

Preamble

The WGS vision for the PhD programme at Wageningen University & Research (WUR) has been developed following an intensive discussion between the six Wageningen University graduate schools. An extended draft version of the vision document was discussed with the Dean of Research, the individual graduate school Boards and the Wageningen PhD council. In this document, Wageningen Graduate Schools (collaboration platform for the six graduate schools coordinated by Wageningen University) presents a concise version of its shared vision on the WU PhD programme by describing the basic principles, elaborating on several aspects of the vision and the consequences we see for our organisation. The Academic Board has reflected on the vision and provided input on the steps that need to be taken in order to move towards our vision.

This vision serves as a guideline for further development of policies and practices for the coming years, as part of the ongoing process of improving, adapting and organising the PhD programme. This vision is also an important input for the external peer review of the graduate schools.

Reality and future developments will inevitably require us to adjust our daily policies and practices; however, we can use our overarching vision to direct these modifications and determine whether we are still on the desired track.

The next step in achieving our vision is to compare the current working methods with the vision and identify differences.

Wageningen Graduate Schools, March 2021

WGS Vision on the Wageningen University PhD Programme

Introduction

The mission of Wageningen University and Research (WUR) is 'To explore the potential of nature to improve the quality of life'. Within WUR, the university forms a unique collaboration with the applied research institutes of Wageningen Research and together we can quickly translate breakthroughs in fundamental knowledge into practical applications such as technological innovations or new government policies.

Wageningen University has attained a unique position in several leading University ranking systems and currently provides high-quality education to Bachelor, Master and PhD scholars. Over the past decade, under- and postgraduate (including PhD candidates) numbers have significantly increased with more academic staff than ever supervising PhD candidates. Nowadays there are a variety of programmes and organisations that provide funding for the various PhD positions at our University.

Wageningen University is internationally renowned for its high-quality PhD programme and makes a major contribution to the WUR mission "To explore the potential of nature to improve the quality of life". The PhD programme is organised into six (in some cases interuniversity) graduate schools, that each provide a high-quality and relevant academic environment for PhD candidates in their scientific domains and together cover all disciplines represented within our organisation:

1. Experimental Plant Sciences (EPS)
2. Production Ecology and Resource Conservation (PE&RC)
3. Wageningen School of Social Sciences (WASS)
4. Wageningen Institute of Animal Sciences (WIAS)
5. Wageningen Institute for Environment and Climate Research (WIMEK)
6. Food Technology, Agrobiotechnology, Nutrition and Health Science (VLAG)

The individual graduate schools jointly form Wageningen Graduate Schools and develop, maintain and execute a comprehensive PhD programme within Wageningen University. The PhD programme attracts and supports exceptionally talented candidates and alumni to start their career at WUR and develop their own research lines.

In this vision on the PhD programme, we respond to new developments and challenges while simultaneously safeguarding our current strengths.

Vision

Wageningen University PhD graduates are sought-after, independent, engaged and principled scientists employed in all sectors of society where their expertise contributes to improving the quality of life through exploration of the potential of nature.

Mission

Our Wageningen University PhD programme provides an optimal environment for talented young researchers to develop into independent scientists at the highest international standards, valued for their work quality and ethics with the potential to become future scientific leaders.

The Wageningen approach

To achieve our mission, the following prerequisite conditions are essential and we continuously focus on ensuring that:

1. Training is offered by discipline specific graduate schools to provided PhD candidates with T-shaped skills and prepare for a broad range of careers.
2. Research is performed in accordance with the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity meaning that scientists can work in a safe, inclusive and open environment where they feel responsible and accountable, can share concerns about dilemmas and can discuss errors made without fearing the consequences;

3. PhD candidates are valued for the scientific quality of their work and are well embedded within their graduate school;
4. Results are shared in an open and transparent manner using Open Science principles.

1. Safe, inclusive and open academic environment

Wageningen University provides a safe, inclusive and open international academic community that offers a stimulating working environment. The PhD programme starts with a transparent recruitment and selection procedure. Our PhD candidates are supported by skilled and experienced academic supervisors and support staff. All scientists and researchers at WUR, including PhD candidates, adhere to the prevailing codes of conduct.

A healthy work-life balance of PhD candidates is promoted with PhD candidates and supervisors regularly discussing workload to allow appropriate measures to be taken to maintain/restore the balance.

We value diversity within our academic community; our policies are founded on trust in employees and promote integrity in research, education and behaviour. We facilitate a diversity in opinions of our academics and do not strive for uniformity. We stimulate discussion that is based on science and arguments, while acknowledging different opinions and perspectives. The PhD programme aims to attract a diverse population of eligible PhD candidates and to be inclusive.

2. Quality and quantity balance

The Wageningen PhD programme has a predominant focus on learning and personal development of PhD candidates. As proof of the ability to act, perform and think as an independent practitioner of science, the candidate writes a PhD thesis or creates a technological design. All PhD research proposals and PhD theses meet high-quality standards, and are assessed with respect to originality, scientific quality, reflection and written presentation. An oral presentation and public defence are required to obtain the PhD degree. The development of disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge and skills, team collaboration within and across domains are encouraged and valued. Science for impact, next to fundamental science, is gaining in importance. PhD projects are firmly embedded within the WUR research mission and domains covering the whole range from fundamental sciences to practice-oriented research. There is a strong connection between researchers, research projects, and societal issues and challenges.

We collaborate with international partners to strengthen our research domains and training activities. Our PhD candidates perform their thesis work in an international context.

3. Open and transparent science

Significant changes are occurring in the way society looks at science, and in the way scientists look at science. Fair and transparent research quality assessments and sharing research results in an open and transparent manner with science and society is rapidly becoming the new standard.

We are explicit about our independent position in research collaborations with third parties and provide adequate financial and organisational means for a high-quality PhD programme.

Our academics make autonomous decisions regarding the development of knowledge and contribute with their research to science and/or societal issues in cooperation with their co-workers inside and outside the university. PhD candidates are increasingly the principal independent drivers of their own research, within practical boundaries, leading to independently thinking graduates.

PhD candidates are encouraged to publish their research results as peer-reviewed scientific papers using Open Science principles such as those on Open Access and FAIR data.

4. Training for a broad range of careers

Our PhD graduates are well equipped to work as independent academics in academia, education and many other professions where employees are required with academic knowledge, analytical skills, high ethical standards and societal responsibility. Learning outcomes of the PhD programme are aimed at the

development of these qualities by offering PhD candidates both in-depth training within the scientific domain as well as broad professional skills to function as an academic.

The learning outcomes set for the PhD programme are continuously evaluated; there is a clear connection between the learning outcomes, the organisation of the programme and the evaluation criteria.