

## EMERGENCY FUND FOR STUDENTS

# 'I didn't imagine I would ever not have enough money for food'

**A crowdfunding campaign for students who run seriously short of money due to the coronavirus crisis has raised tens of thousands of euros. For international students especially, this support is a last-minute rescue operation that enables them to complete their degree.**

TEXT ANJA JANSSEN

In spring 2020, when we realized that the pandemic was causing students to get into financial difficulties, University Fund Wageningen (UFW) launched a crowdfunding campaign to establish an emergency fund. Since then, nearly 830 WUR staff, alumni and students have donated money, and a total of 68,730 euros has been collected. Twenty-six students have already received support from the fund.

The beneficiaries of the fund include a Chinese MSc student of Nutrition and Health who prefers to remain anonymous, as do the other students mentioned in this article. 'Like many Chinese students, I am

supported entirely by my family,' she says. Her family got into financial difficulty because of the pandemic. They earned less and had higher expenses because their daughter was going to have to take longer to complete her degree – an expensive affair with non-EU tuition fees set at around 17,000 euros a year. 'I was doing an internship in a hospital in China when the Covid-19 outbreak started. The hospital was in disarray. I had to work online and my internship supervisor at the hospital had no time for me,' says the student in explanation of her delay. The internship was ended early and she continued her studies in the Netherlands,

where the coronavirus had not arrived yet. 'When I started my degree, I didn't imagine I would ever not have enough money for food,' says the student. Going back to China was not an option for her. 'I am under pressure from my family to come back with a degree.' So the emergency fund was her last resort. 'I was extremely relieved that my application was accepted,' she sighs. The contribution she received for six weeks is enough for her to live off until she graduates.

### NO GRADUATION

Similarly, a Biotechnology student from Ghana, who is studying on a government grant, would not have been able to complete his Master's degree without money from the emergency fund. 'I was doing laboratory research for my thesis when the first lockdown started. I had to change my plans suddenly and do a literature study instead,' he says. Two months later, he could pick up his lab experiments again, but by then he was already running late. To make matters worse, the lab work for his second thesis got delayed, so he could not graduate on schedule. 'Unfortunately, my grant was not extended and my savings didn't run to tuition fees and living costs. So I had to apply to the emergency fund for help.'

It is mainly international students who apply to the fund, says Arianne van Ballegooij of UFW. It is so expensive for them to get an

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UFW's emergency fund for students helps students who have run into acute financial difficulty due to the coronavirus crisis, so that they can continue their studies. The support is for a stated period and is restricted to living expenses, rent and insurance costs to a maximum of 5000 euros. 'Usually they have saved up enough to pay their tuition fees, or their family can just about afford to cover those, but then they have absolutely no money left to live off. They get that from the emergency fund,' says Arianne van Ballegooij of UFW.

Only students with no other possible sources of support qualify. 'Half the applications met the criteria and were accepted,' says Van Ballegooij. 'And now the emergency fund is almost empty. But we are still getting new applications from students whose studies are being delayed because the coronavirus crisis is going on so long.' UFW is therefore raising funds again in March to be able help these students too. To donate: [crowdfunding.wur.nl](https://www.crowdfunding.wur.nl)



PHOTO ANNA DEN HARTOG



PHOTO GUY ACKERMAN



PHOTO MARTE HOFSTEEINGE

Studying in Covid times.

extension that they can't make ends meet, and there is nowhere else they can go for help. Dutch students often have more options than international students, such as going back to live with their parents again or increasing their loan. But even they get into difficulty sometimes. A student from Amsterdam on the Master's in Metropolitan Analysis, Design and Engineering had to put his research on hold for months during the first school closures of 2020. 'I study eating habits among secondary school students, and to do that I needed to talk to students, observe what goes on in schools, and interview teachers. That wasn't possible.' Only after the summer could he get going on his research, and then schools closed

again in mid-December. He conducted the rest of his interviews online, but making that switch cost him another two months. 'I haven't had the right to financing since October, and I get a modest contribution from my parents. Luckily I've been given over 550 euros a month for five months out of the emergency fund. I was very touched by the fact that private individuals gave money. I won't forget that anytime soon. In the future I will definitely contribute to a fund of this sort.'

#### A QUESTION OF SOLIDARITY

Alumnus Jeroen Naaijken (Garden and Landscape Architecture, 1974) felt it was practically his duty to help students out with

a donation. 'It's partly a question of solidarity. And my own degree at Wageningen was crucial because of the good time I had there and the career opportunities it opened up for me. So I want to give something back to the university.'

Before he retired, Naaijken was chair of the board at HAS University of Applied Sciences in Den Bosch. 'I saw there how important it is for students to know they don't have to face everything on their own but can ask for help. I've seen students run aground because the system of being funded by their family stops working due to a crisis. The university community has a responsibility towards them,' Naaijken believes. 'So this emergency fund is a great initiative.' ■