

Chairholder at Wageningen University



WAGENINGEN
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

wur.eu



Introduction for chairholders

You have applied for the position of, or are already working as, professor and chairholder at Wageningen University (WU). While you are familiar with academic institutions, we all know that every university has its own particularities in terms of organisational structure, division of responsibilities, unwritten rules and routines, financing logics and the like. We have learned that the logics at Wageningen University that we take for granted, are not at all self-evident for new colleagues coming from outside of our organisation. Hence, this document has been drawn up to give you a brief introduction and overview of how WU is organised, how it functions (or at least, is supposed to function) and what it means to be a chairholder in our organisation. Of course we realise that this note does not provide the full picture, as it consists of only a few pages and largely ignores the unwritten rules and routines. But we do hope it gives you a basic idea of our university, allows you to identify the differences with what you

have experienced elsewhere and helps you to ask us the right questions. It goes without saying that we are always willing to provide further information and answer questions.



Carolien Kroeze,
Rector Magnificus



Photo: Marte Hofsteenge

Wageningen University & Research

Wageningen University & Research (WUR) is one of the leading organisations in the domain of agrofood and the living environment in the world, and is the only academic organisation in the Netherlands in this domain. It has roughly 7,000 employees, 13,000 BSc and MSc students, and 2,200 PhD candidates.

Wageningen University & Research is comprised of two legal entities, Wageningen University and Wageningen Research, and is governed jointly by a three person Executive Board (EB; see Figure 1 on page 5).

The EB is composed of a president, a rector/vice-chancellor of the university who is also vice-president of Wageningen Research, and an ordinary member/CFO. The rector is responsible for education, student affairs, research, the establishing of chairs, and the appointment and reappointment of professors, among others. Unique in the Netherlands, Wageningen University is a one-faculty university. This structure facilitates extensive cross-disciplinary collaboration in both research and education. Wageningen Research is a foundation consisting of nine applied research institutes, focussed on

providing important research and input to the (profit and not-for-profit) private sector and policymakers at the subnational, national, and international level.

The cooperation of Wageningen University with Wageningen Research takes place through five Science Groups (Animal Sciences, Plant Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Social Sciences, and Agrotechnology and Food Sciences; see Figure 1). Each Science Group consists of a University Department (made up of 12 to 22 so-called "chair groups") and one or more applied research institutes (which in turn are made up of one or more "business units"). Outside these 5 Science Groups, there exists one additional applied research institute: Wageningen Food Safety Research WFSR. Wageningen University currently has a total of 94 chair groups divided over the five Science Groups.

Each Science Group is governed by two directors: a general director (responsible for among others general and research strategy) and a director operations (responsible for, among others, finances, logistics, and support staff).



Photo: Jesse Reij

Wageningen University

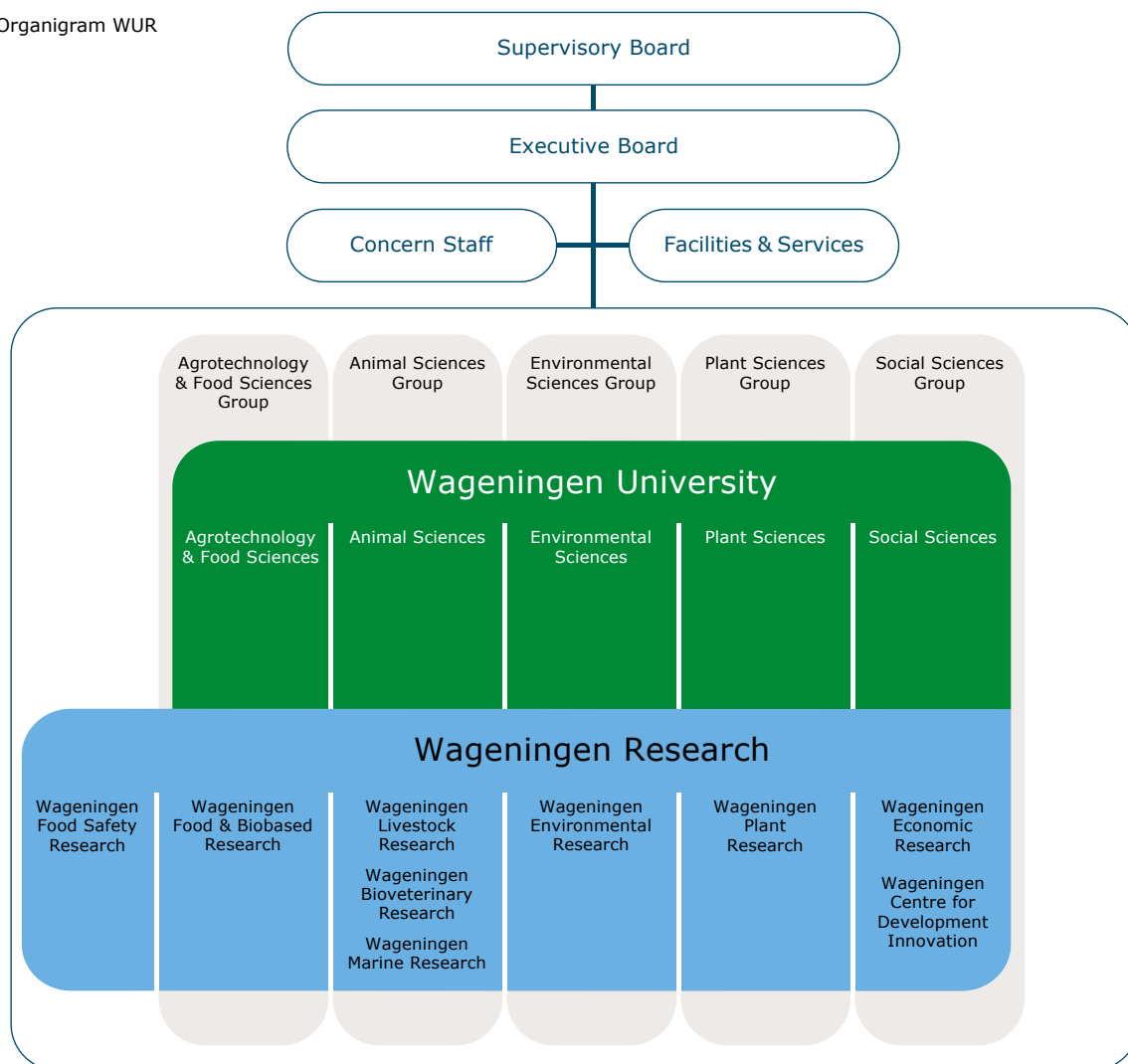
The organisation structure of Wageningen University takes the form of a matrix as set out in Figure 1. In this matrix, the vertical lines of accountability run from the chair groups via the Sciences Groups to converge at the Executive Board. Education (bachelor and master programmes and professional education) and research (PhD programmes, Engineering Doctorate programmes (EngD), post-docs, staff research, and research quality) are organised horizontally in a cross-sectional way.

Mandates for managerial, personnel, or financial issues are executed within the Science Groups, primarily at the chair group level. The graduate schools are responsible for ensuring the quality of research programmes and PhD training, while the responsibility for bachelor and master

programmes lies with programme committees and the university-wide Board of Education. An important implication of this institutional structure is that decisions related to the substance/content and organisation of bachelor and master programmes lie with the respective programme committees, not with individual chair groups.

Chair groups will typically contribute with courses and theses to several programmes at the time, but always do so collaboratively with other chair groups. The membership of programme committees draws on members of involved chair groups (and students) but members are appointed in their personal capacity in light of their subject-specific expertise, not as representatives of a certain chairgroup.

Figure 1 Organigram WUR



Chair group

The chair group is the foundational unit for academic staff, where personnel decisions are made, education and research is carried out, and to which finances are allocated. Chair groups differ in size, but always have one chairholder, several (permanent) academic staff (personal professors, associate professors, assistant professors, lecturers), post-docs, PhD students, and support staff (secretary, office manager, technicians). Academic staff members are appointed under tenure track conditions or the Education Career Path. The tenure track is a trajectory in which scientists can progress from assistant professor to associate professor and – if they wish – to personal professor, on condition that they meet established criteria.

The chairholder guides these tenure trackers in their trajectory. On average, 40% of tenured staff time is available for research (including supervision of PhD candidates), about 40% of tenured staff time is spent on teaching (BSc and MSc level), and about 20% on management tasks and academic services. Most chair groups have a small management team chaired by the chairholder and a kind of general assembly where all staff can participate. Chair groups set their own budgets and hiring strategies, which have to be approved by the directors of the Science Group to which they belong. At the level of the Science Group, support staff is available for chair groups in relation to finances, human resources, and external contracting (a liaison office).

Chair groups can collaborate with other chair groups in sections of clusters (different names exist). Usually a section/cluster consists of 3-5 chair groups. The formation of these clusters/section is stimulated by the Science Groups and university management. Collaboration can relate to joint support staff, a joint research plan, sharing of staff members, collaboration in external research assessment (once every six years), collaboration in teaching, etc.

*"Being a chair at WUR presents a unique opportunity to create a team. Providing a supportive and successful academic environment for an international group of talented researchers in a truly interdisciplinary university has been an incredibly rewarding experience."
Josephine van Zeben is Dutch*

The chairholder

The chairholder sets the strategic vision for the chair group's research, education, and knowledge utilisation goals. The chairholder is also responsible for the hiring and talent management of the group's staff. This strategy is developed within the parameters of the teaching and research remit set by the Executive Board. Transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership are integral to the setting and executing of this vision.

The chairholder may delegate daily management tasks related to education, research, financial management, personal management, outreach, and representation to other members of the chair group. Such tasks can be an important part of the talent development of Tenure Trackers. For that reason, the chairholder's leadership, coordination, organisation, and mentorship skills are important. As a result, the role of a chairholder is more like that of a leader of a small department than that of an individual professor.

In the personnel management of the chair group, the chairholder is supported by the Human Resources department of the Science Group. Every year the management of the Science Group organises strategic personnel plan meetings with the chairholder to discuss personnel planning for the coming year. In addition, every chairholder is expected to write a longer-term strategic personnel plan, which sets out hiring and talent development priorities for the coming five years. Each Science Group holds annual budget discussions between the SG directors and the chairholder in which the developments and results of the group are examined and the budget for the coming year is determined.



Research

The chairholder is the academic leader of the chair group, and has final responsibility for research quality, output and performance. In addition, faculty members of the group may (and often will) contribute to this, e.g. as leader for a specific sub-domain/theme, a project leader of (large) projects, or as research coordinator. Employees whose formal task include research must be a member of a Wageningen University graduate school.



Wageningen University has six graduate schools, each of which covers a specific domain:

- Experimental Plant Sciences (EPS);
- Production Ecology and Resource Conservation (PE&RC);
- Wageningen School of Social Sciences (WASS);
- Wageningen Institute of Animal Sciences (WIAS);
- Wageningen Institute for Environment;
- Climate Research (WIMEK); Biobased, Biomolecular, Food, and Nutrition Sciences (VLAG).

The graduate schools are content driven and are, therefore, not restricted to the disciplines of a specific Science Group.

The graduate schools have three important tasks:

- 1 To coordinate, develop, and facilitate doctoral education and training;
- 2 To stimulate and coordinate the development of a coherent research programme within the mission of the graduate school;
- 3 To safeguard, monitor, and stimulate the quality and progress of research by staff, postdocs, and PhD candidates.

WUR's doctoral degree regulations apply to all PhDs, regardless of their graduate school membership.

Education

Wageningen University provides 19 BSc programmes and 30 Masters programmes, governed by 25 programme committees.

Following the matrix structure, the chairholder has final responsibility for the content and quality of teaching offered by the chair group, which includes the provision of bachelor courses, masters courses, theses and internship supervision, and (where relevant) professional education. The chair group offers education at the request of Programme Committees and the Board of Education. The Board of Education and the Programme Committees are responsible for the design, content, quality, and financing of the BSc and MSc programmes.

Besides these diploma education programmes, Wageningen University – and also Wageningen Research – offer professional education and life long learning elements. The Board of Professional Education oversees the quality of these educational activities, while chair groups (WU) and business units (WR) offer professional education.

Wageningen University strives for all its teachers to have a university teaching qualification (UTQ). To obtain this, they should follow courses and prepare a portfolio.

Teaching quality is continuously monitored by the Programme Committees through student evaluations, which also play a role in career moves for tenure track personnel.

Financial management

The chairholder is responsible for the financial viability of their chair group.

On average, two thirds of a chair group's income comes directly from the university. This primary source of income is derived from four categories of funding: first, core funding, independent of the size or discipline of the chair group; second, education-based funding, which relates to cursory and non-cursory (theses, internships) education provided by the group; third, PhD and EngD related funding, created by successful PhD and EngD defenses; fourth, specific university budgets can be allocated to a chair group, which can, for example, relate to research facilities such as labs.

The remaining income is acquired through various soft money projects funded by, among others, the National Science Foundation ("NWO"), governmental organisations at different levels, companies, NGOs, the European Commission, and other international organisations or foreign governments. Chairholders are supported in the acquisition of such funding by the financial department of the Science Group and a financial controller. At university level, specialists are available to assist with, and provide information on, specific funding agencies and application procedures.

Chair groups pay a variable overhead to their Science group.

Human resource management

The chairholder is responsible for personnel management of the chair group. This concerns various personnel matters, such as appointing and promoting employees, terminating contracts, organising yearly progress & development meetings with personnel, and supervising/coaching tenure trackers in their career progression. Tenure trackers have the possibility to develop and grow into the position of personal professor and over time develop their own research and education line (and post-docs, PhD students and staff dedicated to that line) within a chair group. The chairholder is supported in this by a representative of the HR department of the Science Group.

Support for new chairholders

Every new chairholder receives coaching from the general director of its Science Group. In addition, a "buddy" chairholder can be identified who can informally support the new chairholder and help the chairholder to get accustomed with the organisation, its culture, and procedures. Beside support from the secretariat of the chair group, onboarding support can also be provided by the HR advisor and the financial controller assigned to the chair group. Specific training can be applied for (language, leadership, etc), depending on the needs of the chairholder.



"What I really love about Wageningen University is the contrast between the rather small and intimate environment of the campus (where you really feel like you are part of a community) on the one hand with the incredible international academic standing and expertise on the other. This combination of closeness and worldliness leads to unique opportunities to collaborate and build bridges between researchers and disciplines. Also, I love that there are many voices here on campus, from young environmental activists to researchers with ties to industry. By having the entire spectrum on campus allows for open debate and alternative solutions to be explored."

Eric Schranz is American