# MPhil in Population Health Sciences

**Dissertation supervision guidelines**

Date: July 2023

**Note:** this information should be read in conjunction with the Dissertation Guidelines for the course.

Each student will work with a dissertation supervisor, who will support their work on the dissertation. Students will need to confirm their Dissertation Supervisor as part of the *Research Skills* module by the end of Michaelmas term.

Students are recommended to select a dissertation project from those presented in the proposal collection released prior to the dissertation fair, or to develop a project with an internal supervisor that builds on the content of the course modules or is relevant to their chosen specialisation theme. When choosing a topic, it is important to remember that while there are lots of options, we cannot guarantee supervisor availability for all possible research interests, so students’ topic choice should be guided by the research interests of the people available.

*Dissertation Supervisors*

The Dissertation Supervisor takes primary responsibility for supervising the student’s research project and dissertation.

* All students must work with an internal supervisor – someone who is a member of one of the three population health sciences departments (PHPC, MRC-Epi, MRC-BSU) or who teaches on the MPhil PHS. Students may in addition, in exceptional cases, identify a co-supervisor (either internal or external). In such cases, the student must seek permission from their primary internal supervisor, and from a theme lead or education manager. Students must also ensure that both supervisors have discussed the project with each other prior to submission of the Dissertation Supervisor Agreement.
* The Dissertation Supervisor’s role is to give advice, encouragement and constructive criticism on the student’s dissertation project, from development of the research protocol during the Research Skills module until submission in July.
* There will be a call for dissertation project proposals in the summer. A book of project proposals will be shared with students in October, ahead of the dissertation fair in November, where students can discuss with staff any projects they are interested in.
* Between the dissertation fair and mid-December, students should reach out to talk to potential supervisors. A match needs to be confirmed, and a dissertation title and supervision agreement form needs to be signed by student and supervisor(s), and submitted by the end of Michaelmas term (December). At this stage, the dissertation topic also needs to be finalised, and timing of access to necessary data confirmed.
* The Dissertation Supervisor will offer feedback on one draft of the student’s research protocol for the Research Skills module which is submitted in late January.
* While it is the student’s responsibility to obtain access to appropriate data sources in good time to complete their project, the dissertation supervisor should facilitate this process.
* The dissertation supervisor should encourage the student to keep systematic records of the research, including back-up copies of electronically stored material.
* Students should meet with their Dissertation Supervisor around monthly to discuss the research and to consider constructive comments and criticism on methodology, findings and interpretation. Frequency of meetings will vary depending on student need throughout the year, but students should expect no more than 8 one-hour meetings with their dissertation supervisor.
* Where a student has two supervisors, the co-supervisors must both be involved in at least two meetings to ensure alignment on direction and academic progress.
* The dissertation supervisor should provide written comments on one draft of each chapter, and one draft of the full dissertation.
* Supervision meetings also provide opportunities to monitor student’s progress and time management. Dissertation supervisors should regularly provide students with indications of their progress, and inform the course director regarding concerns about student progress.
* Dissertations are submitted in mid-July. While extensions to this deadline are possible to accommodate challenging circumstances encountered by students, this is only possible for [university approved valid reasons](https://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/your-course/postgraduate-study/your-student-status/extending-your-submission-date#What%20does%20not%20constitute%20a%20reason%20to%20extend). Please don’t put students in a difficult position by supporting a request for an extension due to poor planning by either student or supervisor.
* The dissertation supervisor is expected to attend relevant training designated by the PHS academic committee

Importantly, while the Dissertation Supervisor should provide guidance and help the student keep the work focused, deliverable and within the scope outlined in the dissertation guidelines, the student takes primary responsibility for the dissertation.  Dissertation supervisors are reminded that the submitted dissertation is not a reflection of the supervisor’s capabilities, and that students are expected to take advantage of other available resources, including their course supervision group, the material provided in the Research Skills module, and support offered through the course director’s office. Please remember that the course aims to encourage peer teaching and independent learning, so dissertation supervisors should also encourage students to make use of their course supervision groups while working on their dissertations. Dissertation supervisors are ***not*** expected to:

* Correct poor English, poor presentation, or reference lists, or to make substantial changes to the text (instead, supervisors might correct a single paragraph and expect students to apply this learning to the whole text, or seek support elsewhere)
* Re-teach material learned during the modules (although supervisors might recommend students revisit specific module material, or provide links to other appropriate resources)
* Clean or manage students’ data
* Comment on or help write student's computer code, or help with use of computer systems or running of software
* Help perform statistical analyses
* Take on projects outside their area of expertise/comfort zone

Please remember that dissertation supervisors who over-support are generating an inequity for other students whose supervisor is sticking to this guidance. It’s important that all supervisors try to stick to the guidance even when they feel they want to or should give more. Nevertheless, after submission of the dissertation, the dissertation supervisor may choose to advise the student on the possibility of co-writing a publishable paper based on the dissertation, at which point close copy editing would be appropriate.

**Please note:** the MPhil cannot fund additional costs related to work on the dissertation (e.g. payments for data, software permissions, etc) – supervisors should be prepared to facilitate access to all required resources for the project.

**Dissertation Supervisor renumeration**

£85 per dissertation.

Please note that this is only paid to unestablished staff or external course supervisors.

(The following are not eligible for payment: University Teacher Officers (UTOs) or those who hold a role in which teaching is a formal duty - Professors, Readers, University Senior Lecturers, University Lecturers, Clinical Lecturer, Director / Assistant Director.)

**Support for Supervisors**

Central support for Supervisors is provided by the University Staff Development Office which runs a variety of courses including specific training in supervision.

Any concerns or queries relating to the course should be directed to the [MPhil Education Manager](mailto:kaw82@medschl.cam.ac.uk). If appropriate, these concerns will be taken to the MPhil Academic Committee.

**If things are going wrong**

If either the Dissertation Supervisor or supervisee feels that the supervisions or progress on the dissertation are not meeting their expectations, concerns should ideally be discussed directly with the supervisor / student involved to see if the problems can be addressed and resolved within the supervisions. If this is not possible or appropriate, concerns should be taken to the MPhil [Course Director](mailto:jma79@medschl.cam.ac.uk) or Education Manager as soon as possible, who will work with those involved to help resolve any issues. It may be that, for a number of reasons, another supervisor may be better equipped to meet the specific needs of an individual student, in which case the course director, liaising with the MPhil Academic Committee if necessary, will seek to identify and implement an alternative arrangement.

**Course Supervision group dissertation responsibilities**

* Students are expected to continue working with their course supervision group during the dissertation process to share ideas, concerns, and feedback with their group.
* The supervision group should meet at least fortnightly in term 3 to discuss members’ progress on the dissertation. By term 3, supervision groups should be working largely independently of their Course Supervisor.
* Supervision group members should assist each other to draw up viable research timetables, and members should share any valuable information shared by their own supervisors.
* The course supervision group should serve as a dissertation writing group, in which members are expected to offer feedback on drafts of each other’s dissertations.

**MPhil PHS – contacts and communication**

***Students*** should refer to the course handbook and Moodle for information pertaining to the course. However, if their questions are still unresolved after consulting these resources, please refer to the following table to determine who to contact in case of specific queries. If they are still in doubt about where to direct your concern, please email the course administrator, [phs.masters@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:phs.masters@medschl.cam.ac.uk), who will endeavour to redirect your query as appropriate.

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| ***Topic*** | ***Primary Contact*** |
| Absences | Course administrator |
| Academic difficulty\* | Course supervision group\* |
| Career guidance | Course supervision group  [University careers service](https://www.careers.cam.ac.uk/) |
| Complaints about staff / peers (full process in course handbook) | Course Director  Education Manager |
| Course information, logistics, general queries (after checking in course handbook and on Moodle) | Course administrator |
| Curriculum/course evaluation | Module / course evaluation forms  Student representatives |
| Dissertation choice | Course supervisor |
| Dissertation content | Dissertation supervisor  Course supervision group |
| Extensions – module assessments | Module leader |
| Extensions - dissertation | Degree Committee (via self-service page) *Please also cc. college tutor, dissertation supervisor, Education Manager* |
| Facilities | Course administrator |
| Finance | College tutor  Student registry |
| Intermissions | College tutor *Please also cc. course administrator* |
| IT / computing | [Clinical School Computing Service](https://cscs.medschl.cam.ac.uk/students/)  or [UIS IT services](https://help.uis.cam.ac.uk/new-starters/it-for-students/student-it-services) |
| Module choices | Course supervision group |
| Module content / module assessments | Course supervision group |
| Moodle VLE | Course administrator |
| Personal / pastoral concerns | College tutor  Course supervision group |
| Reading, academic resources | Course supervision group  [Library](https://library.medschl.cam.ac.uk/) |
| Study skills / academic writing\* | Course supervision group |
| Viva | Theme lead |
| Wellbeing | College tutor  [Student wellbeing](https://www.studentwellbeing.admin.cam.ac.uk/) |

\* Academic difficulty: If a student is struggling and has concerns, they should first discuss within their course supervision group (if that seems appropriate) and/or with their course supervisor. In addition, for concerns about progress that are not resolvable within the course supervision group, they may reach out to the course Education Manager, who will be happy to work with them.

***Key roles and contact details***:

Course Administrator: Rosemarie Bell, [rjb205@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:rjb205@medschl.cam.ac.uk)

Course Director: Jean Adams, [jma79@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:jma79@medschl.cam.ac.uk)

Education Manager: Kal Winston, [kaw82@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:kaw82@medschl.cam.ac.uk)

Education Operations Manager: Gillian Barclay, [gb502@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:gb502@medschl.cam.ac.uk)

Theme leads:

Epidemiology: Samuel Lambert, [sl925@cam.ac.uk](mailto:sl925@cam.ac.uk)

Global Health: Tolullah Oni, [Tolu.Oni@mrc-epid.cam.ac.uk](mailto:Tolu.Oni@mrc-epid.cam.ac.uk)

Health Data Science: Will Astle, [wja24@cam.ac.uk](mailto:wja24@cam.ac.uk)

Infectious Diseases: Daniela De Angelis, [daniela.deangelis@mrc-bsu.cam.ac.uk](mailto:daniela.deangelis@mrc-bsu.cam.ac.uk)

Primary Care Research: Juliet Usher-Smith, [jau20@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:jau20@medschl.cam.ac.uk)

Public Health: Jean Adams, [jma79@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:jma79@medschl.cam.ac.uk)

**Staff**

Students will at times reach out to members of staff with questions or concerns. If you have any uncertainty about how to respond, please do refer students to the appropriate resources, as per the table of MPhil PHS contacts above. The [student course handbook](https://universityofcambridgecloud.sharepoint.com/:b:/r/sites/PHPC_Gerontology/Shared%20Documents/General/MPhil%20Population%20Health%20Sciences%20Course%20Handbook%202021-2022.pdf?csf=1&web=1&e=WNoV7W), the [module leaders’ handbook](https://universityofcambridgecloud.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/PHPC_Gerontology/Shared%20Documents/General/Module%20Leaders/Module%20leader%20handbook.docx?d=w2a72b3b01c55440f9049569aa812d5e7&csf=1&web=1&e=G61WqR), the [course website](https://www.phs.masters.cam.ac.uk/) and the [MPhil PHS Teams site](https://teams.microsoft.com/l/team/19%3ae5ec8ac7cc2d4a62a99bf9363cd089af%40thread.skype/conversations?groupId=bb69a3fa-0a34-4e02-b057-b118865ab6c9&tenantId=49a50445-bdfa-4b79-ade3-547b4f3986e9) provide a lot of information about the course, for both staff and students. The university also offers advice about [supporting students in learning and teaching](https://www.educationalpolicy.admin.cam.ac.uk/supporting-students), and has produced an excellent [When To Refer](https://www.educationalpolicy.admin.cam.ac.uk/supporting-students/student-mental-health-and-wellbeing) guide to resources.

In addition, you may want to address specific queries as follows:

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| ***Topic*** | ***Primary Contact*** |
| Assessment and marking | Module lead\* |
| Curriculum development ideas | Module lead / Theme lead |
| Dissertation topic proposals | Course Administrator / Theme lead |
| Moodle – posting teaching materials, adding activities, etc | Module lead |
| Payment claims for teaching, supervising, marking | Course administrator |
| Purchase of teaching resources | Course administrator |
| Reimbursement of expenses | Course administrator |
| Student progress concerns | Course supervisor |
| Submission of module assessment grades | Module lead |
| TA recruitment | Module lead / Course administrator |
| Teacher development | Education Manager |
| Timetable clashes | Module lead |
| *\*Module leaders, if in doubt contact course administrator or education manager* | |

For further details about roles and responsibilities in MPhil PHS, please refer to our [Communications document on Teams](https://universityofcambridgecloud.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/PHPC_Gerontology/Shared%20Documents/General/Policies%20and%20Processes/Communications,%20MPhil%20PHS.docx?d=w910ba2664ffc4012a0425658c54dc960&csf=1&web=1&e=FvlAQ7).