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**MADE BY:**  
Studentcouncil 2024-2025

# POLICY PLAN

## STUDENTCOUNCIL

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## Introduction

A student council functions as a necessary body in any institution of (higher) education. The Vrije Universiteit Brussel therefore chooses to involve it in more than the mandates laid down by decree. And that also typifies precisely the vision of our university: a vibrant, engaged student community with a sense of responsibility to influence the world around them in a positive way. For the student council, it is important to create a campus that, on the one hand, is a *safe space* where students are supported, guided and where a social student policy is pursued. On the other hand, the campus is also a *brave space* where students are challenged to develop themselves, to be introspective, to make mistakes and to agitate within the metropolitan context of Brussels. Based on this vision and conviction, the student council is therefore proud to present this policy plan. To respond to challenges such as a classroom shortage, declining student yields, the student housing crisis, the ever-increasing student numbers and an outdated campus infrastructure that cannot meet the needs of the community.

From the role of president and vice-president, we attach great importance to three pillars to make the functioning of the student council effective within the aforementioned context, namely: participation, transparency and visibility. These are the values and goals we prioritize for the functioning of the student council.

This policy plan came about in collaboration with the coordinators of the student council, who enquired from the student community about what the VUB's recruitments mean today and what their needs are as students.

The VUB provides fertile ground for many students to give them the opportunity to thrive, where students are engaged and where the student community lives. Equally, the VUB is a seed that is sprouting more and more and faster, requiring its entire community to take responsibility for coming together to create a thriving university.

Wout Vanhelden and Pedro Elejabeitia Velu,  
respectively president and vice president of the Student Council 2024-2025

# Student facilities

A supportive and welcoming campus environment is critical to the well-being and academic performance of our students. A recent student needs survey showed a clear demand for a wider range of study areas, Recreational rooms and a more diverse restaurant offering. These needs form the basis for this policy plan, which aims to improve student facilities to enhance wellbeing, social interaction and the study experience.

## 1.1 Study spaces

There is a great need for additional study spaces on campus, as the existing study spaces, such as the library and the tutoring centre, often fill up quickly, thus providing insufficient capacity. The arrival of the Learning & Innovation Centre (LIC) remedies part of this problem, but the supply remains insufficient to meet the growing student numbers. Indeed, students need both quiet study spaces for concentrated work and group spaces for collaborative assignments. Thus, we want to push for a new policy regarding the current library and possibly renovate and modernise it to better meet students' needs. Furthermore, we want to set up the STOA as a quiet study space, while the cafeteria can function as a space for interactive group work and study activities. In doing so, we aim to cater to the various study needs and hope to create a more flexible learning environment that meets the diverse needs of our students in a changing educational context.

## 1.2. Recreational spaces

A more diverse range of Recreational spaces on campus contributes to the well-being and social engagement of our students. For example, we want to extend the opening hours of the cafeteria. The current closing time of 15:45 does not sufficiently meet the needs of students who also seek a place to relax later in the day or to get together between classes. In addition, we wish to encourage an increase in the number of picnic benches on campus and an inviting redesign of the lawn next to Building I, so that these places can best serve as accessible and relaxed meeting places for students.

## 1.3 Restaurant

To better respond to the needs of our students, we are trying to adjust the restaurant offerings and provide more flexibility. We wish to move away from the compulsory menu, giving students the option to buy just a main course without also having to pay for soup within the menu formula. In addition, we also wish to introduce a cheaper dish of the day/week, offering students a more financially advantageous option. We also want to look into the possibility of keeping the sandwich bar in the cafeteria open longer, so that students who have classes in the evening can easily have something to eat. This ties into the vision of keeping the cafeteria open longer as a hangout space, giving students a cosy place to gather and relax after their classes.

# Education

From a recent survey of students, the student council identifies some concerns about education. We note that lines of communication are not clearly defined and students are afraid of missing important information. In addition, the classroom shortage and the need for online learning materials and professional ways of dual learning also emerge. Finally, specific questions linked to study efficiency and student welfare emerge. The student council therefore takes it as their task to have these concerns further investigated and propose concrete actions.

## 2.1 Communication

Students often lose track due to the multitude of communication channels. This fragmentation: e-mail, WeAreVUBStudent and Canavs, creates confusion. We therefore ask to focus on one central communication channel to students to create simplicity and clarity. This also applies to communications from different departments and faculties that are not equally relevant to every student.

## 2.2 Class schedules

The communication concerning class and exam timetables should be published on the above-mentioned central communication channel. The timetables should therefore appear on this in a timely manner. In order to better identify the term 'timely', we call for a study to be carried out in cooperation with the VUB services to examine the needs of students on the one hand and get a view on the practical feasibility on the other. In doing so, we want to shed light on the timeliness of timetable publications, the impact of changes to provisional timetables and the needs of students with individual pathways. For the latter, we suggest introducing a more flexible policy across faculties, looking at better arrangements regarding catch-up times.

## 2.3 General well-being and study rendement

From the analyses by the VUB services, it is noted that the study yield has declined in recent years, despite a recent positive trend. It is therefore our ambition to continue this positive trend through general student welfare. This implies that the student council wants to advocate for better supervision of lecturers and teaching staff through training. Within the improvement of study efficiency, we are also thinking, for example, of the previous generalisation of REFLEX measures. Here, it remains our ambition to protect the interests of various at-risk groups identified from VUB studies. In our view, general student welfare is one of the many ways to work on this issue. We therefore also suggest a commensurate investment in study guidance, study pathway counselling and student psychologists in line with the increasing number of students. Here, it is also our task to ensure that the offer is communicated more clearly and widely to students.

We are also requesting an evaluation of the current appeals procedure in which, through student representation, the general course of the procedure, criteria and feedback to the student will be looked at. All this within the framework of the Codex Higher Education.

## 2.4 Blended learning and classroom shortage

In the context of the classroom shortage and in sign of inclusive education measures in view of the changing educational context, the Student Council urges to develop a policy that offers blended learning, online learning material, in an organised and modern way. In doing so, it is necessary to provide guidance and training for staff on digital and blended education from a centralised direction from the VUB. Various surveys conducted at the kick-off in Jette and Etterbeek show that students prefer a start at 9 am, with classes running a bit longer in the evening. As opposed to the current measures, namely classes starting at 8 am and on Saturdays. The student council therefore suggests carrying out a broader survey on this, both among students and staff, as well as on the needs regarding blended learning.

## Innovation

This year, the Innovation Committee will focus on delivering projects that contribute to a dynamic and enjoyable campus experience for all students. Our focus will be on creating new meeting places, improving cleanliness on campus, and increasing the visibility and accessibility of the student council. By engaging in dialogue engaging with students and investing in innovations that impact their daily life, we aim to future-proof our campus.

### 3.1. PointCafé

One of the major innovations planned this year is the launch of the PointCafé. This new café should become one of the meeting places where students, staff and other students come together to relax, network or participate in events. Our aim is not only to give the café a cosy atmosphere, but also to make it suitable for a wider range of activities, such as afterworks, small performances, and also to give associations freedom of interpretation here.

The operation of the PointCafé will be written into a policy this year by the student council in collaboration with the student community, so that it becomes a place that really lives on campus. In addition, we want to experiment with innovative hospitality concepts, such as a platform where students can organise their own events. The aim is to make PointCafé a place where everyone feels welcome and where campus life and innovation come together.

### 3.2. Cleanliness on campus

A clean and tidy campus environment contributes to a positive student experience. Under this pillar, we want to focus on improving cleanliness on campus by optimising the placement and maintenance of dustbins and ashtrays. Our first step is to map the current situation and determine where bins and ashtrays are most needed. We also want to introduce interactive ashtrays, where students can 'vote' on questions with their cigarette butts. This will not only keep the campus clean, but can also be a playful way to engage students in maintaining a tidy environment. Furthermore, we will elaborate and try to scale the pocket ashtrays project.

### 3.3. Student Council visibility

The visibility and recognisability of the student council is one of our main pillars. We find that many students do not know exactly what the student council does and where they can find us. This year, we want to work on improving visibility and engagement, because we think it is very important to increase student engagement. Active student engagement ensures that we can better represent their interests, incorporate their ideas and feedback into our policies, and together make a positive impact on campus. To achieve this, we are committed to more visible communication campaigns and creating accessible channels for feedback and ideas. This means a combination of both online and physical initiatives: we will increase our presence on social media, set up physical info points on campus and make sure our councillors are easily approachable. By lowering these barriers, we invite students to think and participate.

### 3.4. Student well-being

An accessible and inclusive campus is essential for the well-being and development of our students. This year, we are further committed to student welfare and social support, with the aim of creating a campus environment where every student feels welcome, safe and supported, regardless of their background, identity or personal Circumstances. A campus that functions both as a *safe space* and a *brave space*. We believe that an inclusive university lays the foundation for a close-knit, diverse community where everyone can be themselves and achieve their maximum potential. To realise this ambition, we will build on the existing projects of recent years, such as the transgender policy and the VUB's inclusiveness policy. We will strengthen and expand these initiatives to ensure that they also meet the current needs of our students. This includes continuing to work with students, staff and various organisations to identify and remove any barriers.

## 4. Internationalisation

### 4.1. Communication of crucial information

The Internationalisation Committee is keen to address a number of long-standing issues raised by the international community at our university. The biggest concern is the communication of key information to international students. The amount of information offered is abundant, which can quickly make it difficult to absorb everything. In the 2024-2025 academic year, the Internationalisation Committee will focus on providing a clear and direct flow of information to international students. Specifically, by creating separate tabs on student platforms and using the first days of the academic year to disseminate essential information.

### 4.2. Connecting Belgian and international students

For many international students, it is quite difficult to make friends with Belgian students and find a connection with our culture. As the Internationalisation Committee, we encourage the organisation of events where Belgian and international students can meet and get to know each other's culture. These events will form the basis of collaborations with both internal and external departments and organisations committed to spreading intercultural knowledge. The proper integration of international students into VUB's supportive environment is essential for both their well-being and academic success.

### 4.3. Stronger international student community

Creating a stronger international student community can help students find other people with similar interests and provide a safety net they can fall back on when needed. Navigating alone through a new country and culture can be very challenging, scary and confusing, but with the right people supporting you and informing you every step of the way, integrating becomes easier. In addition, we find that students participating in English programmes show interest in learning about other cultures, languages, etc. In our opinion, this can help break bubbles and encourage connections between students. Increasing the number of international/English-speaking events will make the international community stronger and create more opportunities for contact between Belgian and international students.



## Overview members and mandates

President	Wout Vanhelden
Vice president	Pedro Elejabeitia Velu
Coordinator STUVO	Helena Legier
Comité STUVO	Jarid Jacob
	Mila Todorof
Coordinator Education	Yngwie Derycker
Comité Education	Leon Brauweraerts
	Esmeralda Gjonlulaj
Coordinator Innovation	Theo de Pillecyn
Comité Innovation	Jarid Jacob
	Helena Legier
Coordinator Internationalisation	Helena Verspagen
Comité Internationalisation	Hemanth Lee
	Kim Gutierrez
Other members	Diewert Seynaeve,
	Bob Meerts
	Marthe Van Theemsche
	Sana Sadat
	Luca Spiessens