

The VLAG Graduate Programme

A genuine opportunity for talented MSc students to work on their **own** ideas!

27 May 2020, Karin Schroën



Take the candidates on a journey defined by themselves

- Familiar with scientific research (MSc thesis)
- Pursue a career in science
- Realistic scientific idea ➔ Grant proposal
- Completely new dimension!



How to keep highly gifted students motivated?

- Extra activities (organised by the VLAG team)

Within Research Master Cluster:

- Write a proposal of ~ 10 pages in 2 months
- Interactive program (self organisation & responsibility)
- Skills (personality test, presenting, pitching, peer review, feedback, writing, argumentation, rebuttals etc.)
- Background (science, publications, golden egg check)
- Work together with a personal coach on research topic



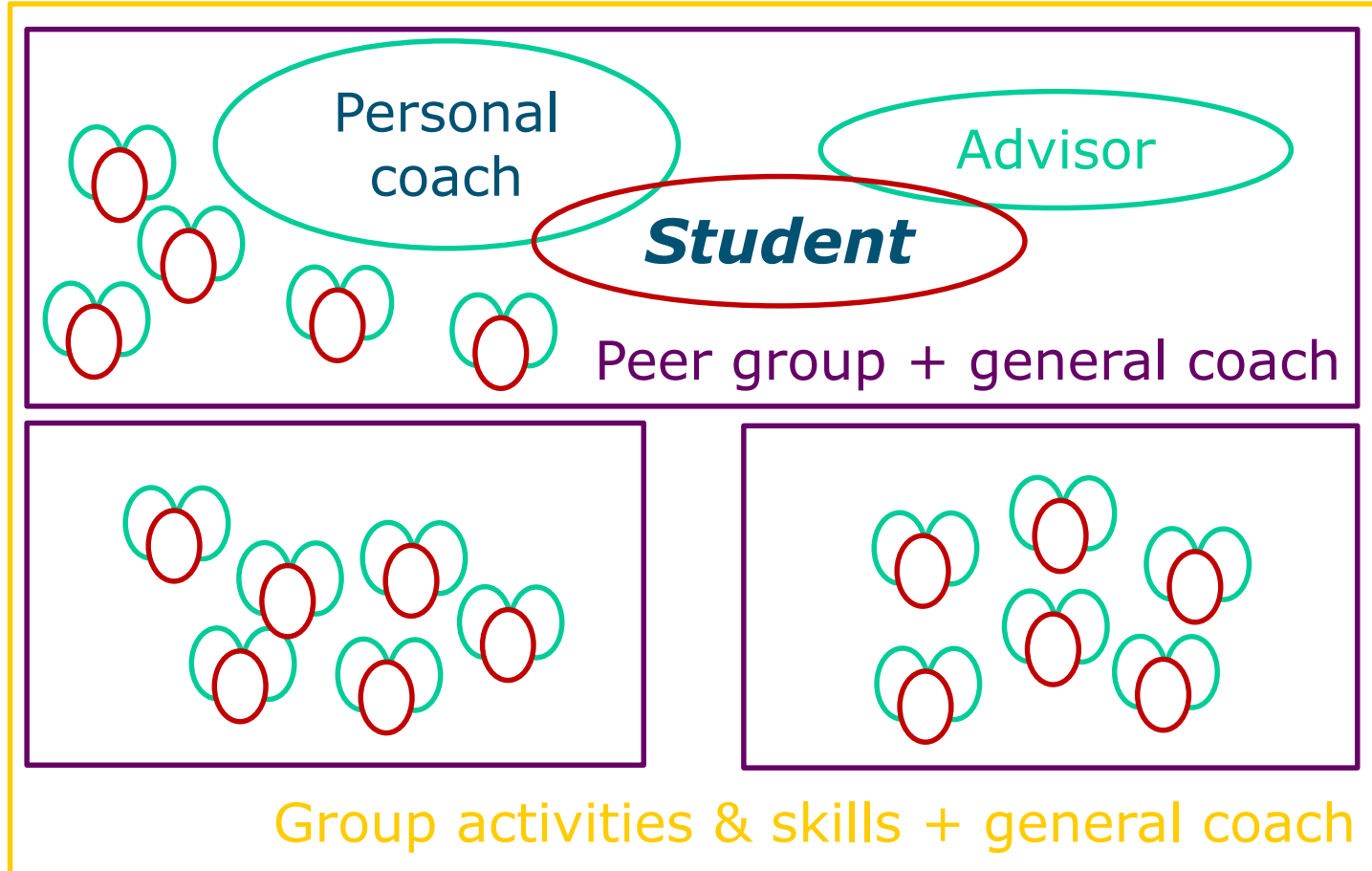
Schedule & assessment in RMC / graduate program

Tentative

- After 1 week: pre proposal < 1 page
- After 4 weeks: core of proposal 4-5 pages
- After 7 weeks: full proposal 11 pages
- Later: defence of proposals



Student organisation



Needed to make this a success

- An expert
- Skills in writing and defending a scientific research proposal
- Background information on how science works
- *Motivation!*
- *Structure!*



What worked excellently

- The group was great
- Clever and dedicated candidates
- Learned a lot from each other; amazing!
- Very professional
- Genuinely interested in each other's topics
- Feedback was honest and on the level
- The team really wanted to help each other
- Even just before the final decision was made!



To see talents grow
and shine is a
privilege!

*I hope to also see you
do that*

Thank you!



VLAG Graduate Programme 2021

Information session 27 May 2020

Karin Schroën, Anouk Geelen



VLAG Graduate Programme 2021

- Funding of two PhD positions
- Stimulate talented MSc students of WU to do a PhD within one of the VLAG groups
- Interested students who fulfil the criteria have to apply for the programme
- We will select 8-12 students who will take part and can submit their PhD proposal
- Next to the regular Research Master Cluster, the students are expected to take part in some additional VLAG-specific learning activities

VLAG-specific learning activities

- A meeting with one or more PhD candidates to ask questions about being/becoming a PhD
- Informal meetings with the other selected candidates and VLAG staff to exchange ideas about the research, being a PhD, and preparing for the call, and the presentation
- Additional personal skills training “Personal leadership and team dynamics” offered by VLAG and given by an experienced trainer to better prepare for the job

Graduate School VLAG

- Mission: develop careers of young researchers and promote research collaboration in Biobased, Biomolecular, Food and Nutrition Sciences
- Research Theme's and participating groups
 - Chemistry for Life Sciences and Bio-based Economy (BCT, BIC, BIP, BNT, ORC and PCC)
 - Food Science & Technology (FCH, FHM, FPE, FPH and FQD)
 - Human Nutrition & Health (GN, HAP, NBH, ND, NMG and SSEB)
 - Modelling & Design of Biological Systems (BPE, HMI, MIB, SSB and TOX)
- For more information: www.vlaggraduateschool.nl

You can participate if...

- You are a (former) student at WUR (graduation between June 2020 and December 2021) from one of the eligible MSc programmes (MBF, MBS, MBT, MFQ, MFS, MFT, MML, MNH)
- You are highly motivated to start a scientific career
- You belong to the best students of your cohort based on your (BSc and MSc) grades
- You have the support of a coach who is affiliated with VLAG
- You will participate in the course YWU-60312 Research Master Cluster: Proposal Writing (in p5 2020/2021, i.e. April-May 2021, the latest);
- You will submit an original research proposal for a PhD project, written by you on a topic of your choice, which fits the VLAG research domain, before 10 May 2021
- You are able to start the awarded PhD project in 2021

Apply to participate in the programme

- Registration form
- A CV
- An official list with all BSc and MSc courses and grades;
- A recommendation letter from your proposed Promotor, a staff member with ius promovendi (of one of the VLAG chair groups);
- A letter with your motivation;
- A statement about the date of your past, current or future participation in the Research Master Cluster course (YWU 60312).

Deadline for application: **17 January 2021**

Evaluation of the proposals

- Only selected candidates can submit a full PhD proposal for the VLAG Graduate Program, the deadline is **10 May 2021**
- The application form is the same form that is used in the RMC course
- Details about the evaluation procedure will become available before January 1st 2021
- All information will become available on the VLAG website www.vlaggraduateschool.nl > Research > VLAG calls

Time schedule 2021

- Online information session: May 27th, 13.00-14.00
- Application deadline: 17 January
- Selection of students: between 17 January and 1 February
- Additional VLAG-specific learning activities: February – April
- Deadline to submit full PhD proposal: 10 May
- Result of the VLAG Graduate Program: ~15 June

Q&A January 2020

- Which costs are funded?
 - The Graduate Programme provides the salary costs for the appointment of a PhD.
- Is there any limit on how many students can apply per supporting VLAG chair group or per supporting VLAG supervisor?
 - The students have to apply to participate in the Programme. If they are selected they can plan to do their research at the group of their choice, so no limitation there.
 - To ensure optimal coaching for your project we recommend that no more than one candidate is supervised by the same coach/mentor.

Q&A May 2020 (1)

- When do I have to schedule the RMC course?
 - You have to follow the RMC course within your study curriculum (before graduation). It is up to you and your study advisor to schedule the course. The RMC in p5 2020/2021, taking place in April-May 2021, is the latest option to finalize your proposal before the May 10th deadline. It is not a problem if you already graduated when the VLAG programme starts (in February)?
- In the course guide for the RMC I read that you can only participate in the course if you finished the writing phase of the master thesis. Does that mean that basically the master thesis would already need to be finished? Or is the writing phase the start of the thesis?
 - The writing phase of the MSc thesis is the final phase of the thesis. It would be good to have some writing experience before participating in the RMC. If you have further questions on the RMC, please discuss with your study advisor or the course coordinator.
- Is it possible to take part in RMC when you are graduated?
 - In theory it is, but as you have to subscribe again it is so expensive that in practice the answer is: no it is not possible.
- How should I schedule my study programme, order thesis/internship?
 - Again it is up to you and your study advisor to schedule your programme. Tentatively we would suggest the following: start your thesis early, do the RMC, after which the internship follows.

Q&A May 2020 (2)

- Is the RMC proposal the proposal submitted before the deadline?
 - In most cases it is, but if the participation in RMC has already been some time ago, an update of the proposal might be needed. Also, a new proposal on a different topic is allowed given that everything learned during RMC makes it possible to do this with the help of your coach/mentor.
- How do you get a coach?
 - Often your coach is a staff member/researcher you already know from one of the courses, or even better your MSc thesis supervisor. Otherwise, you have to come up with your ideal topic for your PhD proposal and find out in what research group and with what researcher it fits best. If you are not able to find out yourself, you can contact VLAG for help.
- Can my mentor or promotor also be a PhD student?
 - No, your mentor should be a staff member, associated with VLAG, with a permanent position or in tenure track. Your mentor does not need to be your promotor. A promotor can only be a staff member with ius promovendi, i.e. all professors and some of the associate professors.
- When selecting students for the GP what is the lowest grade accepted?
 - We do not have a strict criterion but are looking for excellent students which will be judged by looking at BSc and MSc grades. We will select the best students from those who apply.

Q&A May 2020 (3)

- Is it possible to do a PhD at TNO or NIZO, as well as VLAG groups?
 - VLAG consists of the researchers and research groups from Wageningen University (WU) and five major institutes for applied research in The Netherlands: NIZO food research, the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), TNO, Wageningen Food & Biobased Research* and Wageningen Food Safety Research* (*part of Wageningen University & Research). Some of our PhDs are working (partly) at one of these research institutes; in those cases they are linked to one of the VLAG chair groups where they also have their promotor.
- I will do my RMC within the virology chair group; can I participate in the VLAG GP?
 - No, that is not possible. The researchers of the virology chair group are related to another Graduate School.
- So, if I understand it correctly, only one of the two supporting people has to be in the VLAG-involved chair groups, and the other can be anyone, even non WUR-staff?
 - Your mentor/coach has to be related to a VLAG chair group, as will probably be the case for your promotor or copromotor. The advisor mentioned in Karin's PPT can be anyone who can help you improve your proposal.
- Does the MSc thesis grade weigh more than course grades?
 - For the selection into the GP, we take a look at all available grades. If available the grade of the MSc thesis is indeed very important.

Q&A May 2020 (4)

- The selection is not clear: 8-12 selected; 2 funded?
 - Yes indeed, we first select 8-12 students to participate in the GP, those are allowed to submit a PhD proposal. All proposals/candidates will be judged and the best two will be funded by VLAG.
- How many applications did you receive for the 2020 GP?
 - We received 29 applications in January 2020.
- Is there a way to find out if your specific idea is within the PhD topics/subjects that the board is looking for?
 - The board is not looking for specific topics/subjects. The proposed research should fit within VLAG. This is a great opportunity to do the research you would like to do, so come up with your own idea.
- If you don't get funded through the GP, is it possible that your supervisor will hire you as PhD based on your proposal?
 - In theory that is possible, but it will depend whether funding is available or can be found to do so. Normally this would not be the case, but it is worth discussing with your supervisor.
- According to the rough schedule I have now I would graduate at the end of November/begin December 2021. Would this be considered to be okay or is it preferred that there is some room for delays.
 - It is fine as long as the PhD project can start in 2021.

Remaining questions

www.vlaggraduateschool.nl > Research > VLAG calls

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