

Guide for Applicants For Wetsus PhD Positions



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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	2
1.1	Wetsus	2
1.2	Wetsus' PhD Programme	2
2	Application to Wetsus' PhD Projects	2
2.1	Eligibility criteria	2
2.2	How to apply?	3
2.3	List of documents to apply	3
2.4	Language proficiency requirement	4
2.5	Deadline	5
2.6	Non-research ethics and personal data	5
2.7	Research ethics	5
3	Selection Process	5
3.1	Scoring system	6
3.2	Transparency and feedback	6
3.3	Appeal and redress	7
4	After The Recruitment	7
4.1	Wetsus' offer	7
4.2	Procedure of visa	7
4.3	Researchers with disabilities	8
4.4	Gender equality	8
5	Further Information	8
6	Application Documents Checklist	9

1 Introduction

1.1 Wetsus

Wetsus, European centre of excellence for sustainable water technology, is a research centre located in the city of Leeuwarden, province of Friesland in the Netherlands (**Figure 1**). From its foundation in 2004, Wetsus has created a unique multidisciplinary research environment, becoming a hub where intersectoral cooperation between companies, universities and research institutes takes place. Wetsus scientific programme consists of multiple **multidisciplinary dedicated PhD projects**, supported by a broad range of laboratory facilities and researchers' expertise in the fields of engineering, biotechnology, chemistry, microbiology and physics. The excellence quality of research of the Wetsus doctoral programme is reflected by the increasing number of high-impact scientific publications, with to date 90 granted patents, 36 spin-off companies, and 110 graduated doctors, most of which are now successful entrepreneurs or academics. The current network includes 107 companies and 50 professors from 27 universities



Figure 1. Wetsus building in Leeuwarden (NL).

1.2 Wetsus' PhD Programme

The research objective of Wetsus is to develop innovative and sustainable water technology. In our vision, this technology must be:

- based on process technology,
- a potential breakthrough solution,
- emission free,
- part of an endless cycle (cradle to cradle), and
- introduced into society by entrepreneurs.

2 Application to Wetsus' PhD Projects

2.1 Eligibility criteria

To be eligible, at the deadline of the call, the candidate must fulfil the following mandatory criteria:

- Hold an **MSc degree** in the discipline associated with the research topic.
- The candidate's **full-time equivalent research experience must be less than four years (Early Stage Researcher – ESR)**, measured from the date when the candidate obtained the degree entitling them to embark on a doctorate, either in the country in which the degree was obtained or in the country in which the candidate is recruited, even if a doctorate was never started or envisaged.

- The candidate **must not hold a doctoral degree**.

Moreover, other criteria for the candidates are:

- During their academic path, have shown research excellence either through high grades and/or an outstanding thesis.
- Being able to work in a multidisciplinary team in an international environment, and also to work independently.
- Preferably having previous international experience, outside their home country.
- Have excellent English communication skills, both verbally and in scientific writing.
- Suitability for scientific entrepreneurship and to potentially develop business related skills.

Wetsus is committed to equality of opportunity, to eliminating discrimination and to creating an inclusive working environment for all. Wetsus is committed to providing the best possible support for all employees and students. Our HR team understand that each person's disability or impairment can affect them in different ways and therefore the support offered is flexible and tailored. Employment conditions in the Netherlands are appealing and supportive to female researchers. Additionally, Wetsus works predominantly on STEM topics with 48% female researchers in the programme, which shows a high degree of gender balance. Attention will be given to candidates holding the refugee status, which definition includes candidates who are either at risk in their origin countries (due to discrimination, persecution, suffering and/or violence), or are seeking refuge out of these reasons or have recently found refuge in Europe.

We therefore encourage candidates to apply irrespective of age, disability, marriage or civil partnership status, ethnicity, religion and belief, gender identity, sex, or sexual orientation.

2.2 How to apply?

The application documents have to be upload via the web-based application form on the specific webpage of the research project of choice. Research projects are available online at <https://phdpositionswetus.eu/>. Candidates **can only apply to one research project** and indicate their second and third preferences on the application form.

Please **do not send** your application to the email address of the listed academic and Wetus supervisors. Only complete applications received via the official application form will be considered for evaluation.

Multiple applications for different research projects posted in the website will result in the candidate's disqualification.

2.3 List of documents to apply

To apply, candidates need to submit the following documents via the online application form on the webpage:

1. A **motivation letter** max of 1 page.
2. An **up-to-date curriculum vitae** (CV), including the following information: complete name, date of birth, current location, education, list internships and thesis (subject, name supervisor, grade, etc.), publications (if applicable), work experience (if applicable),

scientific interests, complementary qualifications, achievements and other relevant information.

3. **A copy of MSc diploma(s)** (or a letter from university stating the expected graduation date) and **grades** (with explanation of the grading system).
4. **One/two signed recommendation letter(s)**, dated no longer than 1 year before the application deadline, with contact information of the referee(s). If your referee(s) is only able to give a reference letter just under request by Wetsus, please submit a pdf file containing the names, affiliation and email addresses of your referee(s). Once your application is complete, please inform us if a referee request is needed by sending an email to phdpositions@wetsus.eu. Kindly do so at least one week before the deadline and mention the project to which you have applied.

Please ensure that all documents are in PDF format and clearly indicate the type of file, along with your first and last name (e.g., Motivation letter_Jane Doe.pdf; CV_Jane Doe.pdf; Diploma_Jane Doe.pdf; Recommendation letters_Jane Doe.pdf). The application process will only be completed once all four required documents have been uploaded to the correct fields. Additionally, see section 6 for the application documents checklist.

Only applications that are complete, in English, comply with the application rules, and are submitted via the application webpage before the deadline will be considered eligible.

2.4 Language proficiency requirement

In order to be admitted to the Wetsus' PhD programme, the candidate must demonstrate proficiency in the English language. Doing a PhD at Wetsus and the affiliated university(s) requires English proficiency at a certain level to ensure that the candidate is able to communicate well, participate in English-taught Doctoral Education courses, write scientific articles, and write and successfully defend their PhD dissertation.

If the candidate is not Dutch, from a non-Anglophone country and has not completed a higher education with English as the language of instruction, the candidate has to submit an internationally recognised **Certificate of Proficiency in the English Language**. This must be done prior to the start of the PhD-project and before the PhD registration at the affiliated university(s): [Wageningen University and Research](#), [University of Groningen](#), [University of Twente](#), or other universities. Please check for the language proficiency requirement based on the university that your project is affiliated to.

You do not need to present the test results as part of your application; these results will be requested at a later stage during the selection procedure, but if you have one, you may provide it together with your application.

Exemption: Candidates who have completed their Bachelors/Masters at a Dutch University (WO) are exempted from submitting an English Proficiency test. Candidates who have completed their higher education entirely taught in the English language (except online and double degree programmes) are exempted from submitting an English proficiency test.

2.5 Deadline

The application deadline for the call opened on the 2^d of March 2026 and is closing on **Friday 16th of October 2026 at 15.00 CEST**.

2.6 Non-research ethics and personal data

To comply with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), each applicant formally consents at the moment of submission of their application to Wetsus' PhD vacancies that during the selection and evaluation phase, different members inside and outside the host organization will evaluate her/his personal data.

All of the information collected at the application stage is necessary and relevant to the performance of the position applied for. Wetsus will use the information provided by the applicant, by the referees provided, and the educational institutions with whom we may undertake to verify the applicant qualifications with, for recruitment purposes only. Wetsus will treat all personal information with the utmost confidentiality and in line with current data protection legislation.

2.7 Research ethics

When enrolled at Wetsus as researchers, candidates will be requested to uphold the research ethics outlined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and by the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, under penalty of exclusion from the doctoral program.

Enrolled ESR must complete a **research ethics checklist** as part of their research proposal. The research **projects** are permitted, if only they:

- do not perform research on Human Embryonic Stem Cells (hESCs) or human embryos (hE),
- do not involve human participants in the research,
- do not involve human cells or tissues,
- do not involve processing of personal data,
- do not involve animals,
- do not perform research in non-EU countries, and/ or the research related activities undertaken in these countries do not raise potential ethics issues,
- do not perform research on dual use items, technologies or solutions,
- have an exclusive focus on civil applications, and
- have no potential for misuse of research results.

3 Selection Process

The selection procedure consists of three rounds. It is a lengthy rigorous process, which will take several months to complete:

Round 1 – Eligibility check and assessment of application material. The application documents received per each candidate will be evaluated by internal evaluators (from Wetsus and academia), together with the HR department. Evaluation will be carried out according to eligibility criteria evaluating each candidate for different skills such as basic knowledge,

communication approach, teamwork, problem solving, management of research and innovation, public awareness activities, etc. Particular attention will be paid to the suitability for the interaction with industries, and for patents or inventions development. Among all the eligible applicants, maximum of 10 CVs applicants (with score ≥ 70) will be selected for a video interview.

Round 2 – Video interview. The interview panel will be composed by the Wetsus and academic supervisors. The interview will have a duration of 35-60 min. A maximum of 3 applicants (with score ≥ 80) will be selected for Round 3.

Round 3 – Recruitment challenge. The best candidates are invited to Wetsus for a full recruiting day. Travel and accommodation costs will be covered by Wetsus, to avoid any social or income-related bias in the selection process. During the challenge, the candidates will be assessed for:

1. Giving a short *presentation*, focussing on the key findings and discussions from their MSc thesis work.
2. Write a short *project proposal*, related to the topic of the PhD position applied. More information about the modality will follow for the candidates admitted to the Round 3.
3. Short *face-to-face* interviews with the academic and Wetsus supervisor.

In case of travel ban related to the SARS-CoV2 pandemic or similar international emergency-related issues, the recruitment challenge will take place online in video conference modality. All candidates will be informed of the final score, and the best candidates per each PhD position (with score ≥ 90) will be offered an employment as doctoral candidate at Wetsus as the host organization.

3.1 Scoring system

In the selection process, the suitability of the applicant is assessed using a scoring system. In each round, the evaluators will take into consideration the whole range of experience of the candidates, focusing on their potential as researchers, but also assess the candidate considering their creativity and level of independence. To ensure this, the evaluation process will consider a wide range of skills which are grouped under five main evaluation criteria. The criteria and their maximum scores are listed as below:

1. Motivation and affinity for the proposed topic (15 points)
2. Research skills and basic knowledge (40 points)
3. Affinity for personal development (15 points)
4. Initiative and independency (15 points)
5. Communication skills (15 points)

These criteria evaluate each candidate for different skills such as basic knowledge, communication approach, teamwork, problem solving, management of research and innovation, public awareness activities, etc. Particular attention will be paid to the suitability for the interaction with industries, and for patents or inventions development.

3.2 Transparency and feedback

Within one month after the application deadline, all the applications will be evaluated, and the candidates will be informed whether her/his submission meets the requirements to be invited

for the video interview (Round 2). The video interview will take place as soon as possible and ultimately within one month after a positive evaluation in the first round. After the video interview, all the candidates to be invited for the recruitment challenge will be informed at the latest 4 weeks before the recruitment challenge, to guarantee enough time for the candidates to arrange a visa, when needed.

Wetsus aims for a fully transparent evaluation procedure for all the applicants by giving timely feedback. After each selection round, all the candidates will be informed by email about their score. After Round 2, the applicants will get personal feedback from the evaluators about strengths and weaknesses of their application and interview. This feedback aims to help the candidate with future applications and other career choices.

3.3 Appeal and redress

After each round, candidates can appeal within 2 weeks if they feel they are evaluated unjustly for one of the following reasons: relevant information was not taken into account; procedural errors; discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, nationality, age, religion, creed, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression; or any other ethical issues. Appeal can be filed through email at: appeals@wetsus.eu.

4 After The Recruitment

After Round 3, the selected candidate will be offered the PhD position and the project timing will be determined in accordance with all the supervision panel and the university. The availability of the candidate will be taken into account.

4.1 Wetsus' offer

Salary and working conditions are according to the collective labor agreement of the Cooperative Association of Dutch Universities (VSNU) for PhD students. Per July 2026, the salary for a PhD student as determined by the collective labor agreement are (in Euros before tax per year): € 44856 (year 1), €51884 (year 2), €54222 (year 3) and €56714 (year 4). PhD students are appointed by one of the three cooperating universities, but research is conducted at the Wetsus laboratory in Leeuwarden.

The PhD positions are always a collaboration between Wetsus and (at least) one university, but the PhD will be on contract with Wetsus. However, The PhD will be connected to that university and enrolled in their graduate school. The PhD candidate is graduating from this same university.

4.2 Procedure of visa

For the candidates selected for the Round 3, the HRM of Wetsus will organize their visa application. Depending on the country where the applicant is travelling from, HRM supports the candidate by applying for the right visa.

At the procedure of enrolment as a PhD researcher, either the designated universities or Wetsus will take care of the paperwork f.i., the labor contract, and applying for the residence permit (only applicable if the PhD researcher is non-European).

If the candidate is a non-EU/EEA student and requires visa to reside in the Netherlands, the candidate should take into account that some of the affiliated university(s) can only apply for the visa after the candidate have met the language requirements (see 2.4).

4.3 Researchers with disabilities

The Wetsus building (built in 2015) is fully equipped and accessible for persons with physical disabilities. The HR team will provide a tailored support for each specific case. The programme timeline can be adjusted accordingly, in terms of attendance of courses, laboratory work, and utilization of research facilities. Material facilities as special desks, customized chairs and adaptation to the canteen space will be considered. Finally, a doctoral candidate counsellor and/or a “research buddy” will be provided when necessary.

4.4 Gender equality

Employment conditions in the Netherlands are appealing and supportive to female researchers (good secondary working conditions for women, such as paid maternity leave for 16 weeks and parental leave, flexible working hours and working from home facilitated). Wetsus works predominantly on STEM topics and with 48% female ESRs the current PhD programme shows a high degree of gender balance.

5 Further Information

Experiences from Wetsus' PhD students: <https://phdpositionswetsus.eu/experiences/> and <https://phdpositionswetsus.eu/videos/>

Research at Wetsus: <https://www.wetsus.nl/wetsus-research/>

Wetsus laboratory facilities: <https://www.wetsus.nl/https-wetsus-nl-research-facilities/>

Wageningen University and Research: <https://www.wur.nl/en/wageningen-university.htm>

University of Groningen: <https://www.rug.nl/>

University of Twente: <https://www.utwente.nl/en/>

Information about Leeuwarden: <https://www.friesland.nl/en/discover/eleven-cities-and-villages/leeuwarden>

6 Application Documents Checklist

- ☐ A **motivation letter** (max 1 page) (*MANDATORY*)
- ☐ An up-to-date **curriculum vitae** (CV) (*MANDATORY*)
- ☐ A **copy of MSc diploma(s)** (or a letter from university stating the expected graduation date) and **grades** (with explanation of the grading system) (*MANDATORY*)
- ☐ **One/two signed recommendation letters** (*MANDATORY*)
- ☐ **Contact of additional referees** (*if applicable*)
- ☐ **English proficiency certificate** (*if applicable*)
- ☐ **Abstract of one of the papers published** (*if applicable*)

NOTE: If applicable, please merge the *Contact of additional referees* file to the Recommendation letter file, the *English proficiency certificate* file to the *diploma/grades* file and the *abstract* to the CV file. To make a merged PDF file, you can use the following online resources:

https://www.ilovepdf.com/merge_pdf

<https://combinepdf.com/>

<https://www.pdf-merge.com/>