

LERU DOCTORAL SUMMER SCHOOL 2026, 06-11 September

Inter-, Multi- and Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Health

The LERU Doctoral Summer School at KU Leuven seeks to foster increased cooperation in research on health across all academic disciplines and in tandem with extra-academic partners. The timing is fortunate, since 2026 also sees the opening of Leuven's new Vesalius Museum of science, healthcare and society. Participants in the Summer School will be invited to join in pre-opening trial runs of the permanent exhibition and share their critical assessments in dedicated sessions of the Summer School programme.

Andreas Vesalius is an ideal patron scientist for a new generation of doctoral researchers from all disciplines of LERU's comprehensive universities. Some 500 years ago, he entered Leuven University where he studied Arts before switching to Medicine in Paris five years later. Returning to Leuven, he defended his doctoral dissertation on the 10th-century Persian physician and polymath Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, and a few years later, having moved to Basel, made his lasting mark with the publication of the groundbreaking work on human anatomy *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543). As a physician and humanist who collaborated with artists, Andreas Vesalius exemplifies the value of multidisciplinary knowledge-making. His life and work offer an inspiring frame for addressing fundamental questions about life, health, science and scholarship today.

The LERU Doctoral Summer School 2026 welcomes participants from all disciplines whose research focusses principally on health broadly conceived or promises to lend itself to extension to health research. Day One features expert surveys on inter-, multi- and transdisciplinary health research and on research-based public engagement initiatives on health, as well as a presentation of the Vesalius Museum, whose permanent exhibition will serve to loosely structure the Summer School programme. Days Two, Three and Four feature morning sessions by leading health researchers and afternoon sessions devoted to museum testings and group project work facilitated by local experts. On the final day, groups finalise their presentations and share their projects with university leaders, academics and guests.

During lunch breaks, there will be poster sessions on LERU Health Institutes and Young Researchers' Careers Initiatives.

We aim for a course that corresponds to approximately 5 ECTS.

THEMES

The Summer School is structured around three thematic anchors, inspired by the narrative of the permanent exhibition of the forthcoming Vesalius Museum. These themes are fundamental to how we understand our bodies and health, and therefore are broad enough to engage participants from all disciplines:

1. **Boundaries of Life** – When does life begin, and when does it end?
2. **Boundaries of Age** – How do we map growth and ageing?
3. **Boundaries of the Normal** – How can health and illness be understood as a spectrum rather than a binary?

These anchors invite contributions from across the disciplinary spectrum, including biomedical sciences, social sciences, the humanities, natural sciences, technology, and the arts.

PROGRAMME

Monday

- Introductory session on “Inter-, Multi- and Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Health: The State of the Art”
- Introductory session on “Citizen Health: Public Engagement in Medical Matters”
- Presentation of the Vesalius Museum by Academic Director prof. dr. Tinne Claes
- Group formation:

Five groups of 10+ participants each will be formed in advance. Each group should be maximally diverse in terms of disciplines and home universities.

The assignment for each group is to work towards statements of intent (pitches) for one or two interdisciplinary research projects to be presented on the closing day. On Monday, the group members will introduce themselves and their research and share what they anticipate as a good outcome of the summer school for their doctoral training and future career. On Tuesday, groups will discuss possible topics for the project(s) they will further develop on Wednesday and Thursday, with a view to presentation of a firm and informed pitch on Friday. Group work on projects will be facilitated by members of KU Leuven’s [Institute for the Future](#), which organises an annual programme of [21st-Century Training in Transdisciplinary Skills](#) tailored for doctoral researchers.

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday

Morning sessions

All speakers will be invited to share their expert knowledge in a presentation that will engage participants with widely differing disciplinary backgrounds. To further facilitate this, all speakers will be invited to submit a brief profile of their discipline and of their own expertise in advance, to be included in the participant preparation pack. In turn, participants will be asked to reflect in advance on possible new perspectives for their own research in response to the speakers' profiles.

Tuesday: **Boundaries of Life: when does life begin, and when does it end?** (speakers TBC)

Advances in reproductive technologies and neonatal care have shifted the threshold of viability, while ethical, legal, and religious traditions continue to offer divergent views on the status of the unborn. At the other end, intensive care and neurology have complicated definitions of death, distinguishing between coma, brain death, and vegetative states. Historical and cultural perspectives reveal how societies have redefined these boundaries in response to changing technologies, values, and beliefs. The Summer School invites participants to reflect on how such limits are drawn, contested, and reshaped across disciplines and over time.

Wednesday: **Boundaries of Age: How do we map growth and ageing?** (speakers TBC)

The body, including the brain, is often described as “developing” until 18 and “declining” after 65, with adulthood in between assumed to be stable. This framing has consequences: most research is conducted on adults, and most medication is tested primarily on adult populations, leaving children and older adults as “orphan” groups in science and care. Separate subdisciplines such as paediatrics and gerontology have developed to address these groups, but their very existence also reflects how the “default” model of health care and research assumes adulthood. Growth charts, developmental norms, and biomarkers of ageing are used to classify life stages, yet these tools also carry assumptions that can oversimplify or distort the complexity of human development. The Summer School invites participants to reflect on how growth and ageing are charted, and what is at stake when life is divided into stages.

Thursday: **Boundaries of the Normal – How can health and illness be understood as a spectrum rather than a binary?** (speakers TBC)

We tend to classify people as either “healthy” or “ill,” yet in practice the distinction is rarely so clear. Chronic conditions, disabilities, and mental health challenges blur the line, while new diagnostic technologies generate ever finer gradations of risk and variation. Social and cultural factors also shape what is considered normal or healthy, from workplace expectations to gendered patterns of diagnosis and treatment. Mathematical models and disability studies alike suggest that health exists on a continuum rather than a binary. The Summer School invites participants to examine how boundaries of the normal are drawn, how they shift across time and context, and what it means to live between categories.

Afternoon sessions

- Group Projects
- Museum testings: Participants will test the (yet unopened) exhibits of the Vesalius Museum's permanent exhibition, which follows the human life cycle and addresses both boundaries of life. They will have time to explore the displays, complete questionnaires, and engage in discussions with each other and the museum team.

Friday

Morning session

Finalising pitch presentations

Afternoon session

Plenary group pitch presentations to KU Leuven researchers and guests

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning		Welcome Inter-, Multi- and Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Health: The State of the Art Citizen Health: Public Engagement in Medical Matters	<i>Boundaries of Life</i> Two talks, seminars or workshops by KU Leuven and/or international health research experts	<i>Boundaries of Age</i> Two talks, seminars or workshops by KU Leuven and/or international health research experts	<i>Boundaries of the Normal</i> Two talks, seminars or workshops by KU Leuven and/or international health research experts	Finalising presentations of group projects, facilitated by academic and support staff
Lunch	Poster sessions on LERU Health Institutes and Young Researchers' Careers Initiatives					
Afternoon	Arrival and check-in	Presentation of the Vesalius Museum Group formation	Work on group project & Testing Vesalius Museum exhibits	Work on group project & Testing Vesalius Museum exhibits	Work on group project & Testing Vesalius Museum exhibits	Presentations of group projects to KU Leuven researchers and leaders and guests Drinks
Evening	TBA (one social event, one keynote, closing dinner)	TBA	TBA	TBA	Dinner	