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Frequently asked questions – PhD fellowships

FAQs about our PhD fellowships

Here you will find answers to the most frequently asked questions by applicants and fellowship holders in regard to the Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds (BIF) PhD Fellowship programme, organized into categories. Click on the links to go directly to the respective section.

PhD applicants: timing of application, eligibility, required documents, and general questions

PhD fellowship holders: travel allowances, extensions, BIF seminars, and family matters

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PhD applicants

Timing of application

How strict is the deadline?

The Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds can only consider an application if it reaches the foundation at the very latest by midnight on the day of the deadline (Central European Time).

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

Yes, but you have to be able to provide the final university degree certificate (MSc or diploma) within four months after the deadline. If your official diploma cannot be issued in time for the deadline, please include a transcript issued by your university in the documents you upload during your application. In addition, you have to provide at least one university degree certificate at the deadline (BSc, etc.).

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

Yes, you can, provided you have already chosen your PhD laboratory. The lab rotation period is not counted as start of your PhD project, even if your last lab rotation takes place in your PhD lab. Lab rotations are not funded by the BIF as it only funds research and lab rotations are considered as education. Please note though, that awarded fellowships must be taken up no later than six months after the date of the letter of approval.

Are there exceptions to the rule allowing a maximum of 8 years, i.e. 96 months, between university entrance qualification and application deadline?

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

Eligibility

Which nationalities are supported?

We support Europeans worldwide and non-Europeans pursuing their PhD within Europe. We define Europe geographically, which means the UK and the states of the former Soviet Union are included. Turkey and Israel are also treated as belonging to Europe. Applicants with European citizenship must have at least pursued their secondary school or university education in Europe, in order to be considered as European by the BIF. The latter also applies to candidates with dual citizenship.

Am I eligible if I work with plants, on a theoretical or computational project, or on a biotechnological or clinical problem?

We can support projects that use plants as model systems only if they do not deal with specific botanical, ecological, or agricultural topics, but aim 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, neural networks). We cannot support applied research (e.g. biotechnological development, drug design, drug development, pharmacological tests, or improvements), clinical studies, or the development of therapeutic applications and/or methods.

Do applicants need to be enrolled or accepted in a PhD programme?

It is not required that you are enrolled in a specific PhD programme. What is essential for the BIF is that you have been accepted by a supervisor and institution to pursue your PhD – since you have to hand in a detailed PhD project description (see How to apply) and a letter of recommendation from the supervisor of your PhD thesis.

Required documents

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

Recommendation letters must be submitted by the deadline. In exceptional cases, supervisors may send them at a later date, but no later than six weeks after the deadline for submitting applications.

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

The final certificate of the secondary school, i.e. the certificate which in many countries shows that you have met the requirements for studying at a university, including marks (e.g. Abitur, A levels, baccalaureat) and, if applicable, the result of your university qualifying (entrance/national) examination.

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 BIF decides whether your research project (its topic, objectives, and experimental strategy) meets the BIF's general requirements.

Where can I provide additional information that I think is relevant to my application?

You can use the field "Additional information" in the online application portal to supply details on, e.g. gaps in your CV or unusual achievements.

General questions

What are the chances of receiving a PhD fellowship?

Boehringer Ingelheim Fonds PhD fellowships have the reputation of being a certificate of excellence and you will compete with the top 5 % of students worldwide. About 25 % of the applications pass the first round of the selection process (pre-selection). In the end, less than 10 % of all applicants are awarded a stipend.

How important are the marks of the final degree?

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 only a slight chance of receiving a fellowship.

PhD Fellowship holders

Travel allowances

When can I receive a travel allowance?

Please note that travel allowances are solely for BIF fellows, i.e. holders of a PhD or MD fellowship, and are not related to the Travel Grant programme, which is for non-fellowship holders only.

As a BIF fellow, you may receive a travel allowance for the purpose of (a) presenting your data at an international scientific conference, (b) performing experiments important for your research project in a cooperating laboratory, or (c) participating in a methods course (preferably internationally renowned) that is useful for your research project.

Please send us a brief email in advance of your application in which you describe the meeting, course, or laboratory stay and how you and your project would benefit from it. We will then inform you as to whether it is within the funding scope and send you the detailed guidelines for your application.

PhD fellowship extension

How can I apply for a PhD fellowship extension?

If you are a PhD fellowship holder and want to find out whether and how you can apply for an extension of your fellowship, please refer to the section extensions on Conditions & extensions.

BIF seminars

How can I participate in a BIF seminar?

You do not need to apply. We invite all BIF fellows and alumni to the respective seminars whenever it is their turn. To do so, we need your up-to-date contact details, so please be sure to let us know whenever these change.

Family matters

I am married. Does this change my monthly stipend?

If your spouse earns less than 400 euros per month while you are receiving a PhD fellowship, you are eligible to apply for a spouse allowance of 200 euros

If your spouse earns less than 400 euros per month while you are receiving a PhD fellowship, you are eligible to apply for a spouse allowance of 200 euros per month. Please contact us for further details.

Does the BIF help with child care expenses?

As a PhD fellowship holder, you can apply for a child care allowance of up to 500 euros a month provided that your child is 12 years old or younger and you are paying for professional child care (e.g. a nanny or daycare centre for children). This also applies to children of your spouse who are living in the same household as you. Please contact us for further details.

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