

# PHILOSOPHY COURSE INFORMATION FOR PROSPECTIVE POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

**2023 – 2024**

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## About this Guide

While every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this guide is accurate at the time of going to press, changes are likely to occur given the lengthy interval between publication and commencement of the course. It is therefore very important that you check the University and College websites for any updates before you apply for the course by visiting

<https://www.postgraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/> and again before accepting any offer to study at the University. Where there is a difference between the contents of this guide and these websites, the contents of the websites take precedence and represent the basis on which we intend to deliver our educational services to you.

Any offer of a place to study at the University is subject to terms and conditions which can be found at

<https://www.postgraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/postgraduate-admissions-policy>

The terms and conditions set out, for example, your key obligations as a student and when we might make changes to your course, the fees payable and the student regulations with which all students are required to comply. Again, it is important that you do read these before making an application.

If you are unable to access our website for any reason, please contact us via email [pg.admissions@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:pg.admissions@admin.cam.ac.uk)

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## Introduction

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Cambridge was the birthplace of analytic philosophy in the early 20th century, and has been at the forefront of the discipline ever since. The present Faculty of Philosophy is one of world's leading postgraduate schools in the subject, with an excellent record when it comes to employment destinations: a very high proportion of our PhD graduates go on to academic positions across the UK and throughout the world. This success rests on the intellectual vibrancy of our postgraduate student and Faculty community, which, as our students themselves often attest, provides a major catalyst for their future work.

The Faculty usually takes between 10 and 20 students a year for the MPhil. They join the 20-25 students studying for the PhD to form a lively postgraduate community. Cambridge has always been a relatively small Faculty and its size, together with a wide variety of seminars and other activities, enables students and other Faculty members to get to know each other well. The Faculty is committed to equality, diversity, and inclusion. We have a dynamic Minorities and Philosophy Group, and an active Equality Working Group with wide representation from staff and students.

New postgraduate students are usually accommodated by their colleges close to the city centre, the Faculty, and library facilities. Most PhD students, particularly those in their second and subsequent years, do a share of undergraduate supervising; and all PhD students have the opportunity to give some undergraduate lectures in their third year. Students also play an important role in Faculty decision-making.

The Faculty's accommodation includes a Postgraduate Study Centre and Common Room and our own Library, holding some 17,000 books and about 26 current journals. The University Library is a copyright library, holding every academically important book published in Britain since the early eighteenth century, as well as extensive stocks from overseas. With these and other libraries, facilities for research in Cambridge are second to none. Many Colleges provide funds to support postgraduate students' research, enabling them to present papers at academic gatherings and meet extra research costs.

We hope you will find this booklet useful and stimulating. It is a supplement to the [University of Cambridge Postgraduate Admissions webpage](#), which contains general information about postgraduate work in Cambridge, about Colleges, and about financial support for postgraduate students from the UK and overseas.

We hope that you will apply to the Faculty for your postgraduate work.

Alexander Bird, Chair of the Faculty  
Michael Potter, Director of Postgraduate Studies

### Members of Staff

Postgraduate students are nearly always supervised by members of the Philosophy Faculty. A full, online list of Faculty Staff, including permanent and temporary staff members and their research interests, can be found here:

<https://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/people>

Other senior members of the University with philosophical interests may be found in the Dept of History and Philosophy of Science, Faculty of Classics, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Divinity and the Dept of Politics and International Studies.

### Current Research Students

There are currently some 40 postgraduates working for higher degrees in the Faculty and many are international students.

The following selection of thesis topics and titles offers a flavour of the range of studies recently undertaken by research students:

- A metaphysics for semantics and mathematical infinity
- Links between relationism in physics and anti-realism
- Resources, primary goods, and capabilities
- The meaningfulness of aesthetic and affective experience
- Contextualism and its consequences
- Towards a logic of feasibility
- Justifications for intellectual property
- Hegel's criticisms of transcendental idealism
- Trust and moral education
- Systems of arithmetic and their justification
- Notions of identity
- Implications of chaos theory for predictability and determinism
- Intuition and methodology in ethics
- Contemporary metaphysics of form and identity
- Neutrality and normativity in political philosophy
- Rationality and language
- Pacifism, violence and justice
- Knowledge and knowledge attributions
- Moral explanation and the problem of facts
- The role of value judgments
- Possible worlds
- Mathematical necessity
- Supererogation
- Logical consequences, logical form and logical constants

- Power and social policy
- Moral objectivity and judgments of taste
- Thought and language: A critical development of Wittgenstein's writing on intentionality
- Can we require moral obligations when we benefit non-voluntarily?
- Objective truth
- Groundwork for a new causal realism
- Language, necessity and convention: Reconsidering the linguistic approach to modality
- How to make money: Distributive justice, finance and monetary constitutions
- Moral Realism: Time to relax
- Ontological pragmatism
- Democratic speech in divided times
- Reductive aspects of thermodynamics
- Alterpieces: artworks as shifting speech acts
- Carnap and the Ontology of Mathematics
- Generics in use

## Course Details

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The Faculty of Philosophy accepts postgraduate students as candidates for the MPhil and PhD degrees. The MPhil provides an excellent foundation for doctoral research, in Cambridge or elsewhere. Many of our PhD students enter the doctoral programme via this route, although we also welcome PhD applications from students with Masters degrees from other institutions.

### MPhil in Philosophy

This degree provides a rigorous introduction to philosophical research. For those considering a PhD it provides the skills needed for doctoral studies, and an opportunity to pursue selected philosophical topics in considerable depth. Some of our students stay for a PhD in Cambridge, others go on to PhD programmes elsewhere. Many take it with other careers in mind, simply for the opportunity to broaden their philosophical knowledge in one of the world's leading centres.

Students choose the topics for their written work in consultation with their advisor and supervisor, and then work with the supervisor, typically through several drafts. They develop their abilities in structuring lengthy

pieces of work, and in presenting philosophical arguments clearly and effectively. The MPhil class also meet as a group for a weekly seminar, which uses a collaborative format to help students to develop the presentation and discussion skills essential in philosophy.

## **MPhil Course structure**

MPhil candidates are examined on an essay of not more than 4,000 words (including footnotes but excluding bibliography), an essay of not more than 8,000 words (including footnotes but excluding bibliography), and a dissertation of not more than 12,000 words (including footnotes and appendices but excluding bibliography), all on topics which must first be approved by the Degree Committee.

### **i) Essays**

The essays must be in the following areas of Philosophy, including their history: *Metaphysics and Epistemology; Philosophy of Mind; Logic and Philosophy of language; Philosophy of Science; Ethics and Moral Psychology; Aesthetics; and Political and Legal Philosophy*. Both essays cannot be in the same area. However, the Degree Committee may decide to grant candidates specific permission to submit one essay in an area not listed above, provided it is in Philosophy.

### **ii) Dissertation**

The topics of all MPhil dissertations must be in Philosophy, and be such that suitable Supervisors and Examiners are available; but they need not fall within the areas listed above. They may be related to candidates' essay topics, but the dissertation must not reproduce or paraphrase any significant part of either of the essays.

The first essay is submitted at the end of Michaelmas Term (usually early December) and the second at the end of Lent Term (mid-March). The submission date for the dissertation is in mid-June.

The MPhil degree is awarded on the basis of the marks given for the essays (taken together) and the dissertation. MPhil candidates are also examined orally in a *viva voce* for the dissertation.

MPhil candidates wishing to go on to a PhD usually choose a dissertation topic related to their proposed PhD research. MPhil students who move on to become PhD students at Cambridge cannot incorporate their MPhil dissertations directly into their PhD theses, but the latter may be based on the former.

## **PhD**

The Faculty accepts applications for the PhD in a wide range of philosophical areas. The PhD culminates in the production of a thesis of up to 80,000 words, submitted after three years (nine terms) of study, although a maximum of up to four years is allowed. Part-time study for a PhD is also possible.

## **Registration**

Candidates accepted initially for the MPhil can apply while at Cambridge to continue to the PhD, and are considered alongside external applicants for admission. MPhil students accepted to the PhD generally need to satisfy some further conditions, including successful completion of the MPhil, before they can be admitted to the PhD. For further description of these conditions, see, 'PhD degree; Steps towards registration' of the [Postgraduate Handbook](#).

All students admitted for the PhD are 'on probation' during their first year. The Degree Committee will decide whether to register them as candidates for the PhD degree, the registration being then backdated to their date of admission.

Before registering postgraduate students as PhD candidates, the Degree Committee must be satisfied that they have a suitable plan of work and have begun to write about some part of it, in a sustained way, at a standard likely to get them the degree in a reasonable time. Prospective PhD candidates whose work does not show sufficient progress may at this stage be registered only as MLitt candidates. (The MLitt is a lesser degree to the PhD, now used only in these rare circumstances.) They may be re-registered as PhD candidates (with registration again backdated to the date of admission) if they submit sufficiently improved work during their second year.

The Degree Committee will not defer considering the registration of students as MLitt or PhD candidates without good cause (such as illness); and the Student Registry will not normally let students remain on the Register of Postgraduate Students (after their third term) without being registered as candidates for some degree. Postgraduate students who are admitted as Probationary PhD candidates must therefore, with their supervisors' help, start working out their plans of research, and the topic or topics of their written work, as soon as possible after they arrive.

## **Assessment**

A PhD thesis is required to contain some substantial original ideas, while an MLitt thesis need not be so original but should represent a worthwhile



contribution to scholarship. In both cases the thesis will be examined jointly by an internal examiner (other than the supervisor) and an external examiner. An oral examination is an essential part of the procedure.

### **Visiting Postgraduate Students**

Students working for a PhD at other Universities who wish to do research in Cambridge may also apply to be admitted for a maximum period of a year, as postgraduate students not registered for a Cambridge degree. More information can be found on the Faculty's webpage for visiting students:

<http://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/prosp-students/prosp-visiting-students>

### **Affiliated Students**

Graduates of other Universities who wish to study philosophy in Cambridge, but whose first degree contains little, or no, philosophy, should consider becoming affiliated students. This means taking the Cambridge BA degree in two years instead of three. The course is amply demanding: Cambridge is unusual in providing a full-time philosophy course for all three undergraduate years, so that its final year courses go beyond those of many other universities in range and depth. Moreover, research seminars are generally open to affiliated students, and the optional dissertation in the final-year examination (Part II of the Philosophy Tripos) provides a good way of acquiring research techniques and trying out possible research topics. Affiliated students are not admitted by Postgraduate Admissions but by colleges: details are available from any college or from the [Cambridge Admissions Office](#).

Student Services Centre  
New Museums Site  
Cambridge  
CB2 3PT

**Email:** [admissions@cam.ac.uk](mailto:admissions@cam.ac.uk)

**Website:** [www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk](http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk)

### **Postgraduate Courses related to Philosophy in other Faculties**

#### **Gender Studies**

The Centre for Gender Studies, which is located in the Department of Politics and International Studies, offers an MPhil and a PhD in Multi-disciplinary Gender Studies. See attached link for more details:

<http://www.gender.cam.ac.uk/mphil>

### **Political Thought**

The Faculties of Classics, History, and Social and Political Sciences offer an inter-disciplinary MPhil in Political Thought and Intellectual History, as well as related PhDs. See attached link for more details:

<https://www.hist.cam.ac.uk/course/mphil-political-thought-and-intellectual-history>

### **Philosophy of Science**

The Department of History and Philosophy of Science is institutionally separate from the Philosophy Faculty and runs its own MPhil and PhD degrees. See attached link for more details:

<https://www.hps.cam.ac.uk/study/postgraduate>

### **Public Policy**

The Department of Politics and International Studies offers an MPhil in Public Policy. See attached link for more details:

<https://www.polis.cam.ac.uk/study-at-polis/graduates/MPhilPP>

Candidates interested in any of these subject areas may wish to consider these alternative degrees, in addition to the options available in the Philosophy Faculty.

## **Teaching and Teaching Terms**

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### **Supervisors**

The MPhil and PhD degrees in philosophy are awarded on the basis of individual study and research, but each student has a supervisor whose role is to help and advise the student. The Degree Committee will not accept postgraduate students for whom it cannot find suitable supervisors, a fact that applicants should bear in mind when framing research

proposals. Supervisors may be over-committed or on leave and so it cannot be guaranteed that any particular supervisor will be available.

Students' interests and research topics often change as they progress, and this may make it advisable for them to change their supervisor. This can usually be arranged without much difficulty. Postgraduate students are expected to discuss their work with more people than their supervisor. They are expected to take the initiative in discussing with each other, and in consulting other members of the Faculty whose work they find to be related to their own.

### **Lectures, seminars and meetings**

There is a weekly seminar for MPhil students, at which they present and discuss their work – the seminar focusses on developing presentation and discussion skills, as well introducing students to a very wide range of philosophical topics. The Faculty also arranges other seminars especially for postgraduate students, including a postgraduate seminar, which runs throughout the academic year. Postgraduate students are encouraged to attend upper-level lectures and seminars that are relevant to their work. Many postgraduate students run seminars themselves on special topics. The Faculty website has details of current groups and research events. Postgraduate students are strongly encouraged to attend the Moral Sciences Club, which meets weekly in term to discuss papers normally given by visiting philosophers. See the following web page for further details: <https://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/seminars-phil/seminars-msc> Similar meetings are organised in other Faculties (e.g. [the 'D' Society](#) for the philosophy of religion).

### **Teaching terms**

The University's academic year is divided into three teaching terms: the Michaelmas Term, which starts in early October; the Lent Term, which starts in early January; and the Easter Term, which starts in late April. Although the work of postgraduate students continues throughout the year, their research timetable is arranged in terms. In particular, they are admitted at the start of a term. Candidates for the MPhil must come into residence at the beginning of the Michaelmas Full Term; candidates for the PhD will usually do so.

### **Additional Course Costs**

Philosophy does not generate large additional course costs, but naturally there are sundry expenses involved in studying. These expenses may include library copying cards, USB sticks and printing. It is difficult to estimate realistically the overall cost of these sundries, particularly over the three year period of a PhD, but no student is required to undertake substantial expenditure of this kind.

## College Membership

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Any student accepted to read towards a degree of the University must become a member of a college. Colleges will not consider an application for membership until the student has first been accepted by the Faculty's Degree Committee.

Most colleges of the University admit postgraduates; Darwin, Hughes Hall, and Wolfson admit only postgraduates. Three colleges, Lucy Cavendish, Murray Edwards and Newnham, admit only women. All colleges of the University accept students for a wide range of higher degrees, diplomas and research. Further information on each college can be found here: <https://www.postgraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/colleges>

## Faculty Resources and Support for Students

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### Libraries

All postgraduate Philosophy students have access to the Philosophy Faculty's Casimir Lewy Library, the University Library, other faculty libraries, their college library and the electronic resources that are provided centrally.

The **Casimir Lewy Library** on the second floor of the Raised Faculty Building provides support for philosophical study, teaching and research in Cambridge. The book collection comprises more than 16,000 volumes, focusing on Western analytic philosophy, but also covering related interdisciplinary material. For further information, see the library website: <https://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/library>

The University Library, as one of Britain's five copyright libraries, holds every book published in the UK since the early eighteenth century as well as extensive stocks from overseas. The Faculty libraries in Classics, Divinity, History, and History of Philosophy of Science libraries are also useful to philosophy students.

Training is readily available on how to access the many useful resources for research that are available online. This is provided by the Faculty Librarian and also by the postgraduate skills programme.

### Philosophy Postgraduate Study Centre

The Philosophy Postgraduate Study Centre provides a dedicated working space within the Faculty for the use of our postgraduate students to promote contact among students and their teachers and to facilitate the exchange of ideas. It includes an open-plan working area with full computing facilities, a common-room and seminar room.

[Philosophy Faculty Room Booking System](#)

### Computing

In addition to the Faculty's Postgraduate Study Centre, the [Managed Cluster Service \(MCS\)](#) provides shared PCs and Macs in most Colleges and Departments. They provide secure access to a wide range of software and facilities. All postgraduate students have free access to computing facilities of the University Computing Service, and the wireless network. See here for further information:

<https://help.uis.cam.ac.uk/service/wi-fi>

## **Postgraduate Training**

The Faculty has developed a comprehensive training programme for its postgraduates, which runs alongside courses and advice offered by the University's Centre for Personal and Professional Development, School of Arts and Humanities and Careers Service. The Faculty's annual welcome event introduces new postgraduate students to each other, to the administration of the Faculty and to the philosophical opportunities in Cambridge. There are also sessions organised to introduce the Library, computing facilities, and research aids.

PhD students contribute significantly to our teaching programme and in support of this, the Faculty offers a series of tailor-made workshops devoted to teaching and transferable skills. Topics discussed include leading a discussion group, effective small group teaching, and supervising and supporting students with special needs. The Centre for Personal and Professional Development runs additional courses on supervising and lecturing.

Teaching and research are not independent activities. Effective teaching demands clear and illuminating presentation, which makes for excellent research. It is also essential that postgraduate students who intend to continue in an academic career start to publish. General advice on publishing is given by supervisors and the Director of Postgraduate Studies. In addition, a section in the Faculty Library is dedicated to all these aspects of a postgraduate student's training. To complement this the School of Arts and Humanities runs a series of workshops on writing and publishing skills, together with annual workshops enabling students to take stock at the beginning of each year of their PhD.

The [University Careers Service](#) gives advice and information about careers. The Faculty can also provide advice on career prospects and can organise practice presentations and interviews at the relevant times.

## **Language Learning**

The University Language Centre offers weekly lessons for academic reading, as well as general instruction in other languages. See here for further information:

<https://www.langcen.cam.ac.uk/culp/culp-specialist-courses.html>

## **Funding for Conferences**

There are limited funds available to the Faculty to enable postgraduate students to attend conferences.

[Postgraduate Forms](#)

## **Funding, Financial Support, Fees and Expenses**

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For further information on sources of funding, fees, expenses and paid teaching opportunities please see the following webpage:

[Funding and fees](#)

## **Applications**

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Students who wish to study for an MPhil or PhD in philosophy at Cambridge should apply through the University [Postgraduate Admissions website](#). Applications are made online and applicants upload all supporting documents electronically.

Further details on admission to the Faculty of Philosophy can be found here:

[Prospective Postgraduate Applications](#)

## **For Further Information**

Contact the Faculty for all enquiries about programmes of study:

**Address:** Raised Faculty Building  
Sidgwick Avenue  
Cambridge CB3 9DA  
United Kingdom

**Telephone:** (01223) 335078

**E-mail:** [phil-admin@lists.cam.ac.uk](mailto:phil-admin@lists.cam.ac.uk)

**Web-page:** <http://www.phil.cam.ac.uk>

## **Postscript: What Our Students Say**

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### **Paula Keller**

Overall being on the MPhil has been a challenging but very rewarding experience.

It gave me the opportunity to work in three different areas of philosophy which I made use of working in philosophy of language, history of political philosophy and feminist philosophy. While I very much enjoyed doing so much independent work, organising my day was at times difficult, especially at the beginning. But I believe that having learned how to do and structure independent research during this MPhil will help me while working on a PhD.

A further advantage of postgraduate study in Philosophy at Cambridge is the Postgraduate Centre with desks and computers where I work almost every day and leave my books. This allows me to hardly ever work at home, to be around other philosophers while working and I usually leave the Postgraduate Centre in the early evening. I therefore managed to make time for relaxation and non-academic activities much better than I did during my undergraduate degree also at Cambridge.

During the MPhil I also found time to participate in faculty life: organising reading groups, attending seminars and lectures as well as presenting my own work and doing some teaching has both deepened my philosophical knowledge in areas I am interested in and has helped me gain confidence as a philosopher.

Paula Keller, MPhil student 2018-19

### **Samuel Hughes**

I came to Cambridge in 2015, having done my B.A. and B.Phil. in Oxford. That the Faculty's academic standard is extremely high goes without saying, as does the cultural and intellectual wealth of the wider university. What is really distinctive here is the warm and collaborative culture among the postgraduate students, and the great extent to which the Faculty operates as an intellectual community. This is a thing of great value, and one that absolutely cannot be taken for granted. Among its happy consequences for me is that fact that, though I came to Cambridge primarily to do specialist work on one topic, it remained easy and natural to learn about many areas of philosophy throughout my time as a doctoral student. I also want to mention the Faculty's tremendous administrative staff, who contribute so much not only to the efficient running of the Faculty, but also to its relaxed and friendly culture.

Samuel Hughes; PhD Student (2015 - 2020)



### **Shyane Siriwardena**

I have studied here in Cambridge for four years, starting with the MPhil in 2011. The MPhil was excellent training for the PhD which I am now undertaking. My experience here has been overwhelmingly positive. The philosophical community is a very active one, there are ample opportunities to attend seminars, present work, and join reading groups. And even apart from these, I've found that people, faculty, and students alike are so often willing to chat about the work you're doing. Many of the faculty are wonderfully generous with their time; I've never felt at a loss for support in my studies.

What is more, the Faculty supports more than just our studies; they are also mindful of preparing PhD candidates for the job market. I have had the opportunity to do a great deal of teaching in my time here, and this has proved a most rewarding experience. Indeed, once finished my degree here, my plan is to continue teaching philosophy at either the university or sixth-form level.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention the postgraduate community here: the supportive atmosphere and easy camaraderie have been invaluable to my success. Whether I'm in a philosophical bind, or I'm worried about my progress, I know I can always turn to my peers. We have a great working environment: people are always bouncing ideas and problems off of each other, helping whenever they can. It's a community I'll be sad to leave in a year's time.

Shyane Siriwardena, MPhil Student 2011–12; PhD Student (2012-2016)

### **Sahanika Ratnayake**

I did the MPhil at Cambridge several years ago, at the time not knowing if I wanted to continue with philosophy. To my surprise, I enjoyed the experience so much, I returned for the PhD.

My PhD project is interdisciplinary and lies at the fringes of mainstream analytic philosophy. However, I have been given nothing but support and encouragement. If anything, I have been actively pushed to develop the more ambitious claims in my work. Postgraduate study at Cambridge gives you enough breathing room to develop your own ideas and approaches. The department is also eager to support your extra-curricular activities - I recently applied for some funding to run a social project and the staff were incredibly helpful with the application.

One of the very special things about studying philosophy at Cambridge is the postgraduate student community. I have found it to be welcoming and supportive. My peers have given me very helpful feedback on my work and are endlessly encouraging. And if you are ever feeling down - there is a cadre of stuffed dinosaurs in the Postgraduate Centre available for cuddling!

Sahanika Ratnayake, MPhil student 2015-16, PhD Student (2018 - 2021)

**Ege Yumusak**

My MPhil year was the first extended time I had to undertake three projects that I could call my own. It was a thrilling, challenging, and incredibly rewarding experience — one that prepared me for continuing years of scholarship.

Ege Yumusak, MPhil Student 2016-17

**Alex Horne**

The MPhil at Cambridge is a challenging and rewarding experience that provides students with the chance to pursue independent research supervised by an outstanding Faculty. The program offers students who are so inclined maximum flexibility in developing and pursuing a research program commensurate with their interests and strengths. That flexibility can be daunting, but it also lays a solid foundation for pursuing further postgraduate study. If you require more structure for your learning or wish to undertake significant further postgraduate coursework, then the Cambridge MPhil may not be ideal for your purposes. But if you are looking for a program that will allow you to become a better philosopher while researching the topics that interest you, together with the help of skilful and generous supervisors, then I cannot recommend the MPhil at Cambridge highly enough. The program's structure also gives students the time to attend many of the Faculty's reading groups, workshops and seminars and to engage fully in the life of the Colleges and University. I have learned an immense amount since arriving in Cambridge and have thoroughly enjoyed my time here, so much so that I am still here for my PHD.

Alex Horne, MPhil Student 2017-18, Current PhD Student (2022)