

**Cancer Research UK Manchester Centre PhD Programme:
Applicant Webinar FAQ, 1st November 2024 (Virtual)**

What are the differences between the MCRC, CRUK Manchester Centre and CRUK Manchester Institute?

The Manchester Cancer Research Centre (MCRC) is an umbrella organisation/partnership between the University of Manchester, Cancer Research UK and The Christie NHS Foundation Trust, which was founded in 2006. Within the MCRC, we look after PhD funding for our Cancer Research UK Manchester Centre and our Cancer Research UK Clinical Academic Training Award, so MCRC staff will recruit to lots of different Clinical and Non-Clinical Cancer Research UK-funded PhDs. The Cancer Research UK Manchester Institute has its own separate PhD programme and Postgraduate Programme Manager.

What are you looking for in a successful PhD candidate?

We're looking for people who are passionate about science and the PhD project to which they are applying. Candidates will have different levels of research experience, so we are really looking for people with passion and transferable skills that they can apply to doing this particular PhD project in Manchester.

Would you recommend contacting the lead supervisor of a PhD project before applying?

Yes, we would recommend contacting the lead supervisor ahead of submitting your application using their email contact on the [Cancer Research UK Manchester Research Opportunities page](#). Supervisors can receive many emails in a short period of time so don't be put off from applying if you don't hear back from them. All applications will be sent to supervisors to review after the application deadline.

The MCRC is a partnership founded by

How do I write the supporting statement for my PhD application?

Guidance on writing your supporting statement can be found here:

<https://www.bmh.manchester.ac.uk/study/research/funding-fees/funded-programmes/cruk-phd-training-scheme/#d.en.969395>.

How do I prepare my CV for application?

We have provided CV guidance here for [Clinical](#) and [Non-Clinical](#) candidates. Whilst we suggest listing publications, presentations and prizes if you have these, not everyone will and you should consider your transferable skills and why you are the right person for this PhD project. If you don't have publications or research presentation experience already, don't let this put you off from applying to our PhDs.

What are you looking for at interview?

Our interview process has changed slightly this year (2025). You will be asked to do a 5 minute paper critique of a journal article that the panel will have selected and that you will see in advance. You will receive the paper when you're invited for interview, which would be pre-Christmas as UoM closes for one week over the holidays. There will be 1 paper that all non-clinical candidates critique and 1 paper that all clinical candidates critique.

You would then be asked about your scientific knowledge of the PhD project to which you have applied and why you want to study this PhD in Manchester, e.g. why is Manchester the preferred research environment for this project? You may be asked who you would collaborate with within the supervisory team and beyond. You will be asked about your general career trajectory, e.g. what do you need to be successful in a PhD? What are your strengths and weaknesses? How will you succeed in the future as a cancer researcher and what steps do you need to take to get there?

How do I prepare my interview paper critique?

This is a 5 minute analysis of the paper's strengths and weaknesses.

Candidates need to make sure that their 5 minute presentation runs to time

since they will be stopped when they hit the 5 minute mark. They need to summarise the research and question its methods and main results within their critique. They should try and come up with some critique ideas that aren't listed in the paper's limitations section, where possible.

Supervisors will shortlist one candidate for interview and it is a competitive process where we interview more candidates that we can appoint. Therefore, supervisors will want their candidates to succeed and should be helping you to prepare for your interview in terms of what paper critique questions might be asked. You will be interviewed by a panel of mixed clinicians and scientists from across cancer research disciplines so will need to ensure that they can understand your paper critique.

Candidates can bring notes into the paper critique section and a copy of the journal article but should avoid reading verbatim off their notes. Try and practice delivering your answers in advance so that you feel confident and are able to engage with the panellists.

What does your typical day look like?

Eleanor Richards, CRUK Clinical Research Training Fellow: It's different on different days because my PhD project involves multiple quantitative and qualitative elements. The data for the quantitative elements might take a while to come through and I need to write a protocol for the qualitative element of the research before I can begin that. So I am often working on a slightly different element of the PhD project on a different day or a different month depending on what's available to me at that time. In terms of courses, there are no set taught elements to my PhD but I came up with a plan with my supervisor about what I wanted to learn and any short courses/classes that could support this.

Melville Nyatondo, CRUK Non-Clinical Student: It depends on your project but each day looks quite different for me. I've been doing my PhD for about a month so I normally have Mondays and Thursdays as my experiment days and

everything else in between is give or take. I attend institute/Centre talks and I am starting animal training next week. Right now, my days are spent training, shadowing, reading, preparing to read and lots more reading.

Annet Nakkazi, CRUK RadNet Non-Clinical Student: Every day and year it changes. I spent most of my first year completing my literature review then after submitting that I had to prepare for my animal licence exam which was very hard and involved lots of studying. Mostly my days are spent researching and planning and training.

For students who want to apply but are worried they don't have all of the skills that are mentioned for that project, you don't have to worry. They wanted flow cytometry for my project and I had never done flow cytometry, but I had watched somebody doing it so I mentioned that in my interview. When you begin your PhD, you'll have somebody to train you on how to do these things. My project involves MRI which I had never done before so I shadow people who are doing MRI at the same time as attending classes. I am also a Graduate Teaching Assistant at UoM on various courses, so every semester really changes. I also spend time editing my videos because I'm a YouTuber.

Then I have to think about posting on LinkedIn because I love sharing and networking with others. I am also an ambassador for the Manchester Cancer Research Centre so do work for them. Before I applied to my PhD I did coding training on programming with MATLAB to help increase my application competitiveness. Knowing how to run scripts in MATLAB can be useful for some PhD projects – you don't have to be a computer scientist but knowing the basics is helpful.

Do you have a quota on international student numbers?

We have a limited number of bursaries to apply to successfully appointed international students waiving the international fee rate and allowing us to use Cancer Research UK funding for their PhD fellowship/studentship. We apply

these bursaries after interviews and there is no separate international bursary application process.

Do you fund international visa/health surcharge costs?

No, we do not receive funding to cover international visa/health surcharge costs and these would need to be met by applicants or the supervisor to whom they are applying.

Is the Black Leaders in Cancer programme for clinical or non-clinical applicants?

The Black Leaders in Cancer Scholarship Programme is for Non-Clinical applicants only as this comes with an annual stipend of £21,000 instead of a Clinical salary match.

What other EDI PhD opportunities are available at UoM?

We have an Excellence in Diversity Scholarship which Non-Clinical applicants can apply to [here](#).

Do UoM alumni get a PhD fee discount?

Cancer Research UK PhDs are fully funded but for non-funded studentships, UoM alumni can receive a discount and read further details [here](#).

Can you tell me more about other PhD funding schemes within UoM Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health?

There are different funded PhDs available with UoM FBMH. You can read more about these [here](#).

What options are available if I am unsuccessful at interview in January?

We appoint to a select number of PhD projects and advertise more MCRC-CRUK Manchester Centre PhDs that we can appoint to. Supervisors are sometimes able to identify other sources of PhD funding, for example, via the UoM Presidential Scholarship Award.

Will I be asked about my personal statement at interview?

You might be asked questions in terms of your research background and why you want to apply for this PhD. Your supervisor will see all of your application documents and will use these for shortlisting their chosen candidate but the interview panel will only see your CV and supporting statement.

Who do I contact with queries?

To contact our Postgraduate Programme Manager, Dr Georgina Binnie-Wright, email MCRCTraining@Manchester.ac.uk. To contact our student speakers, email MCRCReps@Manchester.ac.uk.