MPhil Information Pack

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What is an MPhil?

- An MPhil (Master of Philosophy) is a degree you can obtain through intercalating. It is classed as a postgraduate research degree.

- The intercalated MPhil is offered by the Department of Women’s & Children’s Health (part of the Institute of Translational Medicine (ITM)). This means topics are typically in the field of Women’s health or paediatrics.

- The MPhil is a 12 month programme where you can devote all your interest and work time to become highly involved in an area that really interests you. Students are typically completed before the end of 12 months.

- There are no exams- the MPhil is assessed through your written thesis and an oral viva.

- There is no formal/compulsory timetabled teaching in an MPhil. Though you are welcome/encouraged to book onto any of the teaching/workshops offered by the Institute of Translational Medicine or the university’s doctoral college.

- The MPhil is an opportunity to play a major part in important and highly influential research, alongside leading professionals and with opportunities for publication and attending or presenting at conferences being plentiful.
Read about the experiences of previous MPhil students:

Abed

1. A Very brief description of what you did during your MPhil.

The aim of my MPhil project was to develop personalised management pathways for patients with incidental intracranial meningioma. Incidental meningioma is an increasingly frequent clinical problem. Although a consensus exists on active-monitoring being the best first-line management option, clear clinical guidelines are lacking. The project comprised two parts: a systematic review and meta-analysis of the current literature to identify prognostic factors of disease progression and further areas for research. This was then followed by a retrospective study of 500 patients at the Walton Centre which we used to build a management algorithm, stratifying patients based on clinical and radiological characteristics.

2. Brief description of your general day to day routine during your MPhil.

I used the first four months (Sep-Dec) of the MPhil to finalise the systematic review, write the first chapter of my thesis (introduction to meningiomas), and identify appropriate patients to include in the retrospective study. I used to work in the Department of Neurological Science, Clinical Sciences Building, Aintree, Monday to Friday 9-5. These months were relaxed and were mainly about reading articles that could be used in the introduction and some writing a well. I had started the systematic review prior to the MPhil having identified the articles suitable for inclusion and so also used these months to extract the relevant data. Identifying appropriate patients for the retrospective study required review of notes and imaging to ascertain which patients, from a master file containing ~2000, had incidental meningiomas. I also got a chance during these months to attend a few stats courses on campus which were extremely helpful. I then started collecting data for the retrospective study from notes, CT and MRI scans. This took me about 3 months (Jan-March). These months were busy and so I had at times to stay in Aintree till late and to go and collect data on weekends. During these months I also analysed the data from the systematic review. From April till June, I wrote up the systematic review, analysed the data from the retrospective study and wrote it up as well. I had a thesis draft ready by the end of June and the final version was submitted mid-July.

3. Any tips you wish you knew before starting/applying for your MPhil.

Mainly the procedures involved in submission of thesis and leading up to the MPhil. The idea of doing an MPhil was suggested to me by my supervisor early on during 4th year and so I had a time to learn and prepare what’s involved in terms of proposals, funding, ethical approval and so on. Also, regarding thesis submission, a few forms will need to be submitted a few months before and these are essential to ensure that a viva can happen before the beginning of the next academic year.

4. What achievements (conferences, publications etc.) or great experiences have you had as a result of MPhil work?

MPhil related: Five national oral presentations (including British Neuro-Oncology Society meeting and Society of British Neurosurgeons and Association of British Neurologists meeting), 2 international oral presentations (European Association of Neuro-Oncology (EANO) and Society for Neuro-Oncology meetings) and 3 publications under review. Undertaken during MPhil but not related: Being in the Walton for the whole year, I got the chance to participate in other projects. These also resulted in a few oral presentations and a publication in the Journal of Neuro-Oncology. I also as a result of these projects put together, got 3 awards including a young investigator award of excellence by EANO. Also, although overall a busy year, the relative freedom not being restricted by frequent deadlines and regular lectures allowed me to be on the committee of a few societies such as neurosoc.
5. If you were in the position of a 3rd/4th year and thinking about intercalating, and knowing what you do now, would you do an MPhil again?

Without a doubt!

Clare

1. A Very brief description of what you did during your MPhil.

I completed a qualitative research project with Dr Gladstone looking at why and where mothers go to support their young children in the Merseyside area. I undertook 22 semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion as part of my research methods before transcribing and analysing these through thematic content analysis. My results showed the importance of building a relationship, professionalism and experience when caregivers were seeking support.

2. Brief description of your general day to day routine during your MPhil.

August to December - learning about qualitative research including attending various courses. Fortnightly meetings with the research team. Settling on my research questions and methods.

January-April - Undertaking the interviews and focus group discussion and transcribing.

April - August - analysis the results and deciding on the themes. Writing the thesis.

3. Any tips you wish you knew before starting/applying for your MPhil.

It was a lot more work than I envisaged but at the same time a lot more rewarding! It can be hard to settle on your research question but that is okay, it is a fluid process at first!

4. What achievements (conferences, publications etc.) or great experiences have you had as a result of MPhil work?

It was presented at the Liverpool Academic Research Conference

RCPCH annual conference

BMJ comments

Mentioned in the houses of parliament by my supervisor as evidence to keep sure start centres.

It has helped me secure my current job; clinical teaching fellow for the University of Bristol. My knowledge of qualitative research was vital for the educational research element of the job.

5. If you were in the position of a 3rd/4th year and thinking about intercalating, and knowing what you do now, would you do an MPhil again?

Without a doubt. It is fairly unique to start F1 with an MPhil and the research skills I have learnt have been invaluable when undertaking QI, audits etc. as part of the foundation years. As a Clinical Teaching Fellow I have been able to use the skills to lead my own projects in educational research and also support my students with their projects.
Lewis

1. **A Very brief description of what you did during your MPhil.**

An investigation into the pharmacokinetics of intravenous aminophylline in children. This comprised two systematic reviews, analysing the therapeutic range and appropriate dosage of the drug and a pharmacogenomic study of children administered the drug in Alder Hey.

2. **Brief description of your general day to day routine during your MPhil.**

Very self-directed. Contact time averaged around one hour a week with my supervisor. This was enough really as I was quite happy to get on with stuff independently. I much preferred it to the low yield activities of undergraduate medicine (clinics, ward rounds and lectures) most work was done at home on a laptop, so a lot time in front of a screen. There was little time spent with patients or in a lab.

3. **Any tips you wish you knew before starting/applying for your MPhil.**

The whole fun of an MPhil is how self-directed it is, so you have a great deal of control over what you do. If you don’t like the sound of a project then you don’t have to do it. Likewise, if you’re interested in perusing something then supervisors were very happy to help (I was interested in the genetics stuff, and made this an entire chapter of the thesis). It’s a journey and it’s impossible to plan what you’re final thesis will look like on the first day.

I was ‘warned’ before enrolling that an MPhil doesn’t have a finish date, and if I don’t submit in time, then I won’t be awarded the degree and will have to defer it. This didn’t happen so wasn’t really an issue. Also, if you want points for the UKFPO stuff you have to work quite quickly (this wasn’t the case for my MRes colleagues who had it all organized for them). I did get this sorted but it involved quite a lot of emails.

4. **What achievements (conferences, publications etc.) or great experiences have you had as a result of MPhil work?**

I have six publications, two poster presentations and a thesis. MRes students generally don’t get published (and if they do, it’s often years after they complete and they aren’t first name authors). I’d say this was the best bit of the whole degree, as learning how to write a manuscript is a skill in and of its self, and isn’t something that you ‘just learn’. So I feel quite competent writing manuscripts now, which means it’s easier to get published. As a doctor it makes people far more willing to work with you in a research settings (look at what I can do, I’m not just your data collection monkey!). Again MRes students don’t really get this from what I gather.

I also had quite a bit of free time due to my lack of clinical placement so I decided to learn German and play the piano. This were more flexible and spontaneous.

5. **If you were in the position of a 3rd/4th year and thinking about intercalating, and knowing what you do now, would you do an MPhil again?**

Yes. Absolutely. It’s quite different from undergrad medicine though. Firstly, you’re not taught anything formally. At all. No one will sit you down and take you thorough systematic reviews 101. So there’s a lot of self-teaching of quite difficult and niche topics, for which there aren’t nice colourful accessible resources for. This is a massive contrast to medicine, where resources are easy and exam techique is well established. At times it felt like I was running before I was walking, especially when trying to devise a study methodology. Having said that, the whole point of research is trying to find out new information, so most of the literature out there isn’t found in textbooks, but in journals. Undergraduate medicine doesn’t prepare you very well for
critical appraisal, statistics, study design, literature searching, scientific writing, peer review, and loads of other stuff that is essential when undertaking a research degree. Before starting I didn’t realize how basic my knowledge of these was! I did eventually learn how to do them, but it wasn’t in a step wise, systematic way. I don’t know if other degrees do this either, and this is probably part of the learning experience of being an autonomous student. Just get on with it!

MPhils are quite solitary and you certainly won’t meet anyone or make friends through it. They’re also quite unusual degrees, and so it’s quite difficult to find other students to give you tips on how to succeed. But these are minor things, MPhils are great!

Applying for the MPhil

It is recommended beforehand to browse vignettes of available opportunities, and to contact/meet with the supervisors to discuss more about what the project will involve, how you will be supported etc.

You should send a CV and covering letter of no more than 300 words outlining your strengths & commitment to a career in women’s & children’s health to Kim Hall (kjhall@liverpool.ac.uk) by 5pm on Friday 18th January 2019.

For the medical school side of applying, the process is virtually the same as applying for any other intercalated degree- by completing & submitting the necessary forms on VITAL. There may also be an extra form for you and your supervisor to complete & sign. The intercalation administration team at the medical school is very helpful.

Additionally, the medical school may ask you to provide a brief outline of the plans for your upcoming MPhil year.

The medical school may also ask you to discuss with the intercalation lead to check that yourself and your supervisor(s) are happy with what you’ll be doing for the year ahead, as the MPhil is more self-directed than other intercalations, it’s good to check that everyone is
happy with how the year will pan out. You may also be asked about things such as ethical approval and alternatives in case your initial plan hits a snag, so make sure you discuss these with the supervisors offering the projects you’re interested in.

Remember to look into funding options for when you apply too. For those students eligible for the NHS bursary, this can be used for the tuition fees.

**Useful contacts & links:**

- The supervisor(s) of the project you’re interested in.

- Professor Paul McNamara- Women’s & Children’s Departmental lead for Postgraduate Research: mcnamp@liverpool.ac.uk

- Dr Dharani Hapangama- Lead for postgraduate studies, Department of Women’s health, University of Liverpool: Dharani.Hapangama@liverpool.ac.uk

- Jared Murphy- MPhil Student & ITM student representative 2018/19: j.a.murphy@student.liverpool.ac.uk

- Kim Hall- send applications to by 5pm on Friday 18th January 2019: kjhall@liverpool.ac.uk

- Medical school intercalation administration: intercal@liv.ac.uk
• University of Liverpool- Department of women’s & children’s health [https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/translational-medicine/departmentsandgroups/womens-and-childrens-health/studies/]

• Child health information- [https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/study/postgraduate-research/degrees/child-health/]

• Women’s health information- [https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/study/postgraduate-research/degrees/womens-health/]

• University of Liverpool postgraduate research fees & funding- [https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/study/postgraduate-research/fees-and-funding/]

• NHS bursary- [https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-bursary-students]