuity. These are 'between campus and city', 'growth', 'members', 'inclusivity', 'digitalisation' and 'financial stability'. In the closing word the implementation for the policy and practice of future boards is given.

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Attention Points

The following are attention points of S.A.W. in terms of its role and relation to the student community.

BETWEEN CAMPUS AND CITY

S.A.W. is aware of the historic coherence between Wageningen city and Wageningen campus and the current distance between the two. S.A.W. strives to strengthen the relation between the city and the campus, the municipality and the university and between citizens and students. Wageningen is one of those cities where students stick around or come back to and settle. So, citizens are often students and vice versa. There is a risk that the campus 'outgrows' the city in certain regards (financially, politically and even geographically). At the moment students living on or near campus still travel to the city centre to attend cultural activities. At campus only a few shops are present, on the so-called campus plaza. The connection should be strengthened in terms of mobility, work opportunities, and transition towards a sustainable earth. For example, a lab can be placed in the city, where students and citizens meet and interact, or research projects for theses conducted with non-students. This way the world-citizens of Wageningen university properly become local citizens, integrated with the rest of the community.

APPLIED UNIVERSITY

For S.A.W. to be able to represent the students of Wageningen there are a few important issues to take into account. S.A.W. should be in contact with many different parties that are close to and of interest for the groups it represents. That is important, because S.A.W. wants to stay updated about developments in each aspect of the students' life. Next to that, the people that have an active role in the union should be a good reflection of the students that it represents. That means that different students have to be able to participate in all levels of the organization. So, the members, the workgroups and the board have to be inclusive and diverse. Currently, S.A.W. is a union for students in Wageningen that is only representing students that study at Wageningen University. However, there are also students that study at applied universities in and around Wageningen. S.A.W. thinks it is important that these students are also represented. Therefore, we will put energy into getting into contact with the student councils, students and other important parties of applied universities in Wageningen and Ede. We will keep close contact with them and stay up-to-date about relevant developments at the institution. The aim is to have a relation in which both the applied university and S.A.W. can ask the other for help in certain topics of interest.

¹ Bijna een op de drie inwoners in Wageningen is student. Bron: <https://www.gelderlander.nl/wageningen/wageningen-duikelt-hard-naar-beneden-in-lijst-van-steden-met-beste-studentenkamers~a476811a/#:~:text=Een%20op%20tweintig%20huizen%20in%20straat%20voor%20studenten&text=En%20dat%20is%20opmerkelijk%20stelt,inwoners%20van%20Wageningen%20is%20student.>

NATIONALITIES

Another important aspect of inclusivity is active involvement of internationals. Wageningen is one of the most diverse cities in the Netherlands when it comes to student nationality. In 2019 the internationalisation portfolio was created and policy written on this topic. Currently, the 2020-2019 board consists of three Dutch students and one international student, yet all documents and most communication is in English. S.A.W. will continue this path and strives to equalize representation of internationals in the member body and board.

Despite the international character of Wageningen, inclusivity is not a given. Many student houses discriminate based on language or nationality and many associations are poorly accessible to internationals, or oppositely, to Dutch students. S.A.W. strives to further promote inclusivity in the student population, with regards to housing, use of language and associations.

DIGITALIZATION

In the year 2020-2021 a lot has changed in the field of digital education. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, schools were forced to quickly find alternatives to the regular physical classes. This enabled students to study from home when they were not allowed to go to the institution, but the tools that made that possible can still be used upon opening of educational institutions. This has two sides.

The first side is positive, because having the possibility to study from home makes education more accessible. Think about for example international students that go to their home country for some time, that can still follow lectures via the internet. Or students with a functional disability that have difficulties going to school, can follow their study from home. S.A.W. believes that this side of digitalization is a good development for the quality and accessibility of education and wants to stimulate the institutions to keep using and improving digital learning platforms.

Digitalization however, can also have a downside. When classes are online more students can attend them at the same time, because there is no limiting factor caused by the available number of teachers and classrooms. To increase the capacity, institutions might choose to make more classes online. More students simply mean more money. This also has two sides, because if for example money is saved by having online lectures and the spare money is invested in more small-scale tutorials, that might be a good thing.

Shortly stated, S.A.W. is not necessarily against digitalization. It is important what kind of blended learning is used and what the reasons for institutions are to make classes online. We should monitor that the education accessibility and quality are in good balance.

Services

Historically, two types of student unions exist. On one hand those who focus on services for members, on the other hand those that focus on defending student rights. S.A.W. strives to do both yet the services have been few and not attracting many new members or of comparable size to services of other unions.

SPORTS AND FUNDS

In Wageningen there are a lot of sports associations that are not directly represented within the university and municipality. This might give them a disadvantage when it comes to the discussions about financial support from the university. The same goes for discussions within the municipality about for instance spatial planning and subsidies. Next to lobbying for student sports associations it would be good for S.A.W. to be aware of what subsidies are available for students in Wageningen and have a clear overview of those in a place that is easily accessible for students. It would also be good for S.A.W. to actively promote the funds that both the municipality and the university offer. On top of that, an idea would be to get an indication of what subsidies student organizations apply for at the moment. By doing that S.A.W. could easily provide advice to those organizations about what other subsidies they have right to, and help them save money.

GP

In Wageningen there are many general practitioners, this makes it difficult to make a decision about who could help you best. It might also be an issue for students to understand if the city they are registered in is of any influence when looking for a general practitioner. As a union, S.A.W. could take responsibility for making this more clear and provide students with help when they need to find a GP.

INSURANCE HELP

For students it can be quite unclear what insurances are necessary to have and which are beneficial to have. It can also be quite a struggle to look for the insurance that fits the students' needs best. A role in this for S.A.W. could be to provide an overview of insurances. On top of that we could run a lobby to get a better price for students for different insurances. S.A.W. could strive to offer all-in-one student insurances like legal assistance, contents insurance, health insurance, travel insurance, insurance against theft and loss of phone and bike, for a very beneficial price. These services make it easy for a student to have an affordable and good quality safety net.

SIDE JOBS

Many students have or want a side-job next to their studies to keep their debt down or to have some more money to do fun things. Sometimes it can be difficult to find a job because it is not easy to find out what company is looking for employees. Especially if companies have certain demands like experience in the field or being able to speak dutch. To make this easier, S.A.W. can mediate between companies in and around Wageningen and students to help them find a side-job they like and fits them. This would improve the financial situation of students and allow them to make several social contacts outside of their standard circles.

Growth

S.A.W. has been growing slowly the last few years. In 2020/2021 more rapidly than the years before. Further growth is necessary for the union to become financially independent.

PROFESSIONALISATION

However, a growth in numbers of members also means that the union as an organisation has to grow along, becoming more professional. This means appointing committees, an earlier recruitment and eventually maybe even employees. This part of the vision discusses how growth should be achieved, and what growth implies for professionalisation.

The most important initial step in making growth happen is increasing visibility. This can be done on social media and through union fashion items, both these things were done by the 2020-2021 board, and by (physically) attending public events such as the AID informarket (once in summer and once in winter). Visibility and reliability can be improved on social media and in public discussions by answering urgent questions in the student community from an informed point of view.

When an organisation has more members, a big enough space should be considered for general member meetings to fit all attendees. This space can be acquired or rented but it should at least fit the requirements of offering a quiet and private environment where attendees may be seated and ideally has a bar and sanitary facilities at hand. Another matter is the board recruitment. So far, the S.A.W. boards have been relying heavily on personal contacts in carrying out the board recruitment. When S.A.W. is big enough, a zoekco (searching committee) and a soco (application committee) should be installed to ensure objectivity and at the same time lighten the workload of the board, who can then focus mainly on promotion and later on the board transition.

S.A.W. ACADEMY

S.A.W. Academy is a page where S.A.W. shares knowledge and information, both created by S.A.W. itself or by another organisation. By being a knowledge centre, S.A.W. contributes to a better understanding of and anticipation of challenges and opportunities for students. S.A.W. conducts research to form and substantiate viewpoints and initiatives through surveys. This can be about topics that are deemed important for students by the board, not in the spotlight yet, or pressing issues that are already in the spotlight. Examples of these investigations are our investigation into the housing market and our exploration of a public transport card for international students. Our findings and our survey results can be shared in this central place. Moreover, the interesting numbers and statistics that Housing Desk produces (e.g. the average room rental price) can be shared there too.

MEMBERS

Welcoming new members

As explained in the above chapter, S.A.W. intends to grow in the next years both in terms of numbers and in terms of impact. Where other unions have up to thousands of members, S.A.W. has a few dozen. An effective way to ensure growth is to properly activate newcomers. This means personally welcoming conversations, giving people/members a task or responsibility (can be the smallest thing) and encouraging members to use their personal

network to create a movement. In personal welcoming conversations it proves effective to ask members for the reason they joined, which values or issues. Furthermore, as to the second step, members can be approached through surveys and calling rounds (phone calls). This can serve two goals at once; keeping members involved in the content and ongoing discussions as well as inviting members to sign up for small tasks.

Committees

The number of members of S.A.W. is increasing, so the number of views on different topics is too. It is important that members can contribute to the union by sharing their opinions and ideas, also apart from the General Members Meeting. An ideal way of doing that is by joining a committee. At the moment there are two active committees which are the sustainability committee (Talk The Future) and the internationalization committee (United Wageningen Committee). However, we do not immediately forward members who say to be interested in a certain committee to them, although we should strive to bind members to the union as much as possible. Therefore, our goal will be to include all members who are interested in being actively involved with S.A.W. in at least one committee.

Financial Stability

S.A.W. is a young organisation, supported by Stichting Arion. In the end, S.A.W. has to stand on its own two feet. Obviously, more paying members will be needed to achieve that. How acquisition and renting services can contribute to financial stability, are elaborated here.

ACQUISITION

In the long term, Stichting Arion will dissolve itself into S.A.W. S.A.W. wants to become financially independent of the money that was left over from the WSO. In order to do this, it is useful to find sponsors. When doing this it is important to make sure that the companies that will become our sponsors share our values and vision, since we have to practice what we preach. S.A.W. shall thus make sure it has a clear view of what kind of companies would be suited for an acquisition deal and contact these companies.

RENTING SERVICE

Renting out materials for a small price is an ideal way to become more known in Wageningen, give members extra advantages and to get extra income. To do this, S.A.W. has to find out what materials students use often, but very few students own. We should take into account that it will not cost us more money, effort and time than it delivers and that the things we rent out cannot be rented somewhere else more easily and cheaply. A few examples of items that we could offer are a cargo bike, beamer, music box and party tent.

CLOSING WORD

This document was put together by the efforts of the 2020/2021 board. Input was collected from the members and the structure was inspired by similar documents from VIDUIS and ASVA, respectively the student union from Utrecht and the student union from Amsterdam.

The implementation procedure that the 2020/2021 board advises is to use this document as a guideline and inspiration for annual policy in the next five years. Additionally, the same board advises to formulate a new document every five years, in which the previous document is shortly evaluated and a new vision is laid out. If the size of the member body allows it in 2026, it is advised to let a committee formulate the new vision. Hopefully the reader now has an idea of what characterizes S.A.W. and what we strive for in the next few years.

We want to thank everyone who contributed to this document and thank you for reading it today.

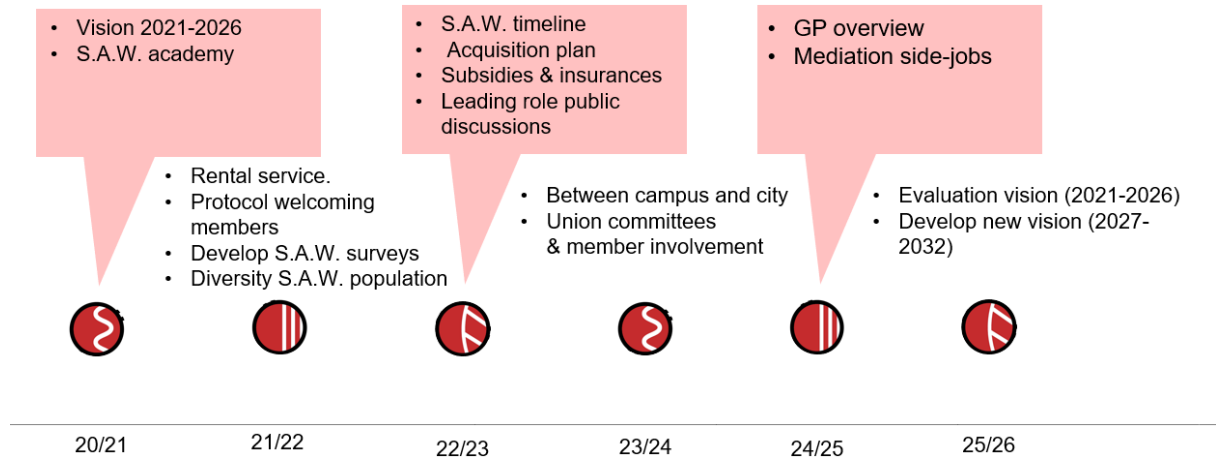
Board 2020 – 2021

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“Let’s get to the point!”

TIMELINE VISION

Timeline Vision



In this figure a visual representation is given of the change in organisational structure of S.A.W. deemed fit for an estimated growth in members and income. Furthermore, suggestions are made for tasks that ensure continuity and progressing professionalisation of the union.

Board 2020-2021

- Develop vision for next 5 years.
- Set-up SAW academy

Board 2021-2022

- Set-up rental service.
- Develop protocol for welcoming members.
- Develop SAW surveys
- Make the SAW population more diverse (Applied university and non-dutch)

Board 2022-2023

- Make SAW timeline previous years
- Set-up acquisition plan
- Make overview subsidies and insurances
- Take on a leading role in public discussions in the student community.

Board 2023-2024

- Between campus and city
- Set-up different union committees and involve members

Board 2024-2025 Make GP overview

- Mediate on side-jobs

Board 2025-2026

- Evaluate on vision (2021-2026) & Develop new vision (2027-2032)

