

## Opening speech symposium

Dear members of the supervisory board and guest, Dear students, PhD candidates and other members of Wageningen UR, on behalf of the rector and all graduate schools I want to welcome you to this symposium organised at the occasion of the 96<sup>th</sup> dies natalis of our university.

My name is Johan van Arendonk, dean of Sciences of this university and responsible for the Wageningen Graduate Schools. I am also member of the Academic Board. That function is probably more known to you due to the recent Dutch media attention for acknowledgements in PhD thesis. The media attention has triggered a critical reflection of the rules and revised rules will be discussed by the academic board this week.

Our PhD candidates come from all over the world. The four-year PhD programme largely consists of conducting research resulting in a PhD thesis. Furthermore, time is used for training and education activities which include participation in courses, competence and skills training, seminars, conferences and working visits. The graduate school provide an environment which enable PhD candidates to make high-quality academic contributions, to critically engage in social debates and to contribute to problem solving and innovation. The graduate schools offers in-depth training that provides PhD candidates with a suitable background for a career in academic and applied research, or for other leading societal positions. Our PhD candidates are trained to study issues within a broad context of science and society. They learn to evaluate various solution strategies in interaction with stakeholders, colleagues from other professional and scientific domains and other cultures. It enables them to combine in-depth professional and scientific training with a broad vision and communication skills. We call this T shaped skills.

Last year, 270 PhD candidates obtained their doctoral degree at this university. The classical idea that a doctorate prepares for an academic career with professor as the endpoint no longer holds. PhDs are more versatile and find jobs in many knowledge-intensive organizations. The career monitor in 2011 revealed that more than 80% of the graduates that entered the labour market in the last 5 years work in the field of their study or a related field. The median time between graduation and finding a job is less than 5 months. These figures illustrate not only that Wageningen University trains a large number of PhD candidates but also that the graduates find a good position in the labour market. Wageningen graduates school continuously improves their training program to maintain that position. Science communication is changing. We, therefore, train our PhD candidates not only to present their findings at scientific meetings but also to present their findings to a non-specialists audience. The pitches by the PhD candidates are an example of the latter.

Changing environments; challenges for rural-urban developments is the theme of the Dies Natalis celebration. Our living environment is changing rapidly worldwide as a result of increasing population, urbanisation, and climate change. Water is essential for people and animals, as well as for industry and nature. Agriculture, and therefore the availability of food and feed in all parts of the world, is directly dependent on water. For this symposium, 9 PhD candidates have been invited to present their research related to

Water. Half of the PhD candidates are from our graduate school Wageningen Institute on Environment and Climate research. Water is also an important aspect in the other schools as illustrated by the other presentations. To all the presenters: thank you in advance for accepting the invitation and taking on the challenge to present your research in a pitch. To the audience: I wish you a stimulating and inspiring symposium.

The symposium will be chaired by Marjolein Helder. Marjolein graduated from Wageningen University in November 2012 on generating electricity via plants at Wageningen University. She now works full time for Spin-off Company called Plant-e. She successfully chaired pitch session last year. That is why we asked her again this year. Marjolein the floor is yours.