



University of Melbourne – University of Bonn Call for joint PhD project proposals 2025

The University of Melbourne and the University of Bonn have supported research collaboration through several initiatives. Through these activities we have recruited over 80 joint PhD candidates and funded several collaborative research projects to date. These initiatives include the [Bonn & Melbourne Research and Graduate School in Immunology](#) (est. 2016), the [Bonn & Melbourne Research and Graduate School in Decision Neuroscience](#) (est. 2020), and the [Bonn-Melbourne Research Excellence Fund](#) (est. 2020).

In 2025, the Universities of Melbourne and Bonn are seeking to expand on these opportunities through a University-wide call for joint PhD projects. Applications are invited, and encouraged, from all faculties and research areas.

Up to four joint PhD projects will be funded across two separate pairs of Principal Investigators (PIs), comprising one PI from Melbourne and one from Bonn. Each of these PI **pairs** will receive funding to support **two** joint PhD candidates, plus additional seed funding to support collaborative activities. Candidates and supervisors will join the established community of the Bonn – Melbourne joint PhD programs, offering opportunities to deepen and enrich their research networks. Additional integration of PhD candidates into the respective research environments at each institution is also expected.

Joint PhD candidates are enrolled at both institutions, perform their research under joint supervision, and are graded according to the academic standards of both institutions. Upon successful completion of the program, each candidate will be eligible to receive a joint PhD, recognised by two testamurs acknowledging the joint nature of the award.

Program structure

Up to **two** proposals will be funded, with each application supporting **two** joint PhD projects. Together, the candidates recruited to these projects will form a 2026 cohort of **four** jointly enrolled candidates. Successful PIs will also receive seed funding to support the growth in collaborative activity.

In each proposal pair, one candidate will have Melbourne as their Home institution, and the other will have Bonn as their Home institution. The **Home** institution is where the candidate will conduct the majority of their research, where they receive their scholarship from, and where they are likely to commence and conclude their candidature.

These projects also have the potential to be organized into **clusters**, bringing together multiple proposals under a shared research theme. While each dissertation project should be able to stand on its own and not depend on the funding of another project, supervisory teams combining multiple proposals should consider how forming a cluster will lead to the creation and proliferation of a new collaborative research network. Teams intending to cluster their proposals with other applications should indicate this in the application form.

All candidates recruited to the program must meet the minimum eligibility requirements to successfully enroll in the relevant PhD course at both Melbourne and Bonn. Candidates should aim to submit their thesis within three years of commencement – with the possibility of two six-month extensions, upon application, to a maximum of four years. The candidates must also spend **at least 12 months at each institution.** Time spent at Bonn and Melbourne can be determined depending on the needs of the project, so long as the candidate spends at least 12 months at each institution and the project is designed to be completed within three years.

Eligibility criteria

The supervisory team must consist of *at least* two Principal Investigators (PIs), one from Melbourne and one from Bonn. The PIs must have the capacity to serve as primary supervisors for two jointly enrolled PhD candidates.

Previous Bonn – Melbourne Research Excellence Fund recipients and applicants are eligible to apply.

Current supervisors of joint PhD candidates funded through the Bonn and Melbourne Research and Graduate School in Immunology are *not* eligible to apply.

Bonn and Melbourne academics must not have outstanding Progress Reports or Final Reports from any other University of Bonn International Office or University of Melbourne Researcher Development or ICRA Scheme.

Melbourne academics

Melbourne academics must be registered to supervise as per the [Graduate Research Training Policy \(MPF1321\)](#). Principal supervisors should be employed at Melbourne beyond the envisaged submission date of their PhD candidates (2030). If their employment contract does not extend beyond the submission date, then alternative arrangements must be in place, by either having:

- a) A named co-supervisor at Melbourne beyond the envisaged submission date of their PhD candidates (2030); *or*
- b) A letter of support from the respective Head of Department/Head of School detailing the arrangements in place to ensure continuity of supervision.

For more information, including the forms for supervisor registration, please consult [the information for supervisors section on the Graduate Research Hub](#).

Honorary employees whose primary academic affiliation is with the University of Melbourne are eligible to lead an application as a PI if they are a registered Principal Supervisor at Melbourne, **and** either:

- a) Their primary employer has entered into a written agreement for this call, using the provided approval form, to fund the Melbourne cash component of the collaborative activity (\$20,000AUD); *or*
- b) They participate at their own expense if they are otherwise unaffiliated (for example, they hold an emeritus position).

Bonn academics

Bonn academics must be authorized to act as primary supervisor for PhD candidates according to the relevant regulations of the respective faculties. The primary supervisors should be employed at Bonn beyond the envisaged submission date of their PhD candidates (2030). If their employment contract does not extend beyond the submission date, then alternative arrangements must be in place, by either having:

- a) A named co-supervisor at Bonn beyond the envisaged submission date of their PhD candidates (2030); *or*
- b) A letter of support from the respective Head of Institute, speaker of excellence cluster, or Bonn International Graduate School detailing the arrangements in place to ensure continuity of supervision.

Additional notes for all applicants

Additional colleagues (including other partners in Australia, Germany, or internationally) are not eligible to apply as PIs, although they can participate in the co-supervision of joint PhD candidates at their own cost. However, involvement of shared external partners that benefit the project, for example through research transfer/translation support or providing internship opportunities, are encouraged.

Adherence to respective equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies are a core feature of this program to ensure that all participants can do their best work, thrive and succeed. Applicant teams should consider how they can take meaningful steps in their future collaborations to foster an environment that values, supports and respects a diverse range of views, knowledge and experiences. Applicants should consider EDI including as it applies to gender, indigenous peoples, nationality, disabilities and career stages.

Applicants that do not satisfy these criteria will **not be eligible**.

Funding

A summary of funding for each project is included table below.

University of Melbourne	University of Bonn
Tax-free scholarship (stipend) for each Melbourne Home candidate. Refer to the Graduate Research Scholarship page for the full details.	Tax-free scholarship (stipend) of 1,800 € per month for each Bonn Home candidate***.
Tuition fee remission scholarship or waiver for both Melbourne Home and Bonn Home candidates.	There are no tuition fees at Bonn. Upon arrival in Bonn, Melbourne Home candidates receive an additional one-time lump sum of 500 € to cover student service fees at Bonn over the course of their PhD candidacy.
Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) single membership for any Melbourne Home international candidate who requires a student	OSHC for the duration of research in Australia for any Bonn Home candidates will be covered from the lump sum detailed below.

visa to study in Australia, when in Australia, and travel insurance whilst on Study Away.	Health insurance for Bonn Home candidates while in Germany will be paid from the candidate's stipend.
Relocation allowance for all Melbourne Home candidates to commence at Melbourne, up to a maximum of AUD\$3,000.	Relocation allowance for all Bonn Home candidates to commence at Bonn, up to a maximum of 1,500 € will come from the lump sum detailed below.
A AUD\$20,000 lump sum* to support Melbourne Home candidates and Melbourne PIs for relevant activities**, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidate travel • PI travel • Workshop costs or virtual collaboration expenses • Graduate recruitment 	A 15,000 € lump sum to support Bonn Home candidates and Bonn PIs for relevant activities**, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relocation allowance of up to 1,500 € • Candidate travel and OSHC • PI travel • Workshop costs or virtual collaboration expenses • Graduate recruitment

*The lump sum provided by Melbourne is pooled and allocated to the Academic Lead of the joint PhD program. The Academic Lead is responsible for the funds for the uses described.

**Please note that ineligible costs for the Melbourne and Bonn lump sums include: directly incurred staff (e.g. Research Assistants), replacement research/teaching costs, directly allocated costs including applicants' time, indirect costs/estates costs, publication costs, equipment, consumable costs, additional scholarships, conference attendance, tuition fees, and honoraria. Melbourne and Bonn reserve the right to determine the eligibility of expenses.

***Bonn academics are expected to allocate additional funds from their departments or faculties to either co-fund the scholarship (with approx. 10,000 € per year) or to convert the scholarship into a salaried PhD position.

Reporting and other conditions

Melbourne academics

Melbourne recipients will be required to provide regular updates on project progress during the candidature of their joint PhD candidates. These updates will be requested annually by the Academic Lead of the program. Recipients who fail to participate in regular reporting mechanisms may be found ineligible for participation in future Researcher Development or ICRA Schemes.

Bonn academics

Bonn recipients will be required to provide regular updates on project progress during the candidature of their joint PhD candidates. These updates will be requested annually by the International Office. Recipients who fail to participate in regular reporting mechanisms for this program may be found ineligible for participation in future International Office grant programs.

Evaluation of projects

The proposals will be reviewed according to the following criteria:

- **Project design and rationale:** How clearly presented and justified is the basis for, and design of, the joint PhD projects? Does the project seem feasible? Is it suitable for doctoral-level research and can it be completed within the scholarship term? What are the anticipated benefits of involving joint PhD researchers in the collaboration? What is the benefit of the candidate spending a minimum of 12 months at each institution?
- **Potential impact:** What is the level of originality and innovation in the research proposal? To what extent does the research proposal plan to address significant challenges and what is the anticipated benefit to local or international communities?
- **Collaborator complementarity:** What is the evidence of an existing research relationship, or added value of a new collaboration? How does the collaboration combine mutual areas of interest and strength?
- **Quality of supervision:** How will the PIs work together effectively when jointly supervising their PhD candidates? How will PhD candidates be integrated into the research environment at each university? Have the PIs accounted for any challenges that may arise when supervising a joint PhD candidate?
- **Capacity for expanded collaboration:** What is the extent of the planned collaboration between the PIs beyond joint supervision? How well does the proposal plan to leverage external funding? To what extent are future collaborations made possible as a result of the proposed activities? How could this project seed the development of a larger network of researchers?

Key Dates

Call for joint PhD project proposals opens	30 June 2025
Call for proposals closes	12 September 2025
Outcome notifications and start of recruitment	November 2025
Recruited joint PhD candidates commence	By October 2026

PIs must successfully recruit two joint candidates by 30 June 2026 (even if the candidates will not commence until later in 2026). If the PIs do not meet this deadline, the scholarships and seed funding will be recalled for use in a future call.

Application and submission

Each pair of PIs should submit one proposal that outlines two joint PhDs projects intended for two joint PhD candidates. These projects can be on a similar research topic or theme, but the candidates cannot rely on each other's results or completed thesis material to progress in their candidature.

The supervision concept put forward by the PIs should outline the planned integration of PhD candidates into their respective research environments. Bonn Home candidates are expected to be integrated into a Bonn International Graduate School or other structured PhD program at the University of Bonn.

The online application form requests:

- The details of the Bonn and Melbourne PIs, research groups involved, including CV's and links to PIs website.
- Overview of Program Design for both Melbourne Home and Bonn Home projects (including project rationale, potential impact, collaborator complementarity, supervision concept, and capacity for expanded collaboration) (up to 1,500 words)
- PhD project titles, abstracts (up to 250 words each), and outlines (up to 500 words each) of the proposed Melbourne Home and Bonn Home PhD projects
- A GANTT chart showing the division of time to be spent by the candidates at both institutions
- Previous collaborations between the PIs, if applicable
- Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) priorities
- Research Project Activity Type
- Fields of Research (FoR) codes and Socio-Economic Objective (SEO) codes
- All Melbourne applicants must attach an endorsement from the respective Head of School/Department and Associate Dean (Graduate Research) [ADGR sign off is not required for MDHS applicants].

PIs must submit a single, jointly prepared application in English via the University of Melbourne's [SmartyGrants](#) Portal by **7 AM CEST / 3 PM AEST on 12 September 2025**. The Melbourne administration team will transfer all submitted applications to the coordinating office in Bonn after the deadline. Applications should be written for an audience proficient, but not expert, in the field.

All Melbourne projects must ensure that the Head of Department/School and Associate Dean (Graduate Research)* endorsement is attached to the application using the approval forms provided on the Researcher Development Schemes website. Melbourne applicants who hold an Honorary position must also complete the Honorary declaration form.

*Please note that ADGR sign-off is not required for MDHS applicants.

For proposals involving a PI from Melbourne's Faculty of Arts only: You must also provide a statement addressing how the Melbourne and Bonn home candidates will meet the Melbourne Faculty of Arts PhD coursework requirements in your application. Please refer to the [Faculty's guidelines for additional information](#).

Elements of Bonn's Faculty of Arts' structured PhD program or other graduate course offerings at Bonn may offer useful options. It is recommended that the Bonn and Melbourne PIs consult with each other and contact Melbourne's Associate Dean (Graduate Research) if any further guidance is required.

Please follow this link to apply: <https://ricunimelb.smartygrants.com.au/BonnPhD-2025>

Contacts

Submission and Melbourne contact details:

The Researcher Development Schemes team
Research, Innovation & Commercialisation
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Bonn contact details:

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