

Dear PhD supervisors and PhD candidates,

During the past year, the Academic Board and Wageningen Graduate Schools have discussed various changes in the doctoral degree regulations and other improvements for our PhD programme. Part of the changes stem from the EUA review and the peer reviews we had in 2015, others resulted from suggestions made by individual supervisors or PhD candidates. We discussed the proposed changes also with the Wageningen PhD Council.

As per 1 January 2017, the following changes have been implemented in the Wageningen PhD programme and the Doctoral Degree Regulations. Where appropriate, for example PhD projects that are about to start or theses that are about to be submitted, a transition phase will be maintained.

### 1. Entry requirements PhD programme

The entry requirements of the Wageningen PhD programme are proficiency in English and, depending on the candidate's diploma, a qualifying exam. Up to now, these entry requirements were checked after the candidate had entered the PhD programme. In that way, candidates with, for example, a deficiency in English or in basic knowledge did experience a difficult start.

Therefore, we decided:

- The results of an English language test (when needed) have to be available **before** the PhD candidate is accepted by the supervisor. They have to be at the level as described in Appendix 2 of the Doctoral Degree Regulations, [Annex 3](#) to this letter.
- In exceptional cases, the chair holder may request the Dean of Research to grant provisional entrance to a candidate with insufficient test results. The chair holder has to be convinced that the candidate will be able to obtain the required level of proficiency in English **within three months**.
- When needed, diplomas must be evaluated by NUFFIC **before** the candidate is accepted by the supervisor.
- If a qualifying exam is needed, it must be completed **within one year** after the start of the PhD project, or earlier if the moment of the go/no-go decision requires so.

More information on these new rules can be found in [Annex 1](#).

### 2. Go/no-go decision and its consequences

Regarding each PhD candidate at Wageningen University, a 'go/no-go' decision has to be taken between eight and fourteen months after the start of the PhD project. If the decision is 'go', the project continues. In the case of a 'no-go' decision, however, supervisors and PhD candidates often don't seem to be aware of all the conditions, procedures and consequences.

Therefore, we decided to add some further explanation on the 'go/no go' form, in particular:

- To regularly discuss and evaluate progress, right from the start, record such evaluations and give clear early warnings in case of a possible 'no-go'.
- To timely tackle a possible mismatch between candidate and (daily) supervisor, either in personality or in scientific field, which may lead to a change of (daily) supervisor.
- To emphasise that a 'no-go' implies that the PhD candidate cannot continue or re-enter the PhD programme at Wageningen University with a different supervisor.

The new 'go/no-go' form can be found in [Annex 2](#) and will be available from Promis.

### 3. Joint, double and dual degrees

The increase of joint doctoral programmes, within and outside the European Union, is accompanied by a proliferation in terminology used to describe the awarded degrees. Thus, PhD programmes with joint governance, joint admission and joint supervision of PhD candidates, may issue either 'joint', 'double' or 'dual' degrees.

Therefore, we decided:

- The same regulations apply for all joint PhD programmes, irrespective of the terminology used for the degree.
- Joint PhD programmes must be approved by the Academic Board.

More information can be found in Appendix 8 of the Doctoral Degree Regulations, [Annex 3](#) to this letter.

### 4. PhD candidate's contribution

While reviewing the PhD thesis manuscript, opponents often find it difficult to judge the candidate's contribution to (chapters of) the thesis, in particular when chapters are multi-authored.

Therefore, we decided:

## ACADEMIC BOARD

DATE  
9 January 2017

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Postbus 9101  
6700 HB Wageningen

VISITORS ADDRESS  
Wageningen Campus  
Building 104

INTERNET  
[www.wur.nl/university](http://www.wur.nl/university)

SUBJECT  
Changes in doctoral degree  
rules and regulations

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- A submitted PhD thesis manuscript must be accompanied by a short **authorship statement** written and signed by the PhD candidate and also signed by the promotor.
  - The authorship statement will be sent to the opponents together with the thesis manuscript.
  - The use of the authorship statement will be evaluated after one year by the Academic Board.
- More information plus an example of an authorship statement can be found in Appendix 5 of the Doctoral Degree Regulations, [Annex 3](#) to this letter.

#### 5. PhD thesis evaluation

Quality standards for PhD theses differ worldwide, and so do quality grades (such as 'cum laude') and evaluation procedures. More transparency in the Wageningen University quality standards would be useful for (external) opponents who evaluate the thesis manuscript. It may also help PhD candidates and their supervisors by making expectations explicit.

Therefore, we decided:

- To improve the thesis evaluation form and provide a **rubric** for the evaluation of the thesis. The use of the rubric will be evaluated after one year by the Academic Board.
- In the case the promotor proposes cum laude for a submitted thesis, the promotor's **recommendation letter** will be forwarded by the Doctorate's Secretariat to the opponents, together with the thesis manuscript.
- To create a routine in Promis so that, immediately after the thesis defence, the anonymised evaluations by the opponents will be made available to the promotor as feedback about the quality of that particular thesis. You will be notified when this new routine has been implemented; this may take some time.

The new evaluation form with the rubric can be found [here](#) and in Appendix 6 of the Doctoral Degree Regulations. This form makes also clear to opponents that if they approve the thesis, they may suggest only some small, textual corrections but cannot request major revisions. If an opponent insists on major revisions, s/he has to declare the thesis unacceptable.

#### 6. Judicium at thesis defence ceremony

Since 2007, Wageningen University has a grading system for the PhD thesis and defence. At the end of the thesis defence ceremony, the grades used to be publicly announced. In the case of a low grade, or a misinterpreted grade, such a public announcement may ruin the atmosphere.

Therefore, we decided:

- To **leave the grades out** of the spoken judicium, except in the case of cum laude. Judicium and laudatio should be constructive in tone and last no more than **five** minutes in total.
- The promotor informs the new doctor at a later moment, for example during an exit interview, about the grades for thesis and defence **and** explains them.
- During the preparatory interview before the thesis defence, the (substitute) rector will inform the candidate of her/his right to be informed about the grades by the promotor.

#### 7. Publishing articles from the thesis

Normally, thesis chapters can be (and often are) published as articles in scientific journals after the thesis defence, but more and more journal editors reject such manuscripts when their anti-plagiarism software has detected that the text is part of the online available PhD thesis in the Wageningen UR Library.

Such problems can be avoided:

- By clearly stating in the submission letter and in the article's acknowledgements and reference list that the article was part of a publicly defended PhD thesis.
- By asking the Library to put the thesis under embargo for one year.

The latter option is the safest, but it doesn't serve the progress of science. Therefore, we have asked the VSNU to contact publishers on this matter - although often editors act independently of publishers. More details can be found in [Annex 4](#) to this letter.

#### 8. Other improvements

We made a series of other changes in our rules and regulations:

- Last year, the PhD thesis was allowed to contain only a summary in English. PhD candidates and supervisors were not happy with that rule. From now on, one or two **summaries** in other languages are allowed again. See also article 14.2 of the Doctoral Degree Regulations.
- Several small textual changes were made in the Doctoral Degree Regulations.
- The Library of Wageningen University & Research used to request ten paper copies of a PhD thesis. This has been reduced to just **one** copy. The Library needs also a pdf file (which must **include** the thesis cover and the propositions) and an abstract in Word format, see also Appendix 4 of the Doctoral Degree Regulations. Note that the Doctorate's Secretariat still needs fifteen copies of the thesis, so in total sixteen copies must be delivered to WUR.

- During the thesis defence, opponents need to be **present**, preferably all four but at least three. Distant participation in the discussion with the candidate is not allowed. See also Appendix 7 of the Doctoral Degree Regulations.
- During and after the thesis defence, photographers sometimes disturb the ceremony. We made a **protocol** for photographers, that will be available in the Aula and is included here as [Annex 5](#).

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Any suggestions from you for further improvement of our practices and regulations regarding the PhD programme are most welcome and can be addressed to the Dean of Research. Changes, however, will be implemented once a year, usually at the onset of a new academic year. The Doctoral Degree Regulations, and this letter containing the main changes, can be found [here](#).

Best regards,  
On behalf of the Academic Board and Wageningen Graduate Schools,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in blue ink. The signature on the left is stylized and appears to be 'A.M.'. The signature on the right is more legible and reads 'R.G.F. Visser'. A horizontal line is drawn across the bottom of the signatures.

Prof.dr.ir. Arthur Mol  
Rector Magnificus

Prof.dr. Richard Visser  
Dean of Research

#### **Annexes to this letter**

[Annex 1](#): New entry requirements to the Wageningen PhD programme

[Annex 2](#): New 'go/no-go' form

[Annex 3](#): New Doctoral Degree Regulations

[Annex 4](#): Publishing articles from the PhD thesis, a note by the Wageningen UR Library

[Annex 5](#): Protocol for photographers at a PhD thesis defence ceremony