Annual Report of WU Quality Agreements 2020

1 Quality Agreements

1.1 Process

The Quality Agreements 2019-2024 were established by the Executive Board, and approved by the Student Staff Council and Supervisory Board in 2019. For two years now, we are implementing the programme to strengthen the quality of our education. The results and impact of these efforts have been periodically summarised in a dashboard. Using these dashboards, the steering group managed, monitored and reported on the implementation, and the Executive Board, Student Staff Council and Supervisory Board evaluated and discussed the progress. The last version of the dashboard is also made publicly available via the Wageningen University website.

Overall, the realisation of the Quality Agreements is well on track. Some projects are delayed due to the consequence of the corona measures for higher education. The corona measures limit the possibilities for meetings in real-life and affect the priorities in education. All programmes and all lecturers focus first and foremost on offering high quality education. Projects that aim at changes in programmes, like the skills project, are therefore delayed causing underspending. In other projects adjustments of the measures were necessary to fit online or blended education, which took time and caused some delay in the realisation. The projects remain to be very relevant, also in the changed situation due to the corona pandemic.

The funding we receive from OCW is fully spent in 2020 according to the established Quality Agreements 2019-2020. Wageningen University invests additional own resources in the Quality Agreements in the years 2019 and 2020. Not all our own additional funding is fully spent.

1.2 Progress

Wageningen University invests in five of the six quality themes. For each theme, different projects have been defined with concrete goals and budgets. Despite the corona pandemic, most projects have achieved their objectives. For each project we give an overview of the results, along with an explanation and some reflection.

WU also evaluates the effectiveness of the measures. This impact analysis is used for internal discussions and can lead to changes in projects to increase the impact when necessary.

1.2.1 Small-Scale Education

Project	Objective	Objective achieved?
Thesis Supervision	**All chair groups** will maintain intensive thesis guidance despite the growing student numbers.	Based on positive outcomes of 10 random interviews per year we conclude that **all chair groups** have retained or implemented intensive guidance.
Sciences Groups Measures	In total, the Sciences Groups will take on **7.3 additional FTE** for intensive small-scale education.	In total, the Sciences Groups have taken on **7.3 additional FTE** for intensive small-scale education.
Additional Teaching Staff for Chair Groups	**11.1 FTE** additional staff will be appointed by 37 chair groups.	**10.2 FTE** additional staff is appointed by 34 chair groups. *In 2021, the 11.1 FTE will be realised.*

The chair groups and sciences groups notice a clear relief in the tasks of the lecturers, who now have more time for education and their students. Chair groups continue to realise intensive thesis supervision

with the extra funding. Many chair groups hired extra staff, partly funded by extra Quality Agreements funding for thesis supervision. An additional effect is that many chair groups invested in improving the thesis procedures, launching thesis rings or offering extra training to students in the thesis process. The investments in thesis supervision and the thesis procedure results in a continuous increase of the satisfaction of students about the thesis since 2018.

The extra staff (7.3 FTE) hired by the science groups facilitate and support small-scale education as they implement the detailed plans of the science groups. They help lecturers to design, organise and offer intensive (online/blended) courses. Intensive thesis supervision and support for small-scale education remained highly relative, especially in the transition to online or blended small-scale education due to the corona measures.

The target for the additional teaching staff for chair groups increased, due to the extra funding from the project free space that was stopped and reallocated in at the start of the Quality Agreements. The new goal for this project is 11.1 FTE instead of 8. The original target of 8 FTE is realised. Recruitment of the extra 3.1 FTE started in the summer of 2020. It is expected that in early 2021 the last 0.9 FTE will also be hired.

1.2.2 More and better study guidance

Project	Objective	Objective achieved?
Dealing with Stress Campaign	Organise a **mental health week and at least 4 other activities**. Continued presence of additional student psychologist (0.4 FTE) organising the events.	**All activities have been organised**, including the 'Surf-Your-Stress' week. Since 2018, a coordinator has been appointed for 0.4 FTE to organise the activities.
More study advisors	**3.0 FTE additional** study advisors.	**1.8 FTE additional** study advisors appointed. *In 2021, the target of 3.0 FTE will be realised.*
More student psychologists	**2.4 FTE additional** student psychologist.	**2.0 FTE additional** student psychologist appointed (0.4 FTE flexible capacity) and **0.4 FTE** unburdening support for psychologists so they have more time for students.
Student initiatives for students	**4 student initiatives** funded.	**7 student initiatives** approved, due to the corona measures only 4 initiatives could be implemented, 2 were delayed, and 1 cancelled.
Virtual Training Centre	Appoint coordinator. **Website launched** and promoted. Align activities offered by WUR.	Coordinator has been appointed. **Website has been launched** with the aligned activities offered by WUR.
Training for staff	At least **two training courses** per year to recognise problems that students face and guide them.	Delayed due to corona. Walk in-hour for lecturers by student psychologists. Some ad-hoc trainings by psychologists. Inventory executed on what lecturers need in terms of support. *In 2021, the target will be realised.*

As from 2019, students can apply for activities offered through the stress-prevention campaign, including the 'Surf-your-Stress week'. The activities and the Surf-your-Stress week were well attended by students who perceived these activities as very helpful. Due to the shift to online education because of the corona measures, students experience more stress affecting their motivation and well-being. Therefore the stress-prevention activities have become even more relevant and urgent. Many students participated in the online programme of the Surf your Stress week. The fact that the activities were online, seemed to offer a safe environment, making participants particularly candid about the stress symptoms they experience. The evaluation surveys show that students are satisfied with the activities.

In the summer 2020, WUR started hiring extra study advisors (0.1 or 0.2 FTE per study programme). The recruitment was delayed for some study programmes, partly hampered by the corona measures. The target will be realised in the 2021.

Students with issues could also ask help of an expanded group of student psychologists. Two extra student psychologists were hired already in 2019, and in 2020 0.4 FTE extra student psychologists were temporarily employed for peak periods. Additional support for all the student psychologists unburdened them of administrative and organisational tasks, giving them more time for meeting students. In addition to the support of student psychologists, WUR also started offering students heart-to-heart talks with trained peer- and student coaches.

To increase the mental well-being of students, seven projects by students for students were initially approved for funding. However, due to the corona measures some had to be cancelled or were delayed. Nonetheless, four projects were able to start in an online environment, creating an online community, or were able to organise their projects outside. The initiatives formed new student communities and brought students together from different backgrounds. In these communities students can help and support each other. The projects launched in 2019 and 2020 continue when successful and when students are available to organise them. For 2021, an additional six projects are approved and who will receive funding.

The Student Training and Support Centre was successfully launched in 2020, offering students a clear overview of the available support and opportunities for personal development. The centre shows the available extracurricular training courses and events organised by WUR or by external parties, like student organisations. A survey among students provided the input for the portfolio of extra training courses and activities. The offer of extracurricular training and other opportunities will be continuously expanded and updated in the coming years based on the needs of students.

Due to the corona measures, lecturers needed all their time to transform their on-campus education to online or blended education. This increased the workload of lecturers significantly. Therefore they had less time to invest in training courses indirectly relevant for their education, for example on student issues. They did do training courses on online education and examination, offered by our instructional designers. The trainings for recognising student mental health issues were integrated more with the trainings already provided to lecturers. The student psychologists did offer the opportunity for lecturers to ask advice and they offered an ad-hoc training on how to keep students motivated. An inventory is performed on what trainings lecturers need, to further develop the needed support for lecturers, amongst other things on dealing with student issues. It is not realistic to double the target in 2021, to compensate the results 2020.

1.2.3   Education differentiation

Project	Objective	Objective achieved?
Student Challenge	WU organises at least **1 student challenge** per year	**2 student challenges** have been launched and an additional student challenge has been prepared for 2021.
Skills development	**New skills implemented** in study programmes, supported by instructional designers. **6 training courses** for student assistants. Expanding **digital learning environment** on skills.	Some programmes **started implementing the skills trajectories**. As from November 2020, a coordinator is hired to implement this project. *In 2021, all programme will start implementing.* **6 adjusted training courses** were organised for student assistants. A **digital learning environment** and digital tools for skills education implemented.
Extracurricular Activities	Increase in Career Service Centre **activities** and appoint **0.5 FTE for career coaching**. Tailor made '***Bildung*' programme** for multiple study programmes. **More extracurricular workshops/training** for all students: at **least two extra**.	**More activities** by Career Service Centre and **0.5 FTE career coach is hired**. '*Bildung*' pilots implemented in **4 programmes**. **More than 10 new trainings** available for students via the virtual Student Training & Support centre.

Using the funds of the Quality Agreements, an annual 'student challenge' has been organised since 2018. In 2020, an additional student challenge was organised as well. Participants were very positive about the contributions to their personal development and networking with the industry and scientific domain.

Some programmes started implementing the skills trajectories for 2020, but not all study programmes could start in 2020 due to the impact of corona. Nevertheless all the preparations for the realisation of the skills trajectories in the study programmes are ready, including the digital learning environment and tools, but also the learning outcomes are developed for the different skills. Some skills training was already offered extracurricular. From 2021 onwards, the new coordinator that was hired in November 2020 will coordinate the further implementation of the skills trajectories in all the study programmes.

Due to the high pressure on lecturers to transition their courses to an online environment, student assistants were trained to support lecturers in offering hybrid education. Additionally, student assistants were trained to provide additional support to newly arriving students. These students supported both with practical information and with building up a social network which can be challenging when students primarily meet online.

Four study programmes started with the pilot '*Bildung*' trajectory. Participating students evaluated these pilots very positively and indicated that they provide much added value to their study programme and personal development. Other degree programmes have also expressed their interest and two extra programme will start the trajectory. The Career Service Centre has organised several extra and new on-campus and online additional and alternatives activities. A student career coach was hired who supports students in their job or internship search. This new possibility is much appreciated by and found to be very helpful for students.

1.2.4   Lecturer Professionalisation

Project	Objective	Objective achieved?
Training for PhD Candidates	At least **140 PhD** candidates in a teaching role will receive didactic training.	**125 PhD** candidates in a teaching role have received didactic training. *In 2021, the target will be realised.*
Professionalisation Fund	At least **6 request** for compensation funded. At least **4 peer reviews** (of a cluster) compensated.	**15 compensations requests** were funded. At least **4 (cluster of) courses** were peer reviewed funded by the Quality Agreements.
Unburdening and support lecturers	**5.5 FTE** additional staff to unburden lecturers	**4.6 FTE** additional staff has been appointed. *In 2021, the 5.5 FTE will be realised.*

In view of the high interest of PhD candidates in educational training courses in 2019, the number of participants this year was lower than expected. We expect this is caused by the increased workload of lecturers (including PhD's) to transform their on-campus education to online education. The majority of the training courses was offered online. This lowered the expenditures. Considering the high interest in previous years, it is expected that next year the goal of 140 participants will be achieved again. The participants indicated they could apply the training directly in their teaching and felt they could support their students much better as a result of these trainings.

Lecturers made additional efforts in improving their didactic skills as well. In total, fifteen compensation requests were funded and at least four (clusters of) courses were peer reviewed to evaluate what could be further improved. In addition, extra training courses were offered to lecturers on blended and online education, online examinations and specific tools and programmes they needed to use.

Lecturers were unburdened by extra staff hired by science groups. Multiple science groups organised education support hubs with staff available to help, support and facilitate lecturers in their education. The unburdening enabled lecturers to spend more time on the transition to online education and implementing necessary new online tools and innovation. The latter resulted in further professionalisation of our teaching staff. The number of staff hired by science groups was lower than planned, because some

on-campus projects were cancelled or delayed, such as unburdening of lecturers regarding on-campus examination. It is expected that in 2021, the total planned FTE will be realised.

1.2.5 Education Facilities

Project	Objective	Objective achieved?
Bring Your Own Device = Study Anytime Anyplace	Available WUR app store	WUR app store is available.

The WUR app store has been launched in 2020. All software students need for online computer practicals is available through this platform. In 2021, we strive to create a "One-Stop-Shop" in which students can find all required software in one platform.

Aside from the WUR app store, it was agreed with the Executive Board and the Student Staff Council to allocate part of the former free space budget (€120k) to a laptop swap service and an incentive on CANS prevention sets. The swap service allows students to borrow a laptop from the IT service desk when their laptop fails and they urgently need one for their education. The CANS prevention sets includes laptop raisers and keyboards. These are offered with a financial incentive, to support students to work more ergonomically. Students have not used the swap service yet. As of 2020, more than 750 of the CANS prevention sets/tools have already been purchased by students.

1.3 Budget

WU received for the year 2020, including wage compensation, a total of €3,835 mln. (€3,728 + €107k salary and price adjustments) from OCW (Education, Culture, and Science) for the Quality Agreements. Wageningen University budgeted also up to €1,502 mln. additional own resources in the quality agreements in 2020.

OCW's financial resources have been spent entirely in 2020. In doing so, WUR has complied with the financial agreements in the Quality Agreements. WUR's own additional funding is not fully spend.

The net underspending of about €186k consisted of a total underspending in various projects of about €454k and the total overspending in other projects of about €268k.

In the leading principles approved by the Student Staff Council and Supervisory Board, we established what part of the underspending can be used to compensate overspend in other projects and what part of the underspending will be moved to 2021. According to the leading principles, for projects where the ambitions were fully realised and/or projects for which goals had been adjusted and will not come up in subsequent year, underspending can be used for compensating overspend in other projects. Another leading principle applies to projects with underspending that have not achieved their goals, but will do so next year. The underspending of these projects will be added to the budget for 2021, which is about €260k.

In the table below, the financial reporting on the use of the quality agreements is listed for the year 2020.

		Budget (k€)	Realisation (k€)
Small-scale intensive education			
1.1	Thesis supervision	1700	1907
1.2	Science Groups	500	500
1.3	Extra staff for solving bottlenecks*	990	959
	Total	**3190**	**3366**
More and better study guidance			
2.1	Stress prevention campaign	50	67.6
2.2	More study advice for student by hiring more study advisors**	272	152.5
2.3	More mental support for students by hiring more student psychologists	200	184.6
2.4	Fund to subsidise student initiatives to support students	20	7.7
2.5	Launch and run training centre	50	87.6
2.6	Training for staff to recognize and deal with student issues.	40	10
	Total	**632**	**510**
Education differentiation			
3.1	Student challenges	300	300
3.2	Skills development	285	164
3.3	Expand extracurricular activities, including more coaching on personal development and career preparation	130	131.4
	Total	**715**	**595.4**
Professionalisation			
4.1	PhD Skills training	75	31.3
4.2	Fund to compensate chair groups for professionalisation and peer review expenses	105	110.2
4.3	Unburden and support lecturers by hiring supporting staff and instructional designers	300	218
	Total	**480**	**359.5**
Adequate facilities			
5	Bring your own device	320	320
	Total	**320**	**320**
Total		**5337**	**5150.9**
Total OCW		3835	3835
Total WUR		1502	1315.9

* The annual budget has been levelled out to €810k per year for 2019-2021. This even distribution is necessary for the appointment of the additional staff. In addition, in 2020 €180k was added from the free space budget. This will increase to €300k as from 2021.

** Extra funding of €157k in 2020 financed by extra funding due to salary and price adjustments and increased market share.

1.4 Student Staff Council and Supervisory Board

The progress of the Quality Agreements is regularly discussed by representatives of the steering group with the sounding group of the Student Staff Council (at least four times a year) and by the Executive Board with the Student Staff Council (at least twice a year) and with the Supervisory Board (at least twice a year). The Student Staff Council and the Supervisory Board receive the progress dashboard reports at least three times a year. The progress dashboard is also publicly available via the Wageningen University website.

In the Quality Agreements 2019-2024 is was agreed upon how the collaboration and involvement with the co-participation council Student Staff Council and Supervisor Board will be organised, in accordance with the NVAO protocol. In 2020, many new members were elected to represent staff and students in the Student Staff Council. These new members were informed elaborately about the Quality Agreements, and the steering group planned more meetings with the sounding committee to train them concerning the Quality Agreements and the role of the Student Staff Council.

In 2020, both the Student Staff Council and the Supervisory Board approved the leading principles for changes in the Quality Agreements, after discussing the principles with the Executive Board. These leading principles are summed below and are applied and reported annually by the steering board and Executive Board.

- In principle the extra funding for salary and price adjustments should be used for compensating higher salary costs. In every project extra staff is hired or staff is funded with the quality funding. Therefore the extra salary and price funding will be divided over all the projects.
- Unexpected changes in the market share of WU, which can be negative or positive, will be added or withdrawn from the project thesis supervision. Some increased funding in 2020 and 2021 will be allocated to the project study advisors.
- When the measures of the project are not realised of delayed, the measures will be implemented in the following year. The budget not spent will be allocated again in the subsequent year to fund the postponed measures, on top of the funding already budgeted for that year.
- When the measures of the project are realised, but some budget remains unspent, this budget will be used to compensate overspending in other projects. When this compensation is not necessary, the remaining funding can be used for additional measures that contribute to the goal of the project. If there is no demand or need among students or staff for additional measures, it is possible to add the budget to another project.

In 2020, the steering group also made an inventory on the impact of the corona measures on the projects. The Executive Board shared this report with the Student Staff Council and Supervisory Board. The Executive Board concluded that the projects, their goals and targets remain highly relevant also for the changed situation due to corona. Some adjustments in the execution might be necessary to achieve the envisaged and agreed upon goals and outcomes. The impact will be evaluated and discussed again in 2021, when looking at the targets for the projects for the plan period 2022-2024.

The sounding group gave input on this elaborate annual reporting on the Quality Agreements. The sounding group is satisfied to see that despite corona possibilities have been sought to continue projects and initiatives and they are specifically pleased to see the BYOD project has been completed. They advised the steering group to intensify the internal communication about the implementation of the Quality Agreements to both students and staff, so that it is clear how the Quality Agreements funding is used to improve the quality of education. The steering group agrees with this recommendation.

Reflections of the Student Staff Council

The sounding group is a delegation of the Student Staff Council (SSC) containing one staff member and three students. Every two months the steering group (representatives Frank Bakema, Arnold Bregt and Eva Verschoor) and sounding group meet. During these meetings, the implementations of the plans, including the realisation and the monitoring of/and modifications to policy actions and processes, are discussed. In addition, the sounding group is involved in early stages with the development of new ideas and amendments to the plan. The steering group provides the sounding group with relevant information e.g., dashboards, impact report, annual reports and other files like 'consequences of COVID-19'.

In the first half of the year three amendments were requested for approval of the SSC by the EB namely, 'adopt leading principles for changes in budget', 'allocation free space for 2020 to BYOD and small-scale education' and 'allocation free space 2021-2024 to small-scale education'. In the second half of the year the 'Appendix Quality Agreements 2019-2024 Results per project per year' was approved by the SSC. SSC members are informed timely about (changing) procedures and have sufficient time to work on incoming requests of the EB and steering group.

In September a fully new SSC was appointed, and sufficient time was spent to inform the new sounding group on the procedures on the QA. Furthermore, several meetings were held between the sounding group and project leaders of the plans to get a better understanding of the outcomes of the plans. In conclusion, the sounding group as delegation of the SSC is satisfied about the collaboration between the sounding-

and steering group, because we are: 1) well informed about procedures and have time to work on incoming documents and 2) in general well involved in the Quality Agreements as a whole e.g. through the conversations we have had with project leaders and since our opinion is also requested on documents that do not require approval. This makes us feel like a worthy discussion partner.