

The Wageningen University PhD Programme: a practical guide for new and experienced supervisors

The Wageningen University PhD programme is 4 years and consists of doing scientific research and writing a thesis (dissertation) under the supervision of 2 to 4 qualified supervisors. Furthermore, PhD candidates use up to 15 percent of the time for learning and development activities, which include courses, competence and skills training, seminars, conferences and working visits. The Academic Board has defined the learning targets for the PhD programme in the [Doctoral Degree Regulations](#).

Doing a PhD at WU is a learning trajectory during which the candidates can grow and prove that they are able to function as an independent scientist. The programme supports the candidates to adopt “T-shaped” skills at three levels:

- **In-depth knowledge** of the specific research topic that the candidate is working on (vertical bar of the T).
- Specific **skills and competences** required to function in or outside academia, and knowledge on adjacent research topics/fields to be able to place the research in a broader context (horizontal bar of the T).
- Being able to **translate** the research outcome (vertical bar of the T) into value for society (horizontal bar of the T).

Supervising a PhD project is a challenging combination of mentoring, advising, and directing a PhD candidate in the process of obtaining academic independence. Success depends on good and frequent contact between the supervisors and the PhD candidate. PhD candidates will thrive in an inspiring work environment, which teaches them to navigate their way through the peculiarities of working in an academic institute and has an open and safe atmosphere to discuss and resolve disagreements.

Rules, regulations, and guidelines

Wageningen University publishes a website with a complete [overview](#) of all rules and regulations of the Academic Board and the guidelines of Wageningen Graduate Schools. Please use this site for information; the Academic Board regularly amends the rules, and revises or issues new policies. All supervisors need to familiarise themselves with the [Doctoral Degree Regulations](#), that form the basis of the PhD programme. See below the most important rules, regulations and guidelines for supervisors and PhD candidates.

Doctoral Degree Regulations	The Doctoral Degree Regulations describe the PhD learning objectives, the degree requirements and the admission criteria. They elaborate on processes related to graduation such as promoters and co-promoters, thesis committee composition, thesis format and the public defence ceremony. The Academic Board regularly amends the Doctorate Conferral Regulations. The Dean of Research is responsible for the execution of the policy agreed by the Academic Board.
The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity	The Code of Conduct lays down the principles underlying scientific integrity: honesty, scrupulousness, transparency, independence, and responsibility. It is a key framework for all academic researchers.
Integrity policy WUR	WUR expects everyone to act with integrity. WUR has developed specific regulations, agreements, and complaints procedures to safeguard integrity.
Authorship, citation, and affiliation guidelines	Chapters of the PhD thesis are often not written by the PhD candidate alone, but with one or more co-authors. Supervisors are often co-author of articles of their PhD candidates. Other scientists may also appear as co-author on

	the articles in a PhD thesis. The guidelines help the PhD candidate and the supervisors to discuss and specify the contribution of a PhD candidate and co-authors to the research. This discussion should start as early as possible; but at least right at the moment the PhD candidate starts the research part.
<u>Data management policy</u>	WUR's research data policy centres around the safety and accessibility of research data, both during and after research. All PhD candidates and chair groups are required to have a Data Management Plan. The supervisors ensure that the PhD candidate has a data management plan and adheres to it.
The go/no-go procedure	This decision is based on the evaluation by the supervisors between 8-15 months after the starting date. The guideline outlines a procedure for supervisors.
<u>Rubrics</u> for the assessment of the thesis	There are two rubrics available: a rubric for the assessment of disciplinary and multidisciplinary PhD research, and a rubric for the assessment of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary PhD research. The promotor decides after consultation with the candidate under which rubric the thesis is submitted to the examining committee, and thus which rubric is going to be used by the thesis committee.
<u>Guideline thesis requirements</u>	More detailed guidelines for the content of the PhD thesis.
<u>Guide for Promotors</u>	This guide outlines the responsibilities of promotors and chair holders

Administration in the PhD process

Recruitment and selection

PhD candidates are recruited and selected by supervisors and the chair groups. Important criteria in recruitment may be the qualities of the candidate and the added value for new or existing research lines. Supervisors interview candidates to assess their academic qualities, proficiency in English and relevant skills (such as communication, leadership). They may also evaluate their writing skills by way of an assignment and question potential candidates on motivation and career ambitions.

Registration and admission

As soon as the selected candidate has agreed to the position, the supervisors inform the graduate school. The graduate school registers the candidate in Hora Finita and sets the admission to the WU PhD programme in motion.

The Doctoral Services Centre (DSC) executes the admission procedures. The PhD programme admits PhD candidates in a variety of constructions. Scholarship and externally financed candidates are required to pay a tuition fee for the time they spend at WU. All PhD candidates who do not have an employment contract with WU, will sign a non-payroll agreement.

Employed PhD candidate	PhD employment contract
Scholarship PhD candidate	Scholarship for the full period not funded by WU
Externally financed PhD candidate	Employed by another institute or organisation, e.g. Wageningen Research, applied or other (international) universities, companies.
External PhD candidate	Do not have any funding and do research in their own time.
Employee in PhD track	WU employees who follow a PhD trajectory within their employment contract

Entry requirements

For admission to the PhD programme, Wageningen University has set requirements. These include:

- Payment of tuition fees for scholarship and externally financed PhD candidates.
- Conditions for scholarships, such as sufficient living allowances equivalent to the IND budget threshold. IND is the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service. We also urge you to pay attention to the specific conditions set by funding agencies that may be unwanted (e.g. payback in case of a no-go or stop) and that could be a reason to decide not to supervise a potential candidate under these conditions.
- A master's degree comparable to a Dutch master. The Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education NUFFIC evaluates the diplomas. The Academic Board can impose a qualifying exam based on this evaluation. Please note that the review of foreign diplomas can take a long time.
- Proficiency in the English language. If applicable, a candidate can meet the language requirements by handing in an internationally recognised Certificate of Proficiency in the English language.

Supervisors are responsible for sufficient funding of the project. The WU PhD programme lasts four years and hence for every PhD project four years of funding must be guaranteed, either by the funding agency, the PhD candidate, or the chair group.

Hora Finita

Hora Finita is the PhD registration and monitoring system used at Wageningen University. This system brings all necessary information together and makes it findable and accessible to PhD candidates, supervisors, and organisational entities involved in the PhD process. All PhD candidates who will defend their thesis at WU register with the relevant graduate school in which they will participate.

Registration starts when the chair group informs the graduate school about the new PhD candidate. The graduate school will request the PhD candidate to upload the required documents in Hora Finita. For more information about Hora Finita, you can consult the Hora Finita manuals. Every graduate school has a Hora Finita key user, who you can contact in case of questions. Please note that HR cannot draw up a contract before the registration in Hora Finita has been completed.

The supervisory team is also registered in Hora Finita. Wageningen University allows 2 to 4 supervisors on a PhD project. The composition of the supervisory team can be changed any time until submission of the thesis.

Graduate schools

The graduate schools organise the PhD programme and develop and process policies to safeguard the quality of the process. PhD candidates are entitled to training, learning and development, and good supervision.

- Approval of the **research proposal**. All graduate schools organise peer reviews of the project proposals regarding relevance, quality, and feasibility. The proposal document format and requirements can be found on the site of the graduate school.
- The **Training and Supervision Plan (TSP)**. Doing a PhD at WU is a learning trajectory. The planning of training and the form and frequency of supervision are formulated in an individual TSP. The TSP ensures that PhD candidates take charge of their learning process towards becoming an independent academic with T shaped skills. The TSP also documents agreements about supervision and, when applicable, about teaching and supervision of students. The format for the TSP can be found on the site of the graduate school. Each PhD candidate is entitled to the educational backpack (4k€ as of 1-1-2025), to be paid by the chair group.

Each graduate school offers a programme of PhD courses and activities in their domain. Furthermore, they collectively operate in the Wageningen Graduate Schools (WGS) to organise an extensive skills and competences courses programme and support for career orientation. WGS also organises learning activities for PhD supervisors: a course Professional in Supervision, and regular lunch workshops and advanced workshops about different topics related to supervision.

- **Advice and support.** The PhD advisors and education coordinators of the graduate schools advise PhD candidates on learning, development, and supervision. The PhD advisors also confidentially advise, mediate, or refer to an expert in case of issues. They are part of the extensive support structure that Wageningen University has in place for PhD candidates. PhD supervisors are also welcome to contact the graduate school and seek (confidential) advice on supervision issues.
- **Monitoring quality and progress.** Supervisors regularly discuss the progress of the PhD project with their PhD candidate. A progress and development meeting should take place at least once a year. Do not hesitate to contact your graduate school in case of emerging issues or delays. The graduate schools perform exit questionnaires and interviews on the PhD process and the quality of supervision.
- **Go/no-go evaluation:** This evaluation is mandatory and should be done by supervisors between 8 -15 months after the starting date. See the WGS guideline on the go/no-go evaluation for more information and tips.

Teaching by PhD candidates

For PhD candidates, teaching including supervising bachelor's or master's theses can be rewarding and a good learning experience, especially if the topics are part of, or close to, their own research project. Hence supervisors may discuss the possibilities with their candidate. There are teaching rules for PhD candidates. All graduate schools credit teaching activities, provided that the candidate and supervisors set clear learning goals in the TSP. Teaching should not exceed 10% of the four-year workload. If teaching clearly exceeds this limit and becomes more a routine job that has no direct link with the PhD candidate's learning objectives or the research project, a clear agreement on compensation for the surplus work is needed. Also note that, regarding teaching duties, PhD candidates not employed by WU are exempt from any obligation to teach or supervise students.

Mental health of PhD candidates

Recent investigations at other universities show that a large section - about one third! - of the PhD candidates is at risk of becoming over-stressed and clinically depressed, which could lead to a burn-out. The main reasons are conflicts between work and personal life, work pressure and inadequate supervision. Supervisors have an extremely important task to identify stress factors for their PhD candidates and to observe mental health risks timely. Do not hesitate to refer your candidate to the PhD advisor or the relevant experts of the support structure. Furthermore, it is vital that supervisors safeguard that the requirements and demands of each PhD trajectory can be met in the available time.

The last stretch of the PhD

To graduate, the PhD candidate together with the supervisor and the graduate school must go through a series of actions within a strict time frame. Most of the actions take place in Hora Finita.

Some of the main steps:

- The PhD candidate submits the thesis and the authorship statement in Hora Finita. The supervisors approve the thesis.
- The PhD candidate submits the propositions in Hora Finita to be reviewed by the supervisors. After approval of the supervisors, the Academic Board approves the propositions.

- The supervisors propose the members of the Assessment Committee; scientists with a PhD degree working at a university, a research institute, or a company.
- The PhD candidate requests the Education Certificate by contacting the graduate school.

For a detailed overview of all required steps see the [graduation webpage](#), the [Hora Finita manual](#) and the [Full Timetable](#).

Chair groups will compensate PhD candidates who graduate at our university for the printing costs of the thesis. The compensation covers the printing costs for the required number of copies of the dissertation to a maximum € 1250 euro.

Contact

- [Experimental Plant Sciences \(EPS\)](#)
Executive secretary: Ingrid Vleghels
PhD advisor: Susan Urbanus
- [Production Ecology and Resource Conservation \(PE&RC\)](#)
Executive secretary: Theo Jetten and Claudius van de Vijver
PhD advisor: Claudius van de Vijver
- [Biobased, Biomolecular, Chemical, Food and Nutrition Sciences \(VLAG\)](#)
Executive secretary: Anouk Geelen
PhD advisors: Jochem Jonkman, Vesna Prsic and Anouk Geelen
- [Wageningen School of Social Sciences \(WASS\)](#)
Executive secretary: Esther Roquas
PhD advisors: Carlos Barzola Iza and Esther Roquas
- [Wageningen Institute of Animal Sciences \(WIAS\)](#)
Executive secretary: Nicole Rodenburg
PhD advisors: Nicole Rodenburg and Paddy Haripersaud
- [Wageningen Institute for Environment and Climate Research \(WIMEK\)](#)
Executive secretary: Koen Wetser
PhD advisor: Peter Vermeulen and Elackiya Sithampanathan