

| The Netherlands

To:
WU PhD candidates, WU post-docs

Dear PhD candidates and post-docs,

Restrictions to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus in the Netherlands will be continuing for some time in 2021. This is affecting not only our personal but also our professional life. Some of us have found innovative solutions to allow continuation, while others encounter significant restrictions that affect their work, including those involved in PhD and postdoc research. The possibilities to travel internationally as part of your project to Wageningen University to start or continue your PhD project or abroad to collect data, are still limited. Moreover, there may still be limits to your planned work such as laboratory analyses and work involving patients. We are aware that the persisting restrictions in place to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus demands much of all of us.

With this letter, we would like to inform you about some possibilities to get your research back on track and handle further delays in PhD and post-doc projects. Also, information is provided regarding support which is available to stay mentally healthy during these difficult times.

Possible changes for research

WUR aims to ensure that all PhD candidates and post-docs can complete their research with as little delay as possible. We would like to indicate and suggest a number of possibilities how research restrictions and potential delay in your PhD/post-doc project can be handled.

1. Although all experiments may not be able to be conducted as planned, other related work such as writing, development of propositions, review of literature, analysis of previously obtained data, design of the next study, development of a proposal/TSP, etc. can continue.
2. Carefully consider possibilities to change activities from how these were originally planned. Laboratory research/analyses can still be conducted, be it under more stringent safety regulations. Advancing certain studies and delaying others may provide a solution to reduce delays.
3. Investigate whether it is possible to use alternative experimental/field research to test hypotheses or meet the aims of the research. It might be possible for planned studies to be redesigned so that they are still scientifically sound but involve less laboratory/experimental/field work or time. In the case of a PhD project, the research plan developed at the start can be changed and parts can be redesigned using new findings, insights and methodologies.
4. When a Go-No go decision has to be made, delays due to COVID-19 will be taken into account.

Wageningen
University & Research

Dean of Research
office

DATE
March 8, 2021

OUR REFERENCE
2109292

POSTAL ADDRESS
The Netherlands

INTERNET
www.wur.nl

CoC NUMBER
09098104

HANDLED BY
Janneke van Seters

TELEPHONE
+ 31 (0)317 7482287

EMAIL
Janneke.vanseters@wur.nl

5. The research described in a PhD thesis provides evidence of the scientific thinking and competence of you as a PhD candidate where next to research quality, critical reflection and independence, the volume of work is one of the criteria in the evaluation. The volume of work conducted should be carefully considered. According to the Academic Board, a thesis is a scientific treatment concerning a specific topic, a number of distinct scientific treatments or a technological design. Are further experiments essential to meet the criteria for a thesis at Wageningen University? Does the thesis already contain sufficient 'evidence' to convincingly provide proof that you are an independent scientist? This proof is not in the first place in the number of (published) scientific articles/chapters. Please note that the rubric score used in the evaluation of PhD theses by members of the thesis evaluation committee does not include a requirement regarding the number of (published) research chapters (articles) as a criterion for assessing proof of independent research.
6. Until now WUR has provided direct financial support to 148 employed and scholarship PhD candidates and 17 post-docs who experienced significant delays following Covid-19. These financially supported scholars all finish(ed) in 2020 and 2021. Many others have also been (financially) supported by their chair group to deal with research restrictions and delays. The recently announced National Education Plan of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) will most likely also offer additional funds to compensate for delay in PhD and post-doc projects at Wageningen University which finalize in 2021, 2022 and 2023; more information will follow this spring.

Mental health

Many PhD candidates, postdocs and supervisors have been working from home while at the same time taking care of children or parents. Others live alone and have to work, sleep and relax within the same four walls. Whatever your situation is, the restrictions imposed to combat this pandemic probably affect your life. Do take your mental well-being into account, and if needed be proactive in discussing concerns and experiences with your supervisor, [PhD advisor](#), [HR-advisor](#), or [the occupational social work department](#).

Try to stay together and connected to others, also in these times of physical distance. Are you feeling lonely and do you find it difficult to speak with your colleagues during department-wide virtual coffee breaks? Then contact a colleague to have a (virtual) coffee break or make an appointment to go for a walk.

Wageningen Graduate Schools offer courses to support you in these difficult times. It includes a [course](#) to discuss experiences, identify challenges as well as means and methods to get back on track and a [course on stress management](#). The latter course is provided by colleagues from the occupational social work department. These courses can be part of your TSP. Of course, you can also contact occupational social work yourself to talk about issues you encounter during the pandemic.

Your own graduate school is there for you! Don't hesitate to contact the PhD advisor of your graduate school to discuss problems you may encounter.

Under the umbrella of Vital@work, WU offers tips and activities to support you in your work. These include tips for a [sustainable work pace](#), [workshops](#) on for example [brain friendly working](#) and [taking active breaks](#) and a walking challenge with the [Ommetje app](#).

Finally, we would like to remind you that all information and new updates on measures regarding PhD and corona are listed on the WUR [website](#).

To conclude, we wish to emphasize that we are aware that there is no such thing as a 'new normal'. We are proud to see that everyone continues to contribute to the best of her/his abilities and is committed to finding answers together, despite the circumstances.

With kind regards,

Arthur Mol, Rector Magnificus
Wouter Hendriks, Dean of Research

CC:
WU supervisors, Graduate schools, secretariats, ABCDE-group

DATE
March 8, 2021

OUR REFERENCE
2109292

PAGE
3 of 3