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## Word form our Scientific Director: External Peer Review Committee looking at the whole VLAG community

Most probably many of you have not even noticed that this was going on, but for months many people have been very busy with the preparation for the scientific external peer review (EPR), and the actual site visit of the review committee last week. I already wrote a bit about it in the last FLASH, but now that the process is almost done (only the final committee report still needs to be completed) I think that it is good to share some points with you.

The EPR is an important exercise that the whole VLAG research community goes through every six years, and not only us, all graduate schools go through this process this year. It is instrumental for getting feedback on the quality of our research, its societal relevance and the viability of the research units, and also much more in general, e.g., on how we do our work, and how we are organized as VLAG community. This year, for the very first time, VLAG was evaluated at research theme level (within VLAG we have four, in which 22 chair groups reside), and no longer grades were given. Our review committee was asked to look at a much higher aggregate level, and act as a critical but constructive friend, to help in e.g. defining promising science routes, and collaborations.



The committee had a full program that lasted three days and was carried out at the campus in a face-to-face setting, which was very much appreciated by all. In general, the committee was impressed by all the work that we do and the

facilities available, and appreciated the entire process that the themes went through in order to get to a joint vision and produce self-assessment reports. The incentives (read: money) provided by VLAG to facilitate this process were used in rather different ways, ranging from putting tenure trackers in the lead of the writing process, to involvement of the whole theme community. All themes were happy with their contributions to the EPR report. And as an additional bonus, our new tenure trackers were able to establish contacts throughout themes which would otherwise not have happened, at least not now.

As VLAG Graduate School, we had two questions that we asked the committee to help us with. The first one was the communication between PhD candidate and supervisor, and how to get that beyond the scientific content. Our second question was related to strengthening the bonds within the VLAG community. I really appreciated the interaction with the committee, and the very open way in which they posed questions and provided feedback. When you are used to a certain situation, you need an 'outsider' to tell you what is remarkable about it, both in a positive and a negative way, and I think that this is what the committee did in a very constructive way. During the wrap-up session they shared some preliminary observations and advice. These results will guide me in deepening my role as scientific director. I really look forward to receiving their report; I am sure that we will receive honest observations and advices. As soon as the final report is in, we will engage in defining an action plan for the coming years that will help sharpen my vision that I wrote already two years ago.

It is pretty amazing how fast time flies, and I look forward to working further with you. I have amongst others meetings with working groups that we formed through the VLAG board, the first one revolves around the teaching load PhD candidates face, how we as a community deal with this, how we may share good practices, and tips, etc. Furthermore, I have a meeting scheduled with our PhD council to discuss how we can work together even better. This is part of a bigger trajectory that we started a year ago, and good things have already come out of it, and many more will follow I am sure.

Stay safe, and stay healthy, and I look forward to seeing you all on campus!

Kind regards, also on behalf of the entire VLAG team,  
Prof Karin Schroën, Scientific Director VLAG

## From the VLAG Office

### Tips from our PhD Advisor

Ever feel the need to take a small step back and reflect a bit on what you're doing? Or are you procrastinating in a way that's unsatisfactory to you? Here's a few tips that might help you to keep an eye on the bigger picture, or to help you feel like you've done something useful and insightful while you're postponing the revision of that draft you were working on...

I'd like to recommend the book *The unwritten rules of PhD research* by Marian Petre and Gordon Rugg ([link to record at WUR library](#)). It contains useful insights and is written in an accessible style, at times a bit tongue-in-cheek. It covers a range of topics from starting with your research project, managing your mentor or supervisor, dealing with literature and reviewing, and even dealing with yourself. Fun and valuable read, worth it!

If you're more into reading short contributions on a variety of topics related to work and personal life in academia, have a look at the career sections of [Science](#) and [Nature](#) (link) magazines. They're a great source of inspiration for personal development, dealing with professional drama, improving skills, building a network etc. Interesting for new arrivals and seasoned academics alike.

Not looking for additional things to read? Don't worry, there's some great podcasts out there too! For example, Nature currently has a podcast series on mentoring in academia. A variety of things is covered, from types of mentoring, building a mentor-mentee relation, the intercultural context...interesting for both supervisors, as well as PhDs. Here's a link to the [first episode](#). And of course, for the visual minded, there's a trove of spot-on comics in the archives of [www.phdcomics.com](#).



These are just a few pointers to the wide variety of blogs, vlogs, podcasts, news websites etc. out there. What sources do you find useful? I'd be happy to receive suggestions, so feel free to share them with [me](#)

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### PhD/Postdoc fellowship

The call for PhD candidates and Postdocs to apply for funding for an international secondment, i.e. PhD/Postdoc fellowship, will be continued. The deadline for activities starting in 2022 is **1 November 2021**. Please use the appropriate application form available at [our website](#). *A second deadline for activities starting in 2022 is expected May 1st 2022, but only if there is budget left.*

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### VLAG Graduate Programme 2022

Applications are written by candidates who will obtain a Wageningen MSc degree between June 2021 and December 2022. If you know an excellent MSc student who e.g. is planning to do an MSc thesis with you, it might be interesting to discuss this opportunity to write a PhD proposal, and possibly get it granted. An early start of their thesis might be helpful in making it possible to fit the Research Master Cluster course in their study programme. The latter is mandatory to be able to take part in the [VLAG Graduate Programme](#).

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### ERC Consolidator and Advanced Grant Course

Researchers who plan to submit an ERC consolidator grant application (deadline 17 March 2022) or advanced grant application (deadline 28 April 2022) can register for the course given by Yellow Research. The first part of the course will be given online on 17 November (10.00 till 12.00) and the second part in house on 18 January (13.00-15.30).

Only researchers who meet the ERC consolidator or advanced grant submission criteria (see the [ERC website](#)) and who are going to apply in 2022 can register by sending an email to [Henriëke de Ruiter](#) before **1 November 2021**.

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### Save the date! 9 December for WUR's Connecting in Food & Nutrition Day

All WUR colleagues involved in the field of Food & Nutrition are invited to the 'Connecting in Food & Nutrition Day'. This event is meant to show and share who within WUR are working the field of Food & Nutrition. Internal connection is key to improve our cooperation and external visibility, but also to expand our authority in this field. Within WUR, hundreds of people are connected to Food & Nutrition. This means a large group of talented people and a unique position in this domain. Together we will talk about what we'd like to stand for in this broad field (morning session). In addition, you can take part in workshops on specific subjects to define a number of actions. To make this day a success, we hope that everyone working in the field of Food & Nutrition will feel the need to join in. Researchers, teachers, as well as analytical staff and other employees. By seeing all those who share this domain we will increase our chances to find each other. It will also enable us to clearly present the scope of our research in this area to the external world. And thus the impact we can have together.

At 09.00h President Prof. Louise O. Fresco will open the event online. You can register for live workshops in the afternoon. At the end of the day there will be drinks and bites, during which we hope to see everybody. More news about the programme will follow.

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## From the VLAG PhD Council



### VLAG PhD COUNCIL

The VLAG PhD council is organizing a hybrid colloquium entitled: **"What's next after your PhD? Staying in academia! But how to get/write grants?"** on **4 November** (16:30-17:30)

Invited speakers: Dr Raymond Staals and Dr Nico J. Claassens from Microbiology, and Dr Tamara van Mølken, a senior programme officer from NWO. They have a lot of experience with grant writing and evaluation and will reflect on their experiences and more.

This will be a hybrid event where the number of in person participants is limited to 30 persons. Priority will be given to the PhD candidates in their 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year, and on a first come first serve basis. Others are welcome to join the event online via MS Teams (for the link see e-mail sent by the VLAG PhD council 20 October).

You need to [register](#) before **28 November**, for those who can join in person there will be PIZZA and drinks!

## VLAG courses

### Highlighted event:

[Advanced Food Analysis](#) (24-28 January 2022)

Knowledge about analytical techniques in food analysis is essential in the field of food science and technology. Developments are quite fast and open new ways to look at the composition of foods or changes of specific constituents as well as to the characteristics and performance of food ingredients and final products. Food scientists and technologists active in food research institutes and food industry need to be aware of new techniques and new strategies to evaluate their research on foodstuffs. The course will focus on several (advanced) techniques and applications (to be) used in food analysis and their potential and pitfalls will be discussed.

### VLAG courses open for registration

[Advanced Organic Chemistry](#) (ongoing)

[Ecophysiology of food-associated micro-organisms: Roles in health and disease](#) (29 November – 1 December 2021)

[Sensory Perception and Food Preference](#) (7 – 10 December 2021)

[Advanced Course Microscopy and Spectroscopy in Food and Plant Sciences](#) (18-20 January 2022)

[Advanced Food Analysis](#) (24-28 January 2022)

[Applied Enzymology](#) (21-25 February 2022)

### Planned courses

Exposure Assessment (7-10 March 2022)

Healthy Food Design (6-10 June 2022)

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

## Wageningen Graduate Schools (WGS) courses

### Highlighted course

[Philosophy and Ethics of Food Science and Technology](#) (starts 27 January 2022 and is free of charge for VLAG PhD candidates)

This course includes hands-on dealings with ethical, philosophical, and societal issues surrounding science. The discussion with the guest scientists from various disciplines is based upon relevant actual cases from the realm of food technology, biotechnology, nutrition and health.

The goal of this discussion series is to spark educated discussions on various facets of science and about the responsibilities of being a scientist.

### WGS Lunch Workshops for **PhD Supervisors**

All supervisors of PhD candidates at Wageningen University are invited to attend the WGS lunch workshops. In these workshops supervisors discuss specific topics and issues with regard to supervision. The workshops include a (short) presentation on experiences of an expert and discussion in small groups.

The lunch workshops are organised as a live event with lunch on the first Thursday of the even months (12.15 – 13.45). You can register, free of charge, at the [WGS course website](#) (please mind the cancellation conditions). Max. 50 supervisors can participate, so do not forget to register in time for the workshop(s) of your choice.

For a complete overview of all competence, skills and career development training activities, please click [here](#).

## Other courses and events

### **Masterclasses in Consumer Behaviour related to Health and Sustainability: Habits** (12 & 19 November)

[This WASS master class](#) is the 2<sup>nd</sup> in the series on consumer behaviour related to health and sustainability, which aims to discuss recent developments in research and theory that are relevant to domains of health and environmental behaviour. The set up incorporates different perspectives, including marketing, communication, and social, health and consumer psychology.

### **Lunch Workshop: Fundamentals of Knowledge Utilization** (23 November)

Knowledge utilization is the process of translating your research into concrete applications implemented by the scientific, industrial community, government or society at large. If you want to know what aspects should you consider for a realistic 'knowledge utilization' plan and what kind of support WUR offers in this process? In this workshop we will precisely do that.

In this interactive lunch workshop (12.00-14.30h, including lunch), you will be guided through the basic aspects of knowledge utilization, provided with insights when your intellectual property plays a role and made aware of the tools, funding and organizational policies available for you to transition your results/technologies into the marketplace and society. This workshop is led by Business Developers and knowledge transfer experts within WUR and who will discuss with you real cases with ample time for questions. The workshop is appropriate to all WUR researchers, you can register [here](#).

### **Integrated Modeling and Optimization** (13-17 December)

Computational modeling is an absolute requisite to gain understanding of the biological mechanisms underlying patterns observed in experimental data. However, one could say that modeling is a craftsmanship, that can only be learned via intense exercising and 'learning by doing'. In this course we offer the participants the possibility to learn and exercise the modeling process and the optimization techniques needed to fit models to data. This BioSB will take place in Wageningen, for more details and registration click [here](#).

### **The national AI course** (free online)

Artificial intelligence is becoming the most radical technological development of our time. It is even said that AI is going to bring about more change than the internet. It is high time to find out [more](#) about it! It is the perfect stepping stone if you want to know more about AI.

### **Process Mining: Data science in Action** (online)

Process mining is the missing link between model-based process analysis and data-oriented analysis techniques. The course explains the key analysis techniques in process mining. Participants will learn various process discovery algorithms. These can be used to automatically learn process models from raw event data. Various other process analysis techniques that use event data will be presented. Moreover, the course will provide easy-to-use software, real-life data sets, and practical skills to directly apply the theory in a variety of application domains. For more details and registration click [here](#).

## External calls & grants

### **LNVH Distinguished Women Scientists Fund (DWSF)**

[The call for the LNVH DWSF](#) is open. This travel grant is intended for female postdocs from all disciplines, up to 3 years after obtaining their PhD, working in the Netherlands, who would like to travel abroad within the framework of their research.

Applications can be submitted until **15 December 2021**