

Position document Executive Board Wageningen University

In June 2015 nearly all research performances of Wageningen University over the last 6 years were reviewed by independent international expert teams according to the national Standard Evaluation Protocol SEP 2015-2021. The leading entities, which were responsible for submitting these reviews are the graduate schools. WIMEK, one of the six Wageningen graduate schools, was reviewed previously in 2014 (in compliance with the former SEP 2003-2009).

Previous to this assessment the Wageningen University PhD programme was assessed for its achievements concerning generic structures and procedures by a team of four experts from the European University Association (EUA). The results of this review and the reaction of the executive board on this review have been disclosed on our website as well.

The assessment of all Wageningen graduate schools has clearly indicated that a major part of our research is globally in a leading position or close to this position. Moreover an upward trend over the last five years has been revealed by these assessments.

All review teams were very praiseful about the quality of research and of PhD education. The peers concluded that Wageningen University offers a well-organised, coherent and productive research environment, in which a well-structured PhD training programme thrives. All graduate schools are regarded as sufficiently autonomous to be able to guarantee a well-organised PhD training programme in compliance with the KNAW-SODOLA criteria.

Notwithstanding the very positive assessments, the assessment committees have been able to indicate a number of recommendations which Wageningen University considers as very useful for its organisation, the functioning of graduate schools and the quality and organisation of chair groups. Most recommendations have to be addressed by the individual graduate schools and chair groups. A few generic recommendations for the entire university have been identified. The Executive Board has endorsed these recommendations and asked the Wageningen Graduate School Platform to follow-up on these recommendations. The Executive Board will monitor the implementation of these recommendation for the years to come.

1. Create a shared vision within graduate schools for common direction, mission and importance, related to the academic domain of each graduate school.
2. Stimulate more synergy and collaboration between research groups with a focus on interdisciplinary collaboration. New combinations of expertise will allow new research fields to develop.
3. Develop strategies to set up and maintain unique facilities at the university.
4. Evaluate (research) appointments at all levels against the highest quality standards. International search efforts should be made to make sure the most suitable candidates for a position are recruited.
5. Encourage and enable highly qualified group members to step out of the shadow of a very strong group leader.
6. Promote and enable communication among postdocs to allow exchange of experiences such as funding opportunities.
7. Address problems resulting from the discrepancy between funding periods and duration of PhD projects. Some sort of forward planning is needed to bridge the gap for PhD candidates with three years of funding.
 - a. Maintain quality of the PhD supervisory structure;
 - b. Maintain time-to-graduation at the current level;
 - c. Continue performance and development evaluations as these help the PhD candidates to develop clear directions and goals.
8. Create a structure for PhD candidates to disseminate results to stakeholders and train PhD candidates to view their research in the light of societal debates and issues.
9. Find an appropriate balance between research and teaching for PhD candidates and staff members.

Executive Board Wageningen University

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