

What we do and do not fund

We do not fund

- Applied research, such as biotechnological and pharmaceutical development (e.g. development of assays for diagnostic purposes or drug screening; optimization or screening of substances/compounds for therapeutic use; development of drug delivery systems or vaccines)
- Studies on the course of diseases or the treatment of symptoms
- Botanical and prokaryotic investigations unless they are of general biological importance
- Education; we can support only research. Therefore, fellowships cannot be used during the course and rotation phase of PhD programmes, but only for the duration of the PhD project.

Examples of project proposals we did not fund

Diagnostics

In this project, specific substances will be explored to develop and validate *in vitro* and *in vivo* novel non-invasive agents for optical imaging, to monitor cancer progression, and differentiation into different cancer forms. Notably, these probes can be further evaluated for therapeutic applications.

Drug delivery

The major challenge of cancer therapy is to achieve specific, efficient, and safe systemic delivery of therapeutic molecules into the tumour microenvironment. This proposal wants to investigate multifunctional nanoparticles as delivery vehicles. The project aims to investigate basic aspects such as nanoparticle size and concentration, cell targeting, and cellular uptake.

Drug screening

Currently, a number of pathways and regulators have been identified that might constitute drug targets for clinical therapy. Among them receptor X is a negative regulator of cell differentiation and the pharmacological modulation of this receptor represents a promising therapeutic approach. To this end, we want to screen compound libraries aiming at the identification of lead substances that can modulate receptor X function.

Drug development

Novel drugs and drug combinations against disease X are urgently needed. Therefore, I aim to 1. determine the activity of 8 anti-X drugs in an *in vitro* system, 2. determine the activity of 3 anti-X drug combinations, 3. determine the activity of a new combination of 3 drugs.

Disease course or treatment of symptoms (clinical studies)

The aim of the project is to evaluate whether treatment with substance X improves cognitive function in patients with disease Y. Control subjects will include patients with syndrome AB who are receiving substance X for this condition. The objectives are: To study in patients with disease Y and in control patients the effect of substance X on: 1) cognitive and motor functions, analysed by psychometric tests; 2) the molecular alterations involved in cognitive disorders; 3) the brain abnormalities, analysed by means of fMRI and EEG.

We fund

The Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds supports only experimental projects in **basic** biomedical research, including *in silico* projects that aim at elucidating basic biological phenomena of human life and acquiring new scientific knowledge.

This can be projects that

- Try to solve the molecular structure and function of cellular proteins using, for example, microscopic or biophysical methods
- Analyse basic cellular, molecular, or genetic mechanisms in human cells or model organisms which might be relevant for the human system
- Try to elucidate basic mechanisms of developmental biology
- Analyse basic mechanisms of tumour biology, either on the level of individual cancer cells or in model organisms
- Try to understand the basic functions and principles of the immune system
- Study basic mechanisms of infection, analysing infectious agents that are relevant for humans
- Try to understand the brain in humans (e.g. with fMRI, EEG) and in model organisms, or projects elucidating the multiple functions of the nervous system
- Use bioinformatics approaches to answer any of the above-mentioned problems

Examples of projects we funded

Cell biology

- Mechanisms of cytokinesis in budding yeast
- Live imaging and mathematical modelling of inner nuclear membrane protein targeting reveal its molecular requirements in mammalian cells

Molecular biology and genetics

- *In vivo* and transcriptome-wide identification of RNA-binding protein target sites
- Monitoring homology search during DNA double-strand break repair *in vivo*

Structural biology

- RNA polymerase I structure and transcription regulation

Neurobiology

- High-throughput imaging of neuronal activity in *Caenorhabditis elegans* chemotaxis
- Spontaneous activity in the development of neural circuits
- Balance and stability of synaptic structures during synaptic plasticity

Biomedical basics of disease

- IL-33 signalling contributes to the pathogenesis of myeloproliferative neoplasms
- Transcription regulates telomere dynamics in human cancer cells

Immunology

- Individual intestinal symbionts induce a distinct population of ROR γ + regulatory T cells

Infection biology

- Heterochromatin protein 1 secures survival and transmission of malaria parasites

Biophysics

- Single-molecule study of the intrinsically disordered FG-repeat nucleoporin 153

PhD Fellowships

The Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds awards PhD fellowships to **outstanding** junior scientists who wish to pursue an ambitious PhD project of approximately 3 years in basic biomedical research in an internationally leading laboratory. For further details please refer to “[Who can apply \(fellowships-grants/phd-fellowships/who-can-apply.html\)?](#)”. The peer-review-based [selection process \(fellowships-grants/phd-fellowships/selection.html\)](#) is highly competitive. Applicants should therefore be outstanding in all three [selection criteria \(fellowships-grants/phd-fellowships/selection-criteria.html\)](#).

Purpose

To promote basic research in biomedicine by providing the best young, up-and-coming scientists with comprehensive support during their PhD phase.

More than a monthly stipend

The fellowship comprises a competitive monthly stipend that is initially granted for 2 years and that can be [extended \(fellowships-grants/phd-fellowships/extensions.html\)](#) for up to another 12 months. Participation in international scientific conferences is also supported. In addition, fellowship holders are offered personal support, seminars to discuss their projects, communication training and alumni meetings, and thus can become part of a worldwide network. Read more under [personal support \(fellowships-grants/phd-fellowships/personal-support.html\)](#) and [conditions \(fellowships-grants/phd-fellowships/conditions.html\)](#).

Timing and selection

Deadlines of application: **1 February, 1 June, 1 October** of each year. Pre-selection takes place about 4 weeks after the respective deadline, and the final selection approximately 5 months after the respective deadline. Read more about the [selection process \(fellowships-grants/phd-fellowships/selection.html\)](#) and its [criteria \(fellowships-grants/phd-fellowships/selection-criteria.html\)](#)...

Who Can Apply for a PhD Fellowship?

The Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds (BIF) awards PhD fellowships to European citizens working in Europe or overseas, and to non-European citizens pursuing their PhD project in Europe. At the respective deadline (1 February, 1 June, 1 October) the university entrance qualification (secondary school leaving certificate/A-levels/university entrance test that permits to pursue first university studies after finishing school) must not have been achieved more than 8 years ago.

The PhD project must be experimental, in the field of basic biomedical research and aimed at elucidating basic biological phenomena of human life and acquiring new scientific knowledge. For a survey on the range of topics, please refer to the results of finished projects in [FUTURA \(news-network/futura.html\)](#), the international journal of the foundation. Natural scientists should have been awarded their ultimate university degree (diploma, MSc, BSc, or equivalent). Students who have not yet finished their MSc studies, i.e. who cannot provide their MSc certificate at the deadline, can only apply when they are able to hand in their certificate within 4 months after the deadline. Physicians, veterinary surgeons and pharmacists should have passed their state examinations.

At the deadline, the applicant should not have been working on his/her project for more than 6 months. BIF encourages applicants to apply for a fellowship when they are about to begin their PhD work; preliminary project results are not expected from applicants. The beginning of the PhD project is considered by BIF to be:

- the date of the **final** degree examination (e.g. BSc, MSc, Diploma, Licenciatura, Laurea) on the official certificate if the applicant continues to work in the same research group; or
- the month of arrival at the laboratory in which the PhD project is pursued if the applicant changes his/her research group, irrespective of the project he/she starts to work on.

In other cases, i.e. when participating in MSc/PhD programmes or graduate schools without an official final examination prior to the PhD project, please [contact us \(mailto:secretariat@bifonds.de\)](#).

If a laboratory presents 2 candidates for a PhD fellowship at the same application deadline, only one of them can receive a fellowship. This is why we would highly recommend that candidates from the same laboratory apply at different deadlines.

We do not support

- applied research, such as biotechnological and pharmaceutical development (e.g. development of assays for diagnostic purposes or drug screening; optimization or screening of substances/compounds for therapeutic use; development of drug delivery systems or vaccines);
- studies on the course of diseases or the treatment of symptoms;
- botanical and prokaryotic investigations unless they are of general biological importance;
- education; we can support only research; fellowships therefore cannot be used during the course and rotation phase of PhD programmes, but only for the duration of the PhD project.

For examples of projects that we do and do not support please see the PDF "[What we do and do not fund \(tl_files/bif/downloads/What we do and do not fund.pdf\)](#)".

In case you are not sure if your project fits into the scope of support, you are welcome to [contact us \(mailto:secretariat@bifonds.de\)](#).

Conditions for PhD Fellowships

Grantees can take up their Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds (BIF) fellowship by sending us their signed fellowship conditions, desired start date, and details of their bank account. The fellowship expires if not taken up within 6 months of the date of the letter of approval.

Amount

The basic monthly stipend amounts to 1,550 euros. In most countries, fellows are paid an additional flat rate of 150 euros per month to cover minor research-related costs (books, travel expenses, etc.). To adjust e.g. for differences in living costs, country-related premiums of up to 1,700 euros may be added (in the United Kingdom and Sweden currently 700 euros, in the USA and Denmark 800 euros, in Australia, Israel, and Canada 500 euros, in Switzerland 1,700 euros, in Ireland 600 euros, and in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain 200 euros). Depending on the cost of living, all other countries are grouped into one of these categories. For example, an unmarried fellow working in Germany currently receives 1,900 euros, in the USA 2,500 euros, in the United Kingdom 2,400 euros, and in Switzerland 3,400 euros.

Furthermore, a spouse allowance of 200 euros, a child allowance of 200 euros per child and/or childcare allowance of up to 500 euros may be added depending on the personal situation.

The initially awarded stipend sum is based on the information provided in the application. The fellowship holder is obligated to inform BIF about any changes in his/her personal or financial circumstances (change of marital status, income of spouse, etc.) so that BIF can adjust the amount of the stipend. The stipend is transferred in euros by the middle of each month.

In addition, fellowship holders can apply for travel allowances to present their research projects at international scientific conferences, to participate in methods courses, or to perform research in cooperating laboratories. Besides, BIF offers its fellows and alumni exclusive meetings, seminars, and trainings.

Duration

PhD fellowships are granted for 24 months and can be extended once for a maximum of 12 months. However, if the fellow began work on his/her PhD before taking up the fellowship, that period will be deducted from the maximum extension period. The beginning of the PhD work is considered by BIF to be the date of the final examination on the official certificate (e.g. BSc, MSc, Diploma, DEA, Licenciatura, Laurea) if the fellow continued to work in the same research group, or the date of arrival at the PhD laboratory if the fellow changed research groups.

In the event of illness, BIF usually continues payments for 2 months, after which time assistance would cease. Upon recovery, the fellowship may be extended by the period of absence due to illness.

Obligations

The Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds does not intervene in the work of fellows who, in turn, are obligated to make proper use of the allocated funds and to adhere to the rules of good scientific practice. Each fellow must devote his/her whole energy to his/her particular PhD project. In the laboratory, fellows should only be assigned to tasks directly connected to their PhD projects.

The fellowship has been granted to pursue the PhD project described in the application and in the laboratory specified therein. If a fellow decides to change the topic of the PhD project or the laboratory, he/she must inform BIF without delay. Major project changes require approval by BIF to continue the stipend. In the event of the project being successfully completed prior to expiry of the fellowship, payment will be discontinued.

Fellowship holders must present a project report for publication in FUTURA, BIF's international journal, at the beginning of the fellowship and a final report no later than 2 months after the PhD examination (defence). Furthermore, they are expected to acknowledge the Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds in all publications resulting from their work during the fellowship and to inform BIF about these publications also after the fellowship. Please note that BIF should be referred to in the acknowledgements as "Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds", not as "Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation". The latter is a different not-for-profit charity.

BIF does not provide any kind of insurance for its fellowship holders. They must insure themselves and their families against any possible costs and consequences caused by illness, accident, personal liability, etc.

Applications to other institutions

The Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds must be notified if an application is submitted to any other research-sponsoring institution. Should an applicant take up an award from another institution prior to the decision of BIF, the application to the Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds is considered withdrawn and BIF must be notified immediately. Please note that only written notification is legally binding.

Additional funding

The Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds fellowship is intended to cover the living expenses of the recipient. A BIF stipend may therefore generally not be held while receiving a regular personal income from any other institution or research institute with the following exceptions:

- An employment or a working contract of up to 5 working hours a week yielding a minor income while holding a BIF PhD fellowship is possible provided that the contract is not issued on the research project(s) supported by BIF and that the salary is fixed according to the standard PhD salary at the fellow's host institution.
- Tuition, bench fees, and overheads are not reimbursed by BIF. Therefore, an additional fellowship from another institution covering exclusively tuition fees can be accepted.

Legal and tax issues

Fellowships awarded by the Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds do not constitute any form of employment. In Germany (EStG § 3 No. 44) and in countries that maintain a double-taxation agreement with Germany, fellowships are usually exempt from tax. Fellowship holders should inform themselves whether the conditions for tax exemption are met and are responsible for paying possible taxes. A fellowship is not considered to be remuneration as defined by Article 14 of the German Social Law IV and is therefore not liable to social insurance. Provision of laws governing formation of capital, saving premiums, and residential building premiums do not apply.

The Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds reserves the right to adjust the stipend, e.g. due to currency fluctuations, and to reclaim any surplus payment or money paid in error. Furthermore, BIF may cancel the fellowship and demand repayment if the fellowship was obtained under false pretences or not used for its intended purpose, if the obligation to submit the final report is not fulfilled, or for any other sound reason.

Please note that the decisions of the Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds are incontestable.

Application for a PhD Fellowship

The application for a PhD fellowship of the Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds consists of two parts:

1. the online application via the [online application portal \(https://phd-application.bifonds.de/cgi-bin/onlineapplication/index.pl\)](https://phd-application.bifonds.de/cgi-bin/onlineapplication/index.pl) and
2. two paper copies of the application including one CD to be sent by regular mail to: Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds, Schusterstr. 46-48, 55116 Mainz, Germany

Both must be submitted by one of the respective deadlines of each year (date as per postmark for the paper version): **1 February, 1 June, 1 October**

The entire application - including the project proposal - must be written in English and by the applicants themselves. However, we recommend consultation with the scientific supervisor. The form of the presentation should be adequate but simple; please do not staple, tack or bind documents.

The two paper copies should contain all the data and documents listed under (1) – (9). The CD should be clearly labelled with applicant's first name, family name and email address and contain documents (1) - (7), preferably in one PDF file.

Applicants can facilitate the selection process by adhering to the following sequence:

1. to 5. two-sided printouts, if possible;
 1. title and summary of PhD project (max. 1,400 characters including blanks);
 2. detailed presentation of PhD project (please also refer to "[How to write a research proposal \(tl_files/bif/downloads/How_to_write_a_research_proposal_7_2015.pdf\)](#)"): formulation of the problem, current status of research, applicant's own groundwork, objectives, experimental strategy including methods of investigation (at least 4-5 pages for strategy and methods), references (including all authors and full titles of the papers cited), work schedule showing the anticipated duration of the entire project and the individual steps;
 3. reasons for wishing to work with a particular group;
 4. summary of final experimental thesis (e.g. bachelor, diploma or master thesis) before embarking on the PhD project; if no final experimental thesis was performed please give the reason(s) in the "additional information" field in the online application;
 5. list of applicant's publications (if applicable);
 6. certificates of all academic qualifications (including grades) and certificates of professional education prior to university (if applicable); in chronological order, the newest on top; photocopies suffice;
 7. () photocopies of high school diploma/secondary school leaving certificate (e.g. Abitur, Baccalaureate, A-Levels) and, where applicable, university entrance test (e.g. SAT/ACT, PAU, YGS/LYS, Joint Entrance Examination etc.);
 8. letter of recommendation from the supervisor of the PhD thesis;
 9. letter of recommendation from the supervisor of the diploma or equivalent thesis (only if changing research group for the PhD project); if no final experimental thesis was performed, letter of recommendation from the supervisor of the most important laboratory internship; letters of recommendation (on official letterhead and signed) have to be written in English and should be sent in a sealed envelope together with the application. In exceptional cases, the supervisors may send their letters of recommendation as a PDF attachment, clearly indicating the applicant's family name and first name, to [secretariat\[at\]bifonds\[dot\]de](mailto:secretariat[at]bifonds[dot]de) (<mailto:secretariat@bifonds.de>).

Selection Process for PhD Fellowships

What happens to your application?

Once both your online application and the paper version of your application have been received by the Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds, we check whether your application meets all formal criteria.

Applications that fulfil the eligibility criteria are forwarded to the foundation's [Board of Trustees \(about-us/board-of-trustees.html\)](#) for pre-selection. In the pre-selection, the Board of Trustees incl. six internationally renowned scientists evaluates each application according to the three most important criteria: (1) the applicant's achievements to date (grades and curriculum vitae), (2) whether the proposed PhD project meets the overall requirements (e.g. topic and required scientific quality), and (3) the scientific standard of the laboratory where the project is to be pursued. About 4 weeks after the application deadline, the Board members meet and decide which applications are admitted to the final selection process. Approximately 25% of the applications reach the final selection and are sent to independent external experts (peer reviewers) for additional evaluation. In addition, and whenever feasible, a member of the foundation's staff visits the applicant for a personal interview at his/her place of work and submits a written report to the Board of Trustees.

Application, evaluation of the external expert and the report on the personal interview are then scrutinized by the foundation's Board of Trustees (read more under [selection criteria \(fellowships-grants/phd-fellowships/selection-criteria.html\)](#)). The Board convenes three times a year and, after detailed discussion of each application, makes its decision. Approximately 15 fellowships are awarded at each Board meeting. The final decision on the applications is reached approximately 5 months after the deadline.

After each Board meeting, the foundation promptly informs the applicants of the outcome. Please note that only written notification is legally binding. The decisions of the Board are incontestable; and due to the large and ever-increasing number of applications, reasons for rejection cannot be given. Re-submission is possible only under certain circumstances, and only after consultation with the foundation.

Selection Process for PhD Fellowships

Selection Criteria

The scientists in the [Board of Trustees \(about-us/board-of-trustees.html\)](#) and the external peer reviewer evaluate applications according to the following three criteria:

- the applicant's achievements to date (grades and curriculum vitae);
- the scientific quality, e.g. originality and inventiveness, of the proposed PhD project;
- the scientific standard of the laboratory in which the project is to be pursued.

The three criteria in detail

When making their decision, Board of Trustees and external peer reviewer seek answers to the following questions.

- 1. Applicant's achievements**
What personal qualities has the applicant demonstrated during his/her training: top grades, talent and inquisitiveness, versatility and creativity, determination and motivation, diligence and perseverance? Has the applicant shown mobility or has he/she been rather settled? In the latter case, did he/she have sound reasons for not having changed country, university and/or supervisor? Is he/she capable of independent research? Does the applicant have a wide variety of techniques at his/her disposal?
- 2. Quality of PhD project**
Is the project imaginative and promising? Is it liable to yield new insights or is it a descriptive, industrious but uninspiring piece of work? Is the current state of knowledge correctly described and adequately documented? Are the methods of investigation state-of-the-art and sophisticated? Is the work schedule logical and realistic for a PhD project of about 3 years? Is the project really a research project in its own right or rather a subunit of a collaborative effort?
- 3. Standard of the laboratory**
Does the laboratory in which he/she wishes to pursue the PhD project have first-class equipment and use state-of-the-art techniques? Has the laboratory made significant contributions to the respective scientific field and does it have an international reputation in this field? In other words, is the laboratory one of the most suitable places worldwide for the project in question?

Extensions of PhD Fellowships

PhD fellowships of the Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds are awarded for 24 months and can be extended once for a maximum of 12 months. However, if the fellow began work on his/her project before taking up the fellowship, that period will be deducted from the maximum extension period.

The beginning of the PhD project is considered by BIF to be:

- the date of the final examination (e.g. BSc, MSc, Diploma, DEA, Licenciatura, Laurea) on the official certificate if the applicant continues to work in the same research group; or
- the month of arrival at the laboratory in which the PhD project is pursued if the applicant changes his/her research group.

Applications for extension are decided by the foundation's [Board of Trustees \(about-us/board-of-trustees.html\)](#), and may be submitted to the foundation by 15 January, 15 May, and 15 September of each year. A decision as to whether the extension can be granted is made approximately two months later (i.e. at the [upcoming Board meeting \(news-network/fellows-alumni/whats-on.html\)](#)).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about PhD Fellowships

How strict is the deadline?

The Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds can consider an application only when (1) the online application reaches the foundation by midnight on the day of the deadline (Central European Time) at the very latest; (2) the paper version was posted on that date at the very latest, i.e. when the date on the postmark of the letter does not exceed the deadline.

How strict is the rule about the period between university entrance qualification and application deadline? Are there any exceptions?

Exceptions are made in certain cases (i.e. children, prolonged illness, apprenticeship prior to university studies) after consultation with the Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds.

Is it possible to apply for a fellowship before the certificate of the final university examination (e.g. MSc, Diploma) has been issued?

Yes, you can provide the certificate of the final university examination (BSc, MSc or diploma) within 4 months after the deadline. If your official diploma cannot be issued in time, you can send us a transcript issued by the university.

What are the chances of receiving a fellowship?

Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds fellowships have the reputation of testifying excellence; thus, about 10% of all applicants are awarded a stipend. About 25% of the applications pass the first round of the selection process (pre-selection), of these about 30% receive a fellowship.

How important are the marks of the final examination(s)?

You will be competing with the very best graduate students from all over the world. So although your marks are part of only one of the three selection criteria ("applicant's achievement"), applicants with average grades and applicants who do not provide their marks in time for pre-selection have therefore only a slight chance of receiving a fellowship.

Is it required to be enrolled or accepted to a PhD programme before applying for the BIF PhD fellowship?

Regarding the application for a BIF PhD fellowship, it is not required that the applicant is enrolled in a specific PhD programme at the application deadline. What is essential for BIF, however, is that applicants have been accepted by a supervisor and institution to pursue their PhD – since they have to hand in a detailed PhD project description (see [Application \(fellowships-grants/phd-fellowships/application.html\)](#)) and a letter of recommendation from the supervisor of the PhD thesis.

Can I apply for a fellowship before all recommendation letters are available?

Yes, if you can hand in the recommendation letters within 6 weeks after the deadline.

Is it possible to apply if the PhD programme requires courses and lab rotations before starting the research work?

The foundation can support only research, not education. You can therefore take up the fellowship once you commence your PhD research project, but not for the course or rotation phase of PhD programmes.

Which nationalities are supported?

We support any nationality, provided the following criteria are met: you are a citizen of an overseas country (e.g. USA, India, China) who will pursue the PhD project in Europe, or you are a European citizen. The latter applies to citizens from all European countries, including the states of the former Soviet Union, Turkey and Israel.

Is it possible to apply if working with plants, on a theoretical or computational project or a biotechnological or clinical problem?

We can support projects using plants as model systems only if it does not deal with specific botanical, ecological or agricultural topics, but aims to elucidate a general biological phenomenon. Theoretical or computational projects can be supported if they address a question in the field of basic biomedical research (e.g. bioinformatics, structure of biomolecules, neuronal networks). Applied research (e.g. biotechnological development, drug design, drug development, pharmacological tests or improvements) or clinical studies and therapeutic applications/methods are not supported.

How important is the summary of the project in the online application?

This is of particular importance for the first round of selection (pre-selection). On the basis of the information provided in this summary, the foundation's [Board of Trustees \(about-us/board-of-trustees.html\)](#) decides whether your research project (its topic, objectives and experimental strategy) meets the overall requirements.

What are “university entrance qualifications” and “high school-leaving certificates”?

The final certificate of the high school, i.e. the certificate which shows that you have met the requirements for studying at a university, including marks (e.g. Abitur, Baccalaureat, A-levels) or – if not available – the result of your university qualifying (entrance) examination.

What is a “Diploma” or “equivalent thesis”?

This applies to the research work performed to meet the requirements for your final university examination (e.g. BSc, MSc, Diploma, DEA, Licentiatūra, Laurea etc.).

Which address should I use when sending my paper copies incl. CD?

Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds
Vera Schlick
Schusterstr. 46–48
55116 Mainz
Germany

Will my paper application or parts thereof be returned to me?

Please note that the paper copies of the application cannot be sent back.