

**Individual Sandwich PhD Scholarship Programme ITM-DGD  
Call 2026**

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## 1. Concept

In the 2026 call round, the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) at Antwerp will award maximally 4 to 6 PhD grants to outstanding PhD candidates as part of a comprehensive capacity strengthening programme supported by the Directorate General for Development (DGD), 'The Health We Share - Strengthening Health systems through Science, Innovations and Transformative partnerships, 2027-2031'. With the PhD grants we aim to support the next generation of researchers in their development into independent researchers by giving them the opportunity to carry out a scientific challenging and innovative PhD project relevant to the programme's outcomes and contributing to capacity strengthening.

The PhD grants are of the 'sandwich' type, meaning that the student will spend the doctoral research time partly in the home institute/country and partly at ITM. The grant is awarded after a competitive procedure based on the evaluation of academic merit, a full PhD project proposal and the quality and relevance of the institutional and supervisory set-up. Selected candidates will be registered as ITM PhD students and must endorse the *Principles for PhD students* as laid down in the [Code for effective PhD supervision](#) (see annex 4).

## 2. Learning objectives

The aim of PhD training at ITM is to train PhD students to become 'independent researchers', this means that they should be able to:

- demonstrate a systematic understanding of their field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field;
- demonstrate the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity;
- make a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work some of which merits national or international refereed publication;
- the critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;
- communicate with peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise;
- promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.

## 3. Eligibility criteria

The ITM Research Office will undertake an eligibility check. All eligibility criteria must be strictly met and only eligible applications will be reviewed by the ITM PhD Committee. Applications must be submitted in English through the [online Student platform](#) by 15 September 2026, 5 p.m. Belgian time. Submissions received after the deadline or incomplete applications will be considered as not eligible.

Prospective PhD candidates must fit the following criteria:



- fit the '[ITM alumnus definition](#)' as defined in annex 1 and/or be embedded in a Strategic or Collaborating partner institution in the 2027-2031 Programme 'The Health we share' (see annex 2);
- be embedded in a scientific institute or university providing a supportive research environment. This candidate's home institute must be based in [an eligible country](#) (see annex 3) and must have a legal position independent from any institution in a high-income country;
- be [a national of a country eligible for DGD funding](#) (list in annex 3). A limited number of PhD grants can be awarded to nationals from other [Low or Middle Income countries](#). Candidates must have primary residence in a Low or Middle income country. Candidates who are nationals from a high-income country too are not eligible nor candidates that performed a professional activity for more than 1 year in a high-income country in a period of 3 years before the application deadline (this is 15 September 2026), nor candidates that are on ITM's payroll or were on ITM's payroll before;
- The minimum language requirements are proof of a TOEFL iBT score of 79-93 (ITM Toefl Code = 7727), an IELTS score of 6.5 or other qualifying evidence (e.g. ITACE, Duolingo English test) of an English CEFR level of B2-C1 meaning a higher tier B2 or C1. A higher tier B2 will generally mean a B2 on all components of language proficiency and would have to be evidenced. (ITM accepts test results to be valid for 5 years, this means that your test results cannot exceed 5 years on the application deadline.) Native English speakers are exempt from these language requirements. Applicants whose first language is not English are exempt if they have successfully completed a higher education programme of at least 60 ECTS credits taught in English or have a higher education diploma from a Flemish Community higher education institution.  
*A helpful resource: <https://publicdocs.itg.be/com/ITM-englishmaterials-toc-2.pdf>. Your PhD awarding university might have higher language proficiency requirements. Please check and make sure you comply with the admission requirements of the university you would like to enrol in (registration at the PhD awarding university must be done in year 1);*
- be fully committed to the doctoral research during the grant period, with written consent and commitment of their superiors as attested in the home institute binding statement. The student is allowed to fulfil other academic and clinical tasks for maximum 8 hours per week.

Please note that age is not an eligibility criterion, but candidates are expected to be in an early stage of their career in order to be able as PhD holders to support the training of the next generation of early stage researchers and/or more generally to strengthen the home institute and/or country.

#### Proposal:

- The proposed PhD proposal must contribute to capacity strengthening of the home institute and/or country.
- The PhD proposal must be aligned with the broad outcome themes as presented in the 2027-2030 'Health we share programme': 1. epidemic and pandemic preparedness, 2. control and elimination of tropical infectious diseases, 3. sexual and reproductive health and rights, 4. policy support. Prospective PhD candidates embedded in a Strategic or Collaborating partner institute must explain how their PhD research is linked to the programme's cluster activities on the related topic.



Research environment and supervision:

-A supervisor at the home institute, ITM and at the university that will award the PhD diploma must declare their commitment to supervise the thesis work and explain how they will contribute to the PhD process. The home institute supervisor must be connected to the home institute in which the PhD student is embedded. Additional supervisors can express their support as well. The supervisors must be eligible as formal academic supervisors of PhD theses according to their national and/or institutional regulations, must comply to the pre-award procedures of their institutes (if any) and must endorse the Principles for supervisors as laid down in the [Code for effective PhD supervision](#) (see annex 4). This Code stipulates that ‘The supervisor must serve as a good role model of what a researcher does. (S)he must have research expertise relevant to the area of the PhD student’s research’.

#### 4. Evaluation criteria

The ITM PhD Committee will review the eligible sandwich applications based on :

1. Scientific quality of the candidate

*Curriculum of the candidate (including study curriculum results, relevant scientific experience, scientific publications (if any))*

*Motivation*

2. Scientific quality of the proposal

*Quality of the research proposal, feasibility of the research plan, relevance to health and health development in LMIC countries, potential output*

3. Supportive research environment

*Coherence with research programmes at the home institute and at ITM*

*Support, role, contributions and complementary expertise of the supervision team*

#### 5. Assessment procedure and ranking advice

The ITM PhD Committee will assess eligible applications in two sequential stages.



#### Document review:

A first evaluation will be done based on the applications in writing. After the preselection meeting (9 October 2026) the PhD Committee may invite you for an online interview. Candidates must have a minimum overall score of  $\geq 7,5$  over 10 (based on the three evaluations criteria) to be invited for the interview.

#### Interview:

Shortlisted candidates will be invited for an online interview with the ITM PhD Committee on 16 October 2026. Subsequently, the Committee will discuss until an interview score is reached by consensus. Candidates need at least a score of  $\geq 7,5$  on the interview to be considered for a PhD grant.

#### Final ranking and award:

The PhD Committee will advise the candidates with the highest scores taking the average of the 2 evaluation steps, for a PhD grant award.

Two of the 6 PhD grant awards are earmarked for PhD candidates embedded in a strategic or collaborating partner institution of the 2027-2031 Programme 'The Health we share'.

The ITM Management Committee will take the final decision on the award of the PhD grants, based on the advice of the PhD Committee.

## 6. Grant

The grant is initially allocated for a period of 18 months starting 1/1/2027 - with a renewal for another 30 months after a positive progress evaluation. Progress will be evaluated after 1 year by the ITM PhD Committee based on the review of documents in writing and an oral defence.

All grant specificities will be detailed in the sandwich PhD student grant contract. The ITM and DGD scholarships regulations apply.

The grant includes allowances to cover:

- the student's living costs,
- research costs, and
- supervision costs.

### 1. Living allowance

- Belgium:  
A living allowance of €1,750 per month is provided during stays in Belgium, for a maximum of 24 months within the total grant duration of 48 months.
- Home institution / country:  
A monthly living allowance may be awarded based on the home institution's PhD salary or fellowship regulations (capped at €1,500):
  - up to 100% of the local PhD salary/fellowship,



- with the possibility of an additional top-up of up to 80% of the gross salary, if duly justified.

The grant further includes:

- Insurance: €60 per month
- Logistical allowance: €700 (one-off)
- Travel: one annual economy-class round-trip flight
- PhD registration fees: covered based on the reference fee of Belgian universities (indicatively €1,182 for 2026–2027)

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## 2. Research allowance

A bench fee of up to €6,000 per year is provided to cover costs directly related to the PhD training and research.

This allowance is subject to financial accountability/reporting.

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## 3. Supervision allowance

A maximum of €300 per month (lump sum) is provided to cover costs for the support and supervision of the PhD student.

The allowance is paid to the home institution's scientific unit during the candidate's stay there, and to the ITM supervisor's unit during the stay in Belgium. The supervision allowance can also be used as an additional bench fee to cover research costs.

Additionally, 1 mission per academic year of max. 10 days for the ITM or home institute supervisor is granted.

Legal status:

- The fellowship does not constitute an employment relationship with ITM.
- During the stay in Belgium, the candidate holds the legal and fiscal status of a student.
- The legal and fiscal status in the home country is the responsibility of the candidate and the home institution.

## 7. Timeline

- The deadline for submission is 15 September 2026, 5 p.m. Belgian time.
- The evaluation and ranking advice by the ITM PhD Committee will take place in October 2026.
- Online interviews with preselected candidates: 16 October 2026.
- The final decision is taken by the ITM Management Committee in November 2026.
- The candidates and their supervisors will be notified by 30 November 2026.
- The PhD grants start on 1 January 2027.



## 8. Annexes

### ANNEX 1. Definition ITM alumnus

1. Have a diploma of one of the ITM Master programmes;
2. Have a certificate of one of the ITM short courses with minimum 5 credits. See list ITM short courses as published on ITM's website <https://www.itg.be/en/study/type/short-courses>. In case of questions to be confirmed with the head of the ITM Education Office, [bbroucker@itg.be](mailto:bbroucker@itg.be));
3. Have completed a predoctoral period at ITM under the supervision of an ITM supervisor for minimum 3 months.

*An exemption to the options above can be made based on a well-argued proposition of the ITM supervisor showing the relationship between the candidate and ITM/supervisor (explicitly to be addressed in the ITM supervisor's letter of acceptance and support).*



**ANNEX 2. Strategic or collaborating partner institution in the 2027-2031 Programme ‘The Health we share’**

1. Partner type	2. Country	3. Institution
Strategic Partners	Benin	Centre de Recherche en Reproduction Humaine et en Démographie (CERRHUD)
	Benin	Laboratoire de Référence des Mycobactéries (LRM)
	Burkina Faso	Clinical Research Unit of Nanoro (CRUN)
	DRC	Ecole de Santé Publique-Université de Lubumbashi (ESP)
	Ethiopia	Armauer Hansen Research Institute (AHRI)
	Ethiopia	University of Gondar (UOG)
	Guinea	Centre d’Excellence Africain pour la Prévention et le Contrôle des Maladies Transmissibles (CEA-PCMT)
	Guinea	Centre National de Formation et de Recherche en Santé Rurale de Maferinyah (CNFRSR)
	Mozambique	Instituto Nacional de Saúde (INS)
	DRC	Institut National de Recherche Biomédical (INRB)
Collaborating Partners	Burkina Faso	Centre Muraz (CM)
	Cambodia	National Institute of Public Health (NIPH)
	Cuba	Instituto Nacional de Higiene, Epidemiología y Microbiología (INHEM)
	Cuba	Instituto de Medicina Tropical Pedro Kouri (IPK)
	DRC	Centre de Recherche en Santé de Kimpese (CRSK)
	DRC	Program National de Lutte Contre la Trypanosomiasis (PNLTHA)
	Ethiopia	Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI)
	Ethiopia	Jimma University (JU)



	Nepal	B.P.Koirala Institute of Health Sciences (BPKIHS)
	Nepal	National Health Research Council (NHRC)
	Vietnam	National Institute of Malariaology Parasitology and Entomology (NIMPE)



### ANNEX 3. Countries eligible for DGD funding

- Benin, Bolivia, Burkina-Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Palestina, Peru, Philippines, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam
- A limited number of PhD grants can be awarded to nationals from other [Low- or Middle-Income Countries](#). Candidates from Nepal or Cuba must be embedded in a Strategic or collaborative partner institution as presented in annex 2.



## ANNEX 4. Code for PhD students and Supervisors

A characteristic of PhD research is that the PhD student carries out her/his research under the guidance of one or more supervisors. This code outlines the mutual expectations and responsibilities of the (co)supervisors and the PhD student, considered as important to successfully conclude the PhD track.

### Principles for PhD students:

Main focus:

The PhD student is expected to mature into an independent researcher. This entails a process that is a joint responsibility of the supervisor(s) and the PhD student. To this end, the PhD student will perform research, which will result in the defence of a PhD thesis and publication of research papers. (S)he will also seek training in various fields that are either directly relevant for the PhD work or for her/his future career in science and society.

Attitudes to be acquired during the process by the student

- The PhD student should be open-minded, willing to learn and capable of **critical thinking/analysis**. (S)he will take the supervisor's criticism and constructive feedback into consideration or builds arguments not do so.
- The PhD student should make sure that (s)he is in **frequent contact with the supervisor(s)**. Maintaining regular contact is considered to be a mutual responsibility of both the supervisor(s) and PhD student. The PhD student should let the supervisor(s) know when she/he needs support or guidance.
- The PhD student should **have a problem-solving attitude**: (s)he thinks about the topics (s)he would like to discuss with the supervisor ahead of time, write them down and possibly email them in advance. (S)he recognizes challenges and problems and will propose solutions.
- The PhD student should **manage his/her time well**. (S)he defines goals for the semester, year, and 4-year research period and aspires to complete the PhD in the foreseen timespan.
- (S)he should demonstrate a **good work ethics**. In addition, (s)he gradually becomes familiar with the appropriate rules, regulations, policies, and procedures i.e. with regard to ethics review and research integrity and acts upon them.
- The PhD student should be a **team player**. (S)he integrates in the research unit and relevant networks. While independent thinking is to be encouraged, the student has to respect the aims and context of his/her research project, which usually fit into commitments of the supervisor with regard to grant and/or consortium agreements.
- The PhD student should acquire **communication skills**. (S)he actively seeks opportunities to present her/his work at scientific meetings at various levels (local, national, international), applies for scholarships for conferences, writes research and review papers as soon as possible. (S)he communicates with peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about her/his areas of expertise.



### Principles for supervisors:

There are 3 possible types of supervisors: ITM, home institute and PhD awarding university supervisor. The ITM and university supervisor or the home institute and university supervisor may be the same person. A home institute supervisor is only present in sandwich PhDs.

### General tasks, expectations and responsibilities of supervisors

- The supervisor has several roles, including hierarchical **head, coach and mentor**. At the start of the PhD process, there is more emphasis on coaching, whereas to the end, the student should have acquired more independency, hence the supervisor will rather be a mentor.
- The supervisor aims to be an **accessible advisor**. Supervisors must discuss, assess and guide the progress of the PhD student at regular intervals. The necessary knowledge, time, commitment and access to resources to undertake the supervision should be guaranteed. When there is more than one supervisor, all parties should meet together regularly. It is expected that supervisors will comment on PhD student's written work within a mutually agreed turnaround period.
- Together with the student, the ITM and home institute supervisor also **guard the student's time** for her/his PhD research
- The supervisor should serve as a good **role model** of what a researcher does. (S)he should have research expertise relevant to the area of the PhD student's research.
- **Cultural sensitivity**: besides providing guidance on the "transcultural or universal" aspects of the scientific method, the supervisor should remain open to specific cultural background of the student and the research environment in his/her country.
- The supervisor has the responsibility to provide a **stimulating research environment**, including encouragement, support and guidance at all stages of the PhD research.
- The supervisor **assists in publications**: indicates possibilities for publication and acts as an advisor and critical reviewer during the publication process.
- The supervisor **assists in training**: helps the PhD student identifying specific areas in which the student requires development of skills (laid down in a 'Personal Training & Career Development Plan' - see below) and refers the PhD student to the appropriate courses or sources of assistance.
- The supervisor **assists in creating a network** for the student by introducing him/her to other researchers in related areas, to external agencies, industry, or other institutional links.
- The supervisor **guards the ethical and regulatory environment** of the PhD process. (S)he should indicate which rules, regulations, policies, and procedures are important for the PhD process, including ethical review and research integrity. Both the student and the supervisor should comply with those rules. The supervisor also assists the PhD student to prepare applications for ethics and other approvals as required.



- The supervisor supports the PhD student in **career preparation**. The supervisor advises the PhD student on post-doctoral research opportunities, visiting fellow appointments or other career options.

Specific roles and responsibilities:

- The ITM supervisor must guarantee the academic quality and compliance with ITM regulations during the PhD process.
- The role of the home institute supervisor is to coach the sandwich PhD student when (s)he is working in the home country and to guarantee the academic quality and compliance with the home institute's regulations.
- The role of the university promoter is to guarantee the academic quality and compliance with the university/faculty PhD regulations.

Personal Training & Career Development Plan (PTCDP) as a tool

In consultation with the supervisor(s) the PhD student establishes a 'Personal Training & Career Development Plan', describing in detail the skills sets, knowledge, and abilities needed to acquire in order to achieve the goals set, both in terms of the actual PhD project and her/his further career.

To this end, the PTCDP contains mutual practical agreements on:

- the milestones and timelines with regard to performing the actual research,
- the timelines for writing of papers and of the thesis,
- which courses/workshops/seminars and skills training will be followed when,
- the frequency of meetings between the student and the supervisors.

The PTCDP has to be regularly updated. This update will be part of the Progress Report, to be evaluated by the PhD Committee.



## **ANNEX 5. Application procedure**

*Apply through the online student platform.*

*The following documents must be uploaded:*

PhD research proposal following the template in annex 6.

### **Motivation letter PhD**

*Write a letter in which you describe your motivation to do (your) PhD research.*

### **Curriculum Vitae**

*A CV is a concise and relevant summary of personal information, work experience, education and training, and personal skills. The Europass website gives a good example of format.*

### **Passport size photograph**

*Will only be used for administrative purposes in case PhD scholarship will be granted, for ITM internal usage only and will be treated with utmost discretion and confidentiality.*

### **Academic and professional degrees**

*Certified proof of prior formal academic or professional education and training. This includes graduate and postgraduate training or higher education degrees such as: Bachelor, Master. If the original degree certificate is not in English, French, Spanish or Dutch, a certified translation must be uploaded as well.*

### **Transcript of academic records**

*These are the authenticated transcripts of grades obtained during graduate and postgraduate education and training.*

### **List of publications**

*If applicable, please list your (5) most relevant publications in international peer-reviewed journals.*

### **Proof of English proficiency**

*The minimum language requirements are proof of a TOEFL iBT score of 79-93 (ITM Toefl Code = 7727), an IELTS score of 6.5 or other qualifying evidence of an English CEFR level of B2-C1 meaning a higher tier B2 or C1. A higher tier B2 will generally mean a B2 on all components of language proficiency and would have to be evidenced. Native English speakers are exempt from these language requirements. Applicants whose first language is not English are exempt if they have successfully completed a higher education programme of at least 60 ECTS credits taught in English or have a higher education diploma from a Flemish Community higher education institution.*

### **Skills and training plan**

*Current skills and training needs. Describe your current skills and capabilities and present a training plan for your training needs during your PhD period.*



**Home institute binding statement**

*This statement on letterhead paper must be signed by the home institute's legal representative and stating his/her/their name, function, email address and stamp of the institute. The statement must attest the following: (i) the candidate's full commitment to the PhD research. The candidate is allowed to fulfil other academic/clinical tasks for maximum 8 hours per week (please mention these other academic/clinical tasks – if any - in the statement); (ii) the amount of the PhD scholarship or the gross and nett salary of a junior scientific collaborator in the home institute; (iii) if the candidate will continue to receive his/her/their local (full or partial) salary in the home institute or not (please indicate the amount that the candidate will continue to receive); (iv) Motivated request- if any - for a topping up. A maximum 80% topping up of the gross salary can be allowed if justified in the statement.*

**Letters of acceptance and support with short cv/website link from the supervisors (ITM, PhD degree awarding university, home institute).**

*The supervisors (from the home institute, ITM and PhD awarding university) receive an e-mail from the Student Portal which enables them to submit their letter of acceptance and support. These must be separate letters by each supervisor including an assessment of the candidate and explaining the supervisor's expertise, role and contribution to the PhD thesis supervision.*

**DGD scholarship application form**

*Must be uploaded for the information of the ITM Student Support.*



## ANNEX 6. Template PhD research proposal (including Research environment, supervision and institutional context)

Use FONT CALIBRI 11, Line Spacing 1. Maximum 15 pages in total.

### PhD research proposal

1. Title research proposal
2. Abstract
3. Specify the outcome theme as presented in the 2027-2030 'Health we share programme' to which your PhD proposal is aligned with: 1. epidemic and pandemic preparedness, 2. control and elimination of tropical infectious diseases, 3. sexual and reproductive health and rights, 4. policy support. Prospective PhD candidates embedded in a Strategic or Collaborating partner institute must explain how their PhD research is linked to the programme's cluster activities on the related topic.
4. State of the art, knowledge gap, 'what's new', hypothesis, objectives.  
*In case of a re-application, please indicate if/how you addressed the earlier feedback by the PhD Committee.*
5. Research methodology (including study design, set-up, study population, data collection, & analysis, ethical considerations)
6. Impact: 'so what', policy and practice change, innovation and scientific relevance (bullet points)
7. Reference list
8. Feasibility, budget, timeline, ethics, risk management, data management

*With regard to the budget, please involve the administrators of your ITM supervisor's department. Indicate how much your research will cost (itemize per year). If the annual amount of the bench fee (6000 €/year) will not be sufficient to cover the costs of your research, please specify how much more budget you will need and what will be the source of this extra budget. Please note that the supervision allowance (300€/month) can be used as bench fee as well.*

### Research environment, supervision and institutional context

9. Supervision team: expertise, role, responsibilities and contribution of the supervisors.

*Explain how they will function as a team.*

*The supervisors (from the home institute, ITM and PhD awarding university) receive an e-mail from the Student Portal which enables them to submit their letter of acceptance and support. These must be separate letters by each supervisor including an assessment of the candidate and explaining the supervisor's expertise, role and contribution to the PhD thesis supervision.*

10. Embedment in the research (team) of the home institute and ITM. Parts of the work to be done in the home institute and at the ITM.

