Call for Applicants (PhD)

HPI-UCT Partnership in Digital Health

The Hasso-Plattner Institute (HPI) and University of Cape Town (UCT) Partnership in Digital Health annually grants PhD and Postdoctoral fellowships to qualifying students from the African continent for students working in the field of digital health, through the Schools of Information Technology (SIT) and Public Health (SPH).

In response to the overwhelming number of applicants we have received**, we have updated guidance on PhD candidates being sought** for positions in our program.

Our deadline for applications has been extended to 1 September 2026. Applications for 2026 PHD and Postdocs are now closed. The 2027 Postdoctoral fellowship will be advertised separately.

PHD Candidate for the School of IT

We seek **one PHD** student to start in 2027 based in Information Systems to work on optimising primary care electronic health records and administrative systems in the Western Cape.

PHD Candidates for the School of Public Health

We seek **two PHD** students to start in the School of Public Health in 2027:

- **One based in the Centre for Integrated Data and Epidemiological Research (CIDER) registering in the Division of Public Health Medicine or the Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics.**
  The potential lead supervisor to approach is **Prof. Andrew Boulle**.
  The successful 2027 PHD candidate would engage in secondary analyses of health data on child mortality, or interventions designed to improve child survival, including but not limited to: Population-wide analyses of real-word health data; Application of novel methods to health data processing or analysis; Evaluating or testing data-linked or digital-health interventions aimed at improving child survival; Data governance and research engineering; Health Information Exchanges, Health Normative Standards; Interoperability, Common Data Models; Electronic Medical and Health Records.

- **One registered in the Division of Health Policy and Systems.**
  The potential lead supervisors to approach are **AProf. Amnesty LeFevre** and/o**r AProf. Jill Olivier.**
  The successful 2027 PHD candidate would apply health policy and systems research methods - with a preferred focus on digital health intervention impacting on *maternal and child health survival in South Africa*, including but not limited to: Implementation research assessing digital health intervention with a focus on systems functioning or effect; Optimizing the use of digital technologies and data systems to strengthen primary health care; Evaluating the implementation, adaptation, scale-up, and sustainability of data-linked and digital health interventions; Strengthening learning systems through integrated digital solutions and decision-making; Assessing CHAMPS-informed approaches across diverse provincial and health system contexts in South Africa; Digital health policy, governance and ethics.

For the Public Health candidates, additional or alternative supervisors will be identified as required based on topic area. In light of the large number of requests, we ask that prospective candidates **not reach out to other Department/SPH faculty for this call.**

Both SPH PhD candidates should be based full-time in Cape Town, South Africa, for the duration of their PhD. Successful candidates need to be present in Cape Town to participate in the growing network of students and faculty participating in the digital health partnership between HPI and UCT.

The funder has a preference for PhD topics broadly related to maternal and child survival. Depending on the proposed PHD topic, there may be opportunities to spend time at the Child Health and Mortality Prevention Surveillance (CHAMPS) network sites—a global platform for comprehensive surveillance of stillbirths and deaths among children under five. Alternatively, candidates could focus on child survival in the Western Cape province, e.g. working with routine health services and associated information systems in the Province.

Eligible candidates will meet the following criteria:

1. **Hold a Masters degree**, supported by a good dissertation.
2. **For registration in the School of Public Health**, this should be in a core public health area such as Epidemiology, Biostatistics, Health Systems, Health Economics, or a related field, or in a clinical or social science discipline with evidence of appropriate research expertise in a public health area.
    a. **PhD candidates in Public Health Medicine/ Epidemiology and Biostatistics** should have advanced skills in health data analytics, epidemiological methods, and quantitative research.
    b. **PhD candidates in Health Policy and Systems** should have existing interdisciplinary skills and experience in Health Policy and Systems Research, with a preference for candidates with a strong background and experience of Implementation and Evaluation Research. Interdisciplinary research methods skills, including strong qualitative analytical skills would be considered an advantage.
3. **PhD candidates in the School of Information Technology** should have a master's degree in computer science, information systems or a related field.
4. **Prior history of peer review publications is advantageous (in particular first-author publication)**
5. **Be proficient in English** as attested by a recent score (obtained within 3 - 5 years before application for admission) of at least 570 (paper-based test) or 230 (computer-based test) on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL); or a recent overall band score of 7.0 (with no individual element of the test scoring below 6.0) on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). If your medium of education was in English then you are exempt from this requirement.

Accepted candidates should be prepared to study full-time in Cape Town, South Africa, and will be required to secure a study visa if not from South Africa.
The bursary includes funding to cover:

- Up to EUR 1590 per annum for tuition
- EUR 13800 per annum / EUR 1150/month towards fees and expenses, subject to postgraduate funding limits
- EUR 1500 once-off equipment allowance
- EUR 2000 per annum for conference travel

Each member may normally be funded for up to 3 years, subject to degree requirements and demonstration of adequate progress.

*Applications open close on **1 September** for admission in February of the following year*

To apply, please submit a curriculum vitae (2-3 pages); Academic Transcripts that show the marks/scaling of your prior degree; TOEFL/IELTS Results; A brief research proposal (2-3 pages) based on one of the three focus areas described above; Please submit a single pdf file, comprising ALL the application materials, electronically to https://limesurvey.uct.ac.za/index.php/258499?lang=en

Your proposal must outline your research question(s) and proposed methodology for conducting the research or alternatively outline your research interests and how your expertise and interests align with the advertised focus areas. If you have more than one area of interest, please indicate this at the end of your research proposal. Supervision options will be explored as part of the selection process, based on topic alignment with available supervisors.

Shortlisted candidates will be contacted and expected to arrange for three reference letters to be submitted and be available for a video-conference interview. Questions or requests for more information can be made to the HPI at UCT Coordinator at hpi-admin@uct.ac.za, to the SIT co-lead Melissa Densmore and/or to SPH co-leads Drs. Amnesty LeFevre and Andrew Boulle.

The University of Cape Town reserves the right to disqualify ineligible, incomplete and/or inappropriate applications. The University of Cape Town reserves the right to change the conditions of award or to make no awards at all.