

## Entry Requirements Wageningen University PhD Programme

The Academic Board of Wageningen University is responsible for determining the entry requirements of the PhD programme: proficiency in English and the qualifying exam. The graduate schools have recently noticed that a lack of clarity with regard to these requirements causes unacceptable delays in PhD projects and uncertainty among PhD candidates. In the current regulation, the entry requirements are included in the go/no go procedure and formal admittance to the PhD programme. We decided to separate the procedures for entry and the go/no go procedure.

### Proficiency in English

#### *Current situation*

- A certificate of proficiency in English has to be obtained before the go/no-go which takes place between 8 and 14 months after the starting date. PhD candidates can thus work for about a year without the language skills necessary for participating in Master and PhD courses, for effectively doing research, and for professional communication with supervisors, peers and support staff.
- Supervisors do not sufficiently pay attention to monitoring their PhD candidate in case a certificate of proficiency in English has not yet been obtained.

#### *Proposed solution*

1. **The results of an acknowledged English language test** (when needed) have to be available **before registering** with Wageningen University. The results have to be at the level as required by the Academic Board.
2. **In exceptional cases**, the chair holder may request the Dean 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 demonstrate the required level of proficiency in English within **three months** after the starting date. In order to acquire that level, the candidate can participate in an intensive training programme on proficiency in English, with special attention to the aspect Speaking. Wageningen in'to Languages will offer such a programme.

### Qualifying exam

#### *Current situation*

- Diplomas from candidates with a non-NVAO accredited Master are evaluated by NUFFIC. On the basis of this evaluation, the Dean decides to approve the level of the training or to require a qualifying exam.
- Supervisors have different perceptions about the goal of a qualifying exam. There are also considerable differences in size, level and content of qualifying exams.
- Diplomas are sometimes evaluated after acceptance of a PhD candidate. Starting PhD candidates are not always well informed about the necessity and the content of the qualifying exam.
- The qualifying exam needs to be completed before the go/no go decision and formal admittance to the programme.
- Currently, the Dean requests a qualifying exam in all cases where NUFFIC evaluates previous training at the level of 'one year Dutch Master programme'. Due to this policy, the number of PhD candidates with a qualifying exam is rising.
- The Dean is responsible for approving qualifying exams without a support structure that can oversee all domains and disciplines at WU.

#### *Proposed solution*

1. **Definition:** A qualifying exam is a test of the academic level of the candidate, in particular on subjects relevant for the envisaged PhD research.
2. **Time frame:** Diplomas have to be evaluated by NUFFIC **before** a supervisor accepts or appoints a PhD candidate. If a qualifying exam is needed, the PhD candidate must be informed about the necessity and content of the qualifying exam and must accept the qualifying exam, e.g. by signing a

PhD contract, **before** the PhD projects starts. A qualifying exam 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. The first promotor informs the Dean about the result of the qualifying exam.

3. **Procedure:** The Dean decides on the necessity and the content of the qualifying exam, also taking into account relevant and proven work experience of the candidate. The Dean asks the first promotor to make a suggestion for the content of the qualifying exam. The Dean may ask advice from the graduate school and the graduate school may consult one of the MSc examining committees. After his decision, the Dean informs the PhD candidate and the promotor about the content of the qualifying exam.
4. **Content:** A qualifying exam consists of maximum 12 ECTS credits. The preferred content is one Master course focused on theory and one Master course focused on methodology. At least one of these courses must have a first examiner outside the chair group(s) of the supervisor(s). The courses can also be acknowledged Master courses from other universities. Elements of a qualifying exam cannot be included in the Training and Supervision Plan.

### **Exceptions**

- In exceptional cases the Academic Board may allow a candidate with a **Bachelor degree** or a **polytechnic degree** to start a PhD trajectory. In these cases, relevant and proven work experience of the candidate is taken into account, and a tailor-made solution with regard to the qualifying exam is necessary.
- Other exceptions to the rules in this document are only allowed by consent of the Academic Board, after advice from the Dean.