

PhD Research

at the

University Medical Center Groningen

Are you a talented and aspiring researcher in the health sciences? The University Medical Center Groningen in the Netherlands welcomes you to discover our PhD opportunities!

We may be the right choice for you if you are looking for an academically demanding, interdisciplinary and truly international research environment in a European city offering one of the highest standards of living to its, largely student, population.

In the Netherlands we pride ourselves on the quality of our doctoral research. Our country is ranked 2nd in the world based on the number of publications per researcher, and 4th based on its impact worldwide.

The **University Medical Center Groningen** (UMCG) in the city of Groningen, the Netherlands, is the second-largest teaching hospital in the country and has an annual research output of about *2,000 scientific articles* and *180 PhD theses defenses*. The UMCG accounts for about *40% of all the research* carried out at the University of Groningen. PhD students at the UMCG receive their degree from the **University of Groningen**, a *Top-100 University* in the major world rankings. Furthermore, almost half of the UMCG's PhD candidates are international students.

The UMCG works at the interface of experimental basic science and clinical medicine. Translational medicine is at the core of all our teaching and research programs. The aim being to "translate" the knowledge, mechanisms and techniques discovered through basic scientific research into new approaches for the diagnosis and treatment of disease, while at the same time also designing new research questions based on clinical observations.

Although doctoral studies in the Netherlands are in many respects perhaps not all that different from the programs available in your own country, there are still some particular features of the PhD programs offered in Groningen that you should take into account when making your decision. Still interested? Read on!

Flexibility

When we say PhD 'program', we are not referring to a rigid structure with fixed enrollment dates and course schedules or even an entrance exam. PhD research in the Netherlands takes the form of a very flexible, individualized, tailor-made four-year program. This means that:

- ✓ You can start your program at any time of the year if you and your supervisor have so agreed.
- ✓ You will only take courses that support *your* research project.
- ✓ You work independently under the supervision of one of Groningen's Principal Investigators.

Quality

For us, the commitment to quality is one that works both ways. If you would like to be accepted as a PhD student at the UMCG, we firstly expect that you have the talent and motivation to successfully finish and defend your PhD thesis within four years. Furthermore, to be accepted for a PhD in Groningen:

- ✓ You must hold a master's degree or possess academic skills comparable to those of a master's degree graduate (e.g. MDs)
- ✓ You must be able to communicate, both written and orally, in English (no level of Dutch is required)

For our part, we will make sure that your supervisor is an academic who meets certain quality requirements and is therefore deemed a Principal Investigator (PI).

- ✓ Every year the academic output of our researchers is measured, and only those who have published at least eight peer-reviewed research articles in journals that belong to the top 25% of a relevant ISI-field over the past three years qualify as Principal Investigators.
- ✓ The PI who is to be your PhD supervisor is considered by us to hold the primary responsibility for your selection to our PhD program, a decision which will be based both on your academic quality and motivation, as well as your English skills.

Together, you and your supervisor are responsible for the completion of your PhD thesis. After a maximum of four years we expect that:

- ✓ Your thesis will consist of approximately four to five experimental chapters, of which at least two should already have been published (or accepted) as peer-reviewed articles, preferably in top-25% journals, at the time of your defense.

Research Topics

The common thread running through and binding all of the research and education taking place at the UMCG is that of Healthy Ageing, seen as a lifelong process beginning at conception. From their diverse perspectives, all UMCG researchers aim to contribute to the unravelling of the question as to why different people age differently. The approaches they take can range from those of basic molecular and cellular biology studies, to psycho-social factors, epidemiology and larger public health questions that impact ageing.

The UMCG has divided its research between five different institutes.

- GUIDE Institute: Chronic Diseases and Drug Exploration
- BCN-BRAIN Institute: Behavioral and Cognitive Neurosciences
- SHARE Institute: Health Research and Epidemiology
- W.J. Kolff Institute: Biomaterials
- CRCG Institute: Fundamental, Clinical and Translational Cancer Research

Funding

As a PhD student you will have a full-time commitment to your research and therefore will have no time for part-time jobs alongside your program. This means that most PhD students are dependent on external funding for the success of their project. There are several options available for external funding and our advice is to explore and apply to all of the funding opportunities that are available to you. Generally, funding options can be divided into four types of opportunity;

1. You graduate from one of our two-year research master programs and successfully defend your PhD proposal in the final semester. The most excellent students will be offered a three-year scholarship to complete their PhD at the UMCG.
- You design your own proposal
2. Your PhD supervisor may have successfully applied to funding from, for example, the European Commission or industry, for a particular project.
- Inquire directly with your supervisor whether this is the case. These are usually very competitive scholarships and the project is more or less fixed.
3. You apply to full-time external funding from, for example, your own government.
- If you identify a supervisor who is an expert in your area, you may discuss and agree with them the exact topic of your PhD research and apply to funding with a project you jointly agreed upon.
4. You apply to a *sandwich PhD project* with one of the strategic partners of the UMCG/Graduate School of Medical Sciences within its *Abel Tasman Talent Program*.
- You will be enrolled at both your home university as well as the UMCG and divide your research time more or less equally between the two institutions. It is important that the contributions of Groningen and the partner institute have a complementary value and that your supervisors on either side have agreed on your project and its structure. We will provide you with a full scholarship for the duration of your stay at Groningen. Usually students of this program will receive a double degree, and in all cases students will defend their thesis at the University of Groningen.

International Cooperation

In recent years, the UMCG, through its Graduate School of Medical Sciences, has developed a targeted internationalization strategy that is based on the establishment of sustainable collaborations with high-quality partners abroad. We have developed various funding modalities within our *Abel Tasman Talent Program* (ATTP), and central to this program are the sandwich PhD scholarships. See www.groningenbiomed.com.

The idea of these international partnerships is that they are beneficial to all involved: the UMCG, the partner institute, and you. These partnerships help to facilitate a better selection of candidates and improve the quality of our research output *and* your thesis.

What's next?

If, after reading all of this, you are still interested, we would be delighted to hear from you! Please check below for all of the steps you should next take into account.

1. Firstly, check *whether we have the expertise in your field of research*. If you have browsed our website and identified one of our researchers working in an area of interest to you, please let us know. If not, you may want to look for such a match via our website. In any case, send us your English-language CV and an overview of your research interests.
2. If indeed your topic matches with our expertise, the next step is for you to *be in touch with the researcher we have together identified*. Our PI will probably want to know more about you to be able to assess your academic and language skills, as well as your motivation. Usually they will want to conduct a Skype interview to begin with.
3. You will need to explore and decide on the *financing structure(s)* for your PhD. There are very few university funded full scholarships, but if you have the opportunity to apply to external funding, co-funding, or a sandwich PhD project, we really recommend to also look into step 4.
4. *Is Groningen really the place for you?* We completely understand that while the possibility of a four-year commitment abroad is exciting it is also quite scary, and so we want to ensure that you make the right choice for you. Therefore, if you have identified a potential research match and our PI is interested in hosting you, we would like to offer you a one-month partial grant that we call a "Research Voucher". With this grant you will be able to spend four weeks at a research department of your choice. The scholarship we offer will cover the cost of your stay, while you will be responsible for your own travel costs. Through this grant you will be given a chance to experience our research environment and the city of Groningen, and during this period your supervisor will also be able to assess your qualities.
5. Finally, make sure to keep the *Graduate School of Medical Sciences* informed of all your actions! If you involve us from the start we will be able to advise you on the matching of your research, on financing structures, on legal frameworks (e.g. in case of sandwich PhD structures), and much more. Importantly, we will also be able to bring you in touch with the right people. Moreover, it is quite possible that our PIs may not be aware of all of the details of the various collaboration opportunities there are, and so this is another area in which we may be able to help you out.

Contact

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