



annual report  
WUR Council

2023

## Preface

Welcome. If you made it here this means you have some interest in the activities of the WUR Council. The WUR Council is where the Student Staff Council (SSC) and the Central Works Council (COR), two central participatory councils of WUR, meet together. Although we have done and are doing our best to change this, most students and staff appear to be not very much aware of what the participatory councils do, even though their hard-working members do their best to represent all WUR students and employees. This system, in which an organisation's constituents get to have a say in how their organisation is managed is a precious asset, that is certainly not something that exists everywhere in the world. In the Netherlands, this so-called 'co-participation' is deemed so important that it is mandated by law for organisations and companies with more than fifty employees. It ensures that all 'constituents' have a way of exerting influence on the functioning of their organisation. The underlying idea is that this helps to make better decisions because the participatory members can provide (different) perspectives, ask critical questions to the management, or give unsolicited advice on matters that they think are important for employees/students or the functioning of the organisation. These have to be considered by the management, which ensures that different views are heard and considered when they make decisions.

In this annual report, the various committees of the WUR Council, which is composed of staff, students, and PhD candidates, outline what they have worked on in the past year. These committees prepare the formal recommendations that - after joint discussion in the WUR Council - are issued by the SSC and/or the COR. We hope this report will inspire you to participate too.

*Blair van Pelt (chair SSC and WUR Council) and Paul Smeets (chair COR)*

Would you like to stay informed about our activities? Then follow our WUR Council SharePoint for employees and students and/or intranet page.

WUR Council SharePoint for employees and students:

<https://wageningenur4.sharepoint.com/sites/WURCouncilinformation>

WUR Council intranet page:

<https://intranet.wur.nl/Project/WURCouncil>



*WUR Council from September 2023*

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## Glossary

COR	Central Works Council
EB	Executive Board
SSC	Student Staff Council

## 2023 WUR Council in a nutshell

28 

Members when all seats are filled

Combined of

 COR  
SSC



Student members change annually



PhD candidates change annually



Staff members change every 3 years



Regular internal WUR Council meetings

9 

Requests for advice and/or approval in 2023

4 

Consultation meetings with the Executive Board

6 

Active committees on various topics

3 

Ad hoc committees and working groups

## General information

Depending on the subject and legal requirements, the Executive Board submits preliminary decisions to the COR and/or SSC for advice and/or approval. During the year, this happened nine times. The SSC gave a formal response four times (including: "Budget WU 2024" and "Taverne opt-out") and the COR two times ("HR Together" and "Code of conduct Social Safety and Code of relationships at work").

Once, the COR and SSC jointly gave a formal response, namely in response to an approval request for the Academic Career Framework.

The Executive Board regularly submitted documents to the COR and/or SSC for information; over thirty-three times in 2023. This sometimes led to technical meetings and/or questions to the Executive Board in the consultation meetings.

Additionally, the Supervisory Board requested and received formal confidential advice from the COR twice, and once jointly from the COR and OR-WU (employees in the SSC). All three files were also sent to the Student Council.

## Committee Communication

Last year, Committee Communication of the WUR Council looked into new ways to inform the constituency of the WUR Council. The constituency consists of more than 23,000 people (approximately 13,500 students, 7,600 employees and 2,300 PhDs). This led to a challenge of reaching this diverse group.

In order to deal with this challenge, the committee worked on a communication plan. This sets a guideline on what the committee would like to achieve, and (maybe even more important) on how they achieve it. With the new participatory council starting in September 2023 (2023-2026) the communication plan was adjusted due to the findings and experiences of the previous committee members.

The WUR Council was also granted funding from the Executive Board to make an informative YouTube video on what the WUR Council is and does.

The committee made a newsletter which was sent to all employees and students in May 2023. Making the newsletter took a lot of effort but did not lead to the desired results. Therefore, it was decided to look into alternative ways to get the attention of the constituency.

Lastly, the public SharePoint of the WUR Council (<https://wageningenur4.sharepoint.com/sites/WURCouncilinformation>) was shaped last year as well where we inform all employees and students about our work as WUR Council, which gives good opportunities to enhance the involvement of the constituency. The challenges for the coming year are grabbing and keeping the interest of people to stay informed on the work the WUR Council does.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayCpkyp01Q8>



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Picture made by Joris Schaap (WUR brand portal)

## Committee Education, Research and Internationalisation

In 2023, committee Education, Research and Internationalisation (E&R+I) of the WUR Council has engaged with different dossiers. One of the main topics was the Academic Career Framework (ACF) and associated assessment guidelines. This constitutes WUR's approach to the ambition of the Dutch universities to modernise the system of Recognition and Rewards (see <https://recognitionrewards.nl/>). The aim is to diversify career paths, achieve balance between individual and team performance, stimulate open science, have a stronger focus on quality and content, and stimulating good academic leadership. This means that a broader set of academic output and activities, more diversity in academic profiles, more flexibility, and an increased focus on qualitative assessment. The WUR Council supports these ambitions and is positive about the thorough iterative process undertaken with the Recognition & Rewards working group and the Executive Board, as endorsed by committee E&R+I on behalf of the WUR Council. Following the request of the WUR Council, the Academic Career Framework was assessed with the associated assessment guidelines, now called Academic Career Guidelines, in mind. We had multiple discussions regarding the focus on qualitative assessment and stressing the fact that the number of required assessment indicators should be minimal while allowing sufficient room for diversity in the individual profiles and offering recognition of a broad spectrum of academic work. The working group on Recognition & Rewards, with input from the WUR Council, the Graduate schools of Wageningen, and other staff and stakeholders, prepared the final version of the ACF that was approved. The WUR Council believes that that version makes strong efforts to include career advice in the assessment framework and overall seeks to strike a balance between assessment and advice. Committee E&R+I and the WUR Council also values the explicit attention to the need for a cultural change on how one recognises and rewards the multiple forms of academic work that university staff carries out. We appreciate how multiple other recommendations made by the WUR Council were considered and often also included in the final ACF.

Another topic that the committee worked on was the extended daytime schedule. After signals from both students and lecturers a survey was sent out to serve as input for plans for an adapted schedule in which the 10-minute break between lecture blocks is made longer again.

Additionally, committee E&R+I was involved in a first evaluation of the Hora Finita system for managing PhD projects which was launched in 2022. Pending software improvements by the supplier the evaluation focused on areas of improvement not requiring the supplier: support and communication with users.

Based on the Dutch Copyright Act researchers can share short scientific works without financial consideration after a reasonable period of time (six months). This so-called Taverne arrangement had an opt-in approach at WUR in which researchers had to actively agree on this mode of publication for each paper. The WUR Council (SSC) approved the preliminary decision of the Executive Board to move to an opt-out system. This reduces the work load and promotes access to publications that would otherwise be behind a pay wall.

Finally, the committee has been involved in several other topics and projects such as the Quality Agreements and the National Program Education (NPE) fund. Overall, the committee was well involved in the decision-making and therefore looks back on the past year with satisfaction.

## Committee Finance

Committee Finance of the WUR Council deals with all dossiers related to WUR's finances, with the focus on Wageningen University. Every year we focus on monitoring recurring topics, of which are reviewing the budget, the Framework Letter, and the quarterly finance reports. Committee Finance works closely together with Corporate Finance & Control on these dossiers. The documents we get to review as committee Finance are often very technical and complex. Corporate Finance & Control helps us to understand these documents and to put them in a broader perspective. Committee Finance is therefore the perfect place in which you can develop literacy on financial policy documents, in addition to helping WUR staying a financially healthy organisation. The financial data of WUR are confidential, so as committee members you have access to very exclusive information. You are the first to see the confidential financial figures of WUR.

At the beginning of the calendar year, the Wageningen University budget cycle starts with writing the Position paper in which the Student Staff Council offers its vision on WU(R) and its finances to the Executive Board. The input for the Position paper is collected by a survey which all members of the WUR Council and members of related committees filled in. The Position paper of 2023 consisted of topics such as workload/work stress, facilities, branding and the inflation and energy costs.

After presenting the Position paper, Corporate Finance & Control and the Executive Board presented their Framework Letter of 2023 to the Student Staff Council for feedback.

In November 2023, the draft budget of Wageningen University for 2024 was presented to the Student Staff Council and Student Council. The Student Staff Council has the right of approval on the main lines of the budget of Wageningen University, while the Student Council has the right of advice on the Wageningen University budget for 2024. The budget of Wageningen University for 2024 was approved by the Student Staff Council after multiple technical meetings, internal WUR Council meetings, and a consultation meeting with the Executive Board in November 2023. This approval was combined with the request to invest in the branding and accessibility of Wageningen. The budget period runs on a very tight schedule, but as committee with a new composition of members, because of the participatory elections that took place in May 2023, we managed this well because of good preparations.



*Picture made by Marte Hofsteenge (WUR brand portal)*



Picture made by Marte Hofsteenge (WUR brand portal)

## Committee Housing, Working Conditions and Environment

The committee Housing, Working Conditions and Environment (HAM) of the WUR Council deals with issues related to housing, working conditions and the environment. The purpose of committee HAM is to contribute to the creation of a safe and good working environment in which employees and students can perform their work properly. The Works Council Act (In Dutch: Wet op de Ondernemingsraden / WOR) provides this opportunity because various dossiers are subject to the right of advice or approval of employee participation.

Committee HAM dealt with the following dossiers in 2023:

- Strategic Housing Plan 2021-2026 through regular updates from the Executive Board
- Adjusted investment Smart Fabric (presented for advice)
- Annual report Radiation Safety 2022
- Annual report Sustainability 2022
- Evaluation of WUR smoking policy
- Closure of buildings at the end of the year

In addition to these dossiers, committee HAM has regular meetings with those in charge about progress within housing (with Facilities & Services) and developments regarding regulations on working conditions (with the Safety and Environment Department).

The main topics for 2024 are realising the Strategic Housing Plan, supporting the Risk Inventory and Evaluation (RI&E) policy and contributing to the discussion on sustainability. An important step within the Strategic Housing Plan is the realisation of a new research building. This dossier was submitted to the COR for advice at the end of 2023.

Also in 2024, a start will be made on retrofitting several existing buildings. Committee HAM will follow this process closely. Conducting Risk Inventory and Evaluations is a cornerstone of the safety policy within WUR. Implementation is facilitated and assessed from the central organisation. Committee HAM wants to contribute to optimising this process.

Sustainability is taking on an increasingly important role within the organisation's policy. Committee HAM will investigate what role it can play within this discussion.

## Committee Management and Organisation

Last year committee Management and Organisation (M&O) of the WUR Council worked on several topics. An annual recurring dossier is the Code for Good Governance. This dossier entails the reflection done with the WUR Council, Executive Board and Supervisory Board.

There were also some dossiers the committee was informed about, but did not have formal advice or approval rights on. One example was the tender process for the Food and Beverages in the WUR buildings. In a later stage an evaluation will take place, in which the participatory councils will be involved.

The WIRE/VOICE project (restructuring of the WUR Website and Intranet) was also a dossier where the committee was provided with updates on the process. The WIRE/VOICE dossier is expected in Q1/Q2 of 2024 on which the COR and/or SSC will have the right of advice.

Lastly, the developing process of the new Strategic Plan of WUR started in 2023. This Strategic Plan will be implemented in 2025. The first technical meetings have taken place, and the committee is looking forward to fulfil its task as committee picking up this topic for the WUR Council in 2024.



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## Committee Personnel

The main topic for committee Personnel of the WUR Council in 2023, was the introduction of the HR Together project in the HR department of WUR. In HR Together, one of the most important changes introduced is the pooling of knowledge and therefore a boost in effectiveness within the HR department. With the introduction of the HR Together project, a shift of people, tasks, and responsibilities also takes place. In May 2023, the COR received the request for advice on the implementation of HR Together. Committee Personnel picked this dossier up content-wise for the WUR Council. After an extensive process, the COR issued their advice in October 2024 that implementation of HR Together may begin if several conditions are met. The main reason that the advice of the COR was delayed was because it was not clear to some of the HR staff what was ultimately expected of them after the implementation of HR Together.

Another topic presented to the COR and Student Council for approval in 2023 was the Code of Conduct for Social Safety WUR, and the Code of Relationships at Work. Agreement on the Code of Conduct for Social Safety was quickly reached, as it was clear what is and is not allowed around social safety. The Code Relationships at Work caused more discussions. After discussions the COR approved the preliminary decision to adopt the Code of Conduct for Social Safety with the advice to add the "Find your way" infographics to the Code, and to include that discrimination based on the level of education is not acceptable.

The COR decided to not approve with the preliminary decision to adopt Code of Relationships at work, unless dismissal as a final option to solve conflict based on relationships at work will be removed from the Code for Relationships at work. The Executive Board replied that they will follow the advice and condition set in our approval.

In 2023 there was also an evaluation by an external agency about the position of an ombudsperson within WUR. The general conclusion is that the ombudsperson fulfils a very valuable function within WUR and should be continued within WUR.

There was also a discussion in 2023 about whether WUR employees would be given the opportunity to take a language course in Dutch or English. It turned out that for several employees this was not granted for cost reasons, despite clear agreements being made and laid down in the WUR 2021-2024 language guidelines. Ultimately, the Executive Board indicated that these costs should not be an impediment to denying someone a language course, but that there should be further internal review of how this should be financed.

## Contact information

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*Picture made by Marte Hofsteenge (WUR brand portal)*



**WUR**  
**COUNCIL**  
central participation councils  
centrale medezeggenschap