

NIHR Global Health Research Group on Vaccines for vulnerable people in Africa (Vanguard)

Call for PhD Opportunities

Vaccines are extremely effective public health interventions. COVID-19 and recent Ebola outbreaks have brought this to public and political attention. But not everyone benefits equally. Structural factors (social, biological, geographical, political circumstances that determine the benefits of vaccination) render some communities vulnerable, unable to secure optimal health benefits from vaccination programmes. This both drives health inequity and undermines wider vaccine impact by allowing persistence of non-immune communities as foci for recurrent disease outbreaks.

Our goal is to identify modifiable structural, social and biological determinants of impaired vaccine impact in vulnerable African communities, and hence develop integrated strategies to address them and to drive health equity.

Our overall aim is to identify key structural and modifiable determinants of impaired vaccine impact in vulnerable communities to inform the development of integrated strategies to address them.

Our specific objectives are, in Uganda and Kenya, to

1. Investigate biological drivers and mechanisms of population differences in vaccine response
2. Understand how structural, social and biological determinants of vaccine response interrelate to determine vaccine impact
3. Identify and model integrated strategies to inform development of future interventions to optimise vaccine impact among vulnerable populations

Integrated with our research programme we have two supporting objectives, to

4. Empower vulnerable communities to optimise vaccine impact for their people through a process of co-learning and co-creation between them and researchers, and
5. Build capacity for, and a culture of, consultative, collaborative multidisciplinary vaccine research in East Africa.

The Vanguard programme is run in collaboration with eight institutional partners:

- KEMRI Wellcome Trust Research Programme (KWTRP)
- London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM)
- Makerere University – Uganda
- Ministry of Health Uganda
- MRC/UVRI & LSHTM Uganda Research Unit (MUL)
- The Chancellor Masters and Scholars of the University of Oxford
- Uganda Christian University (UCU)
- Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI)

Opportunities available

We shall support three PhD studentships, two based in Uganda, one in Kenya; but there will be opportunities to be attached to other sites for some of the work. The PhD student will register at either Makerere University or Uganda Christian University in Uganda or the Open University in Kenya.

PhD studentship 1 - Biosciences: The PhD student will be based in Uganda and work with the team to address Objective 1, “to investigate the biological drivers and mechanisms of population differences in

vaccine responses". The PhD student will enrol at Makerere University. Potential supervisors include Dr Gyaviira Nkurunungi (MUL), Professor Sarah Atkinson (KWTRP) and Dr Katie Ewer (Oxford).

PhD studentship 2 - Community surveys and qualitative studies: The PhD student will be based at KWTRP and will work on the VAnguard community study to plan and implement field investigations (community surveys and qualitative studies) to explore structural, social & biological determinants impairing vaccine impact. The PhD student will enrol at Open University. Potential supervisors include Professor Dorcas Kamuya (KWTRP), Dr Primus Chi (KWTRP), Professor Alison Elliott (MUL) and Professor Emily Webb (LSHTM).

PhD studentship 3 - Stakeholder, Community and Public Engagement and involvement: The PhD student will be based in Uganda. The PhD student will describe the influence of communication on emerging issues around vaccines and empower vulnerable communities to optimise vaccine impact for their people through a process of co-learning and co-creation between them and researchers. The PhD student will enrol at Uganda Christian University. Potential supervisors include Professor Monica Chibita (UCU), Professor Dorcas Kamuya (KWTRP) and Dr Primus Chi (KWTRP).

In addition to the formal training, the PhD candidates will benefit from other trainings including but not limited to scientific writing, grant writing, science journalism, policy analysis, media, public and community engagement, evidence appraisal, scientific preparedness for emergencies, research management, responsible conduct of research and safeguarding, Good Clinical Research Practice and Human Subjects Protection.

The programme will provide a laptop, tuition fees, medical insurance and a stipend throughout the studentship.

To be eligible, candidates must:

- i) Be a national of a country in sub-Saharan Africa aged 45 years or below
- ii) Hold a minimum of an upper second-class honours first degree from a recognised university. A master's degree is preferable and a requirement for Ugandan universities but equivalent experience may be considered for Open University.
- iii) Have at least one-year full time equivalent work experience since completion of their first degree. Project time during the master's project may be considered.

How to apply

- Applicants should complete the application form on the link below and attach an updated CV and copies of academic transcripts by **30th June 2022**.
https://redcap.link/VAnguard_PhD_application
- Successful candidates will be required to register either at Makerere University or Uganda Christian University, or Open University in Kenya.
- Only candidates who meet the minimum criteria will be shortlisted and contacted.
- Applications received after the closing date will not be considered.

Enquiries

Informal enquiries concerning the opportunities can be made to Prof Sam Kinyanjui (skmuchina@kemri-wellcome.org) or Achilles Kiwanuka (achilles.kiwanuka@mrcuganda.org)