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## Word from our Scientific Director: Wellbeing of the VLAG community



It is such a simple word: wellbeing, but it is also one that comes with many challenges, especially in times of Covid! In previous letters in FLASH, I have addressed some aspects, such as social activities that are organized by groups to keep people connected. Together with the VLAG office team we for example participated in the pub-quiz organized by the microbiology group, and also had our own Christmas gatherings on-line with hilarious questions about what the VLAG team did when they were still kids. Although quite different from what we used to have, I do feel that these activities serve a purpose, and we know also many examples from within the VLAG groups that work well.

But how do we do this for the science part of our work, and more specifically how do we arrange things well for our talented people so that they become well-rounded scientists? That is something that I would like to write about this time, since I think that may be even more hampered than the social activities of the groups. How do we keep our team motivated (including ourselves) if we talk to people of post stamp size all the time? Can we even still have a full scientific debate talking to these post stamps, and really go in depth, or do we prefer to stay at the surface and play it safe because communication is hampered when carried out through a screen now for almost 2 years?

The results from the questionnaires sent to our PhD candidates clearly show that there are a lot of mental issues related to the covid situation, and what is often mentioned is the feeling of isolation and detachment of their supervisors, inefficient communication, and lack of feeling part of the research group. Although there are still considerable limitations in place, I feel that opportunities to meet are becoming more and more abundant, and I would like to encourage you all to make best use of them, and be kind not only to your team members, but also to yourselves. Why remain fixed behind a screen

if you could also have a work-, or if you prefer, walk meeting on the campus with one of your talented co-workers? Or as a PhD candidate: suggest this to your supervisor. Or make an appointment with your co-workers so that you are at work at the same time. They may all be small things, but many small things can make a positive impact on all people belonging to VLAG.

The walking part I do see happening when looking out of my window in Axis, and I do have people in my office on a regular basis, and see that also happening with other supervisors. I had PhD candidates from abroad starting just before the first lock-down, and I felt I needed to throw them a life-line by having regular live meetings with them, and that worked out well. I would really like to encourage you all to consider working (together) from campus (within the rules that are laid out of course), which will make everyone feel less isolated, and will also bring the scientific process toward a more personal level where I think a large part of true inspiration takes place.

Kind regards, also on behalf of the entire VLAG office team, and stay safe and healthy,  
Prof Karin Schroën, Scientific Director VLAG

## From the VLAG Office

### VLAG Fellowships

VLAG has a yearly budget to support the quality of scientific research and strengthen international collaboration, through so called VLAG Research Fellowships.

The next deadline for **PhD/Postdoc fellowship** activities starting in 2022 is **1 May 2022**.

NEW:For 2022/2023, we extend the fellowship programme with **fellowships for Assistant Professors**.

The deadline for Assistant Professors to apply for activities starting in 2022 is also **1 May 2022**.

The grant for **visiting guest researchers** can be used to fund sabbaticals, masterclasses and symposia.

Based on the questions from our scientific community, we now also include an option to fund **PhD thesis committee members**. Committee members invited by a chair group may be eligible for reimbursement of travel and accommodation costs in case such a researcher extends his or her stay with the aim to actively and substantially contribute to a VLAG workshop or masterclass.

For any of the options listed above, please use the appropriate application form from our [webpage](#).

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### WGS Veni courses 2022

Wageningen Graduate Schools together with Wageningen In'to Languages organise two courses for researchers who will apply for an NWO Veni grant that will be carried out at Wageningen University. The courses, [Getting on Track with your Veni](#) and [Preparing Your Veni pre-proposal](#), aim to provide talented postdocs and other promising researchers the skills and competences needed to write a high quality research (pre-)proposal to submit within the NWO Veni programme.

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### WGS Sandwich PhD Programme

The aim of the [WGS Sandwich PhD Programme](#) is capacity building: a way for the university to reach out to like-minded scientific institutes to build international scientific networks, to facilitate exchange and to reinforce the knowledge basis of these institutes. This programme includes an 18 month scholarship for PhD candidates to visit Wageningen and for other financial components such as visa compensation and travel costs. Additional funding for a candidate is needed for the time not spent in Wageningen. Application deadline: **18 May 2022**

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### Africa Talent Programme

[The Africa Talent Programme](#) (ATP) has been initiated to give young talents from Africa the opportunity to become a PhD-candidate or obtain a postdoc position at Wageningen University. With this programme, Wageningen aims to attract the most talented scientists from Africa by offering a 4-year, full-time PhD position or the financial equivalent of a postdoc position (3 years). A preselection is made by the Wageningen Graduate Schools. Application deadline: **1 June 2022**

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### Call for proposals WU-CAAS PhD Programme 2022

Call for collaborative PhD projects for The Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) and Wageningen University Joint PhD Programme with deadline on **31 May 2022**. The programme funds a 4-year sandwich PhD project where the PhD candidates perform the major part of their research at CAAS and spend at least 18 months in Wageningen. [The programme](#) funds a maximum of 20 PhD projects per year.

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### PhD Excursions (PhD trips)

Inspired by the initiative of one of our groups, we no longer limit the support for [PhD excursions](#) to international trips. National PhD excursions can be subsidised (grants amount 50% of the amounts for international PhD excursions) if they are organised by a group of PhD candidates and last at least five days.

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### WGS- Parents support group

The combination of parenthood and being a scientist can be quite a challenge and it is difficult to establish a healthy work-life balance. To share these challenges and find solutions we would like to set up a parent network. The network can help establish new friendships, to exchange tips and tricks about how to combine work and parenthood, but also about more general things like good daycare, babysitters and kids-friendly trips. Interested? Please fill in [this survey](#) so WGS can start planning the lunch sessions.

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### The Modelling & Simulation Discussion Group

In many fields of research, modelling and simulation are critical tools. As their popularity has grown, so has the discourse surrounding why and how they should be used. To help inform this debate [The Modelling & Simulation Discussion Group](#) hosts a university-wide platform for discussing systems modelling and meets once a month, alternating guest lectures with open fora for discussing members' modelling-related questions. Topics of interest include system scoping, conceptual models, modelling paradigms (agent-based, system dynamics, discrete event,..), uncertainty and sensitivity analysis, experiment design, and more. The group is open to all skill levels and backgrounds. Upcoming online meetings;

- 16 March (13-15h); t.b.a.
- 20 April (13-15h); An Introduction to Simulation-based Optimization, Dr A. Hadjimichael (Penn State University)
- 18 May (13-15h): Escape from Model-land: the limits of modelling, Dr E. Thompson (London School of Economics)

If you are interested in joining, get in touch with [Jillian](#) to be added to the mailing list.

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### Resource Cover Prize 2021 Winner Wen Ying Wu

VLAG PhD Wen Ying Wu has won the [Resource Cover Prize 2021](#) (best thesis cover), she came first in the jury selection and second in the public vote. Combined, these results earned her first place in the competition.

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### From our [PhD Advisor](#): starting to supervise BSc and MSc thesis students!?

I'll keep my contribution short and will use it to advertise the courses of the [Education Support Centre](#). Many of our PhD candidates will be involved in assisting in teaching undergraduate courses and in (co)supervision of BSc and MSc thesis students. The courses organized by the ESC will help you to prepare for these tasks and improve your didactic skills. If you are completely new to supervision and would like some tips to get started, they offer a short workshop on starting to supervise BSc and MSc thesis students every month. Highly recommended!

## VLAG courses

### Highlighted events:

[Dairy Protein Biochemistry](#) (27-29 June 2022)

The aim of this masterclass is to learn about the specific properties of both classes of dairy proteins, caseins and whey proteins. You will get insight in the different analytical methodologies to characterize dairy proteins, their variations and molecular features as well as in the nutritional quality of dairy proteins in the human diet.

### Other VLAG courses open for registration

[VLAG Online Lecture Series](#)

[Exposure Assessment in Nutrition Research](#) (7-10 March 2022)

[Intro to R – online](#) (7 & 8 March 2022)

[Advanced Course Microscopy and Spectroscopy in Food and Plant Sciences](#) (6-8 July 2022)

### Planned courses

Healthy Food Design (6-10 June 2022) *REGISTRATION WILL OPEN SOON!*

*Tip! For an overview of all courses regularly organised by VLAG take a look in [past courses](#) and contact the [VLAG office](#) for the planning.*

## Wageningen Graduate Schools (WGS) courses

### Highlighted course

[Career Development for Postdocs: Science and the Alternatives](#)

Young academics have to make a decisive career choice: either pursue a career in science or look at alternative options of which there are many. When thinking about what to choose many questions arise. It is therefore that WGS offers this programme to postdocs and other young academics who have a PhD.

For a complete overview of all competence, skills and career development training activities by WGS, please click [here](#). Or click [here](#) for the direct links to the webpages of the other graduate schools.

## Other courses and events

### BFC Career Event 2022

[BCF Career Event](#) is the perfect meeting place for everyone who is or wants to be active in Bio/Life Sciences, Chemistry, Food or Pharma:

BCF Career Event Netherlands - Jaarbeurs Utrecht (19 May 2022)

BCF Career Event Belgium - Ghent ICC (16 November 2022)

### ReMaT - research management training - online workshop (4 & 5 May 2022)

[ReMaT](#) is an interactive, intensive workshop providing an introduction to research management. The modules of the workshop cover exploitation of knowledge and entrepreneurship, acquisition of grants, intellectual property rights and the management of interdisciplinary projects. They are delivered in such a way that it challenges participants to consider different perspectives on how they might use their PhD education in a variety of career paths, and convince others to hire them.

### NWO Life 2022 (24 & 25 May 2022)

[NWO Life](#) is a unique annual congress covering all disciplines and scale levels in the Dutch Life Sciences, from femtometre to kilometre, from cell to planet. The overarching theme of this year's NWO Life is 'Resilience'.

### Biobased Coatings Europe 2022 (8 & 9 June 2022)

The 3<sup>rd</sup> [Annual Biobased Coatings Europe](#) will give you an insight to the industry's latest policy evaluations and, while focusing largely on developments within the coatings industry in Europe, will also concentrate on updates and future forecasts on supply and demand of the key world markets.

#### **BioBusiness Summer School** (27 June - 1 July 2022)

[The summer school](#) is an introductory course for academics who are contemplating a career switch to industry and young professionals in their first industry jobs. During the programme participants will learn the basics of the main business topics, gain insight into the world of Life Sciences companies, meet leading business people and expand their international network.

#### **Grant Application Course** (12 & 13 October 2022)

During this [intensive online course](#) participants will be taught by seasoned scientists, grant application experts who have reviewed hundreds of grants, assessors from funding bodies and many more.

## External calls & grants

#### **The Dutch L'Oréal Unesco For Women in Science Fellowships**

[The Dutch L'Oréal Unesco For Women in Science Fellowships](#) are awarded each year to female scientists, who conduct research in the life sciences in the broad sense, and who obtained their doctorates at least three years and at most ten years ago (Veni/Vidi level, maternity leave and periods of part-time work due to family circumstances may be deducted). The grants are intended for a stay (fellowship) at the NIAS-KNAW in Amsterdam, where they can focus on broadening their research and writing publications or grant proposals. Deadline **28 February 2022**.

#### **Prize D4D**

[Prize D4D](#) rewards outstanding initiatives that use digitisation and (new) technologies as a lever for development towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. Participate in the Prize D4D and compete for one of the prizes. Applications are open until **15 March 2022**.