

# From Masters to PhD student within the Institute of Ageing and Chronic Disease

## Phaedra Winstanley-Zarach

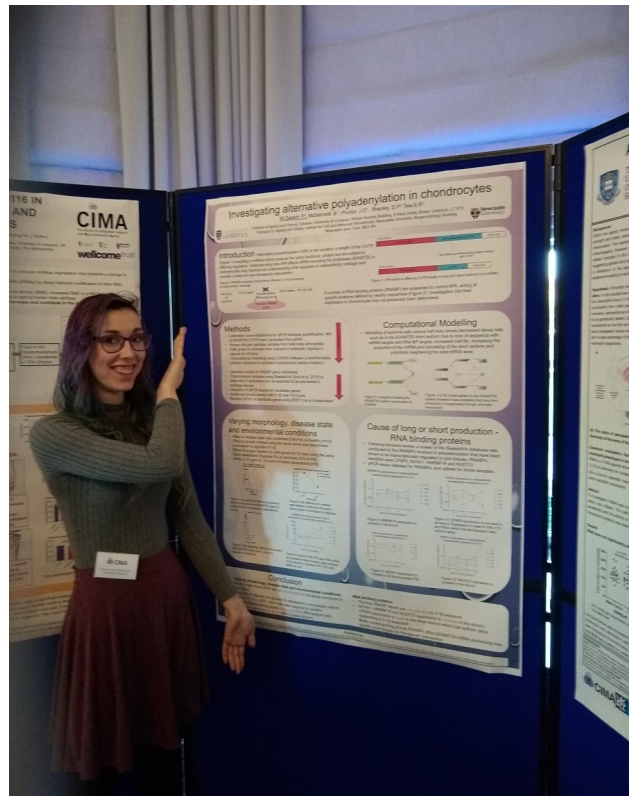
1<sup>st</sup> year PhD student in Musculoskeletal Biology

**M**y overall experience transitioning from my masters (MRes Musculoskeletal Ageing) to a PhD student has been very favourable. I may have had a slightly more cohesive experience than many as my masters and PhD are both funded by the Centre for Integrated Research into Musculoskeletal Ageing (CIMA), and I have continued with the same primary supervisor for both. This meant when I started my PhD I was already used to the lab and the other lab users.

The main thing I think has made my experience positive is the people. I was lucky during my MRes that the post-doc in my group encouraged me to join in the social activities of the wider research group. I would encourage any masters or PhD students to do this. At first I was quite intimidated going along to coffee breaks in the morning, farewell parties and occasionally planned escape rooms with all these clever academics; but as time has gone by I now consider them to be my friends, which makes everything much less scary during bouts of imposter syndrome! I really benefit from this for example when I can't find something in the lab – I just need to ask a friendly face where the item is, as opposed to needing to ask someone I've never talked to before which can often make me a bit anxious.

Other extremely valuable resources are PhD students starting at the same time. I feel like it makes it much easier to transition when you have people going through the same thing as you and you can talk about it; or even having a chat with the PhD students further along their degree as they'll have been there to. Within my group of friends who started at the same time as me we've all made one or two silly lab mistakes, and it's good to have someone to laugh with.

Similar to the masters project, PhD project time is very self-motivated. This personally works quite well for me, however you do have to be strict with yourself on days you aren't keen to come in. One challenge during the PhD studies is the far away seeming deadline - whereas my masters only lasted a year, my new deadline is suddenly three years away now. It's taken me a little while to get used to the idea that I don't need to have everything done right away, and that I can't possibly have the whole three years planned in the way I could plan 7 months of lab work. This has led to more emphasis on short term goals than during the masters, and more adaptability to see how experiments turn out and plan accordingly, as opposed to the rigid structure of the masters project experiments.



Becoming a PhD student means the project is being more shaped by my ideas and input, which can be a bit nerve racking. Whereas previously my supervisor was the driving force behind designing experiments, I am now more active in deciding which path we will take, which genes we will examine and which samples we should look at. It's starting to get quite exciting, however, seeing how genes I chose are responding. It was very rewarding when I presented a poster recently and was now able to explain confidently and in detail why those were the candidate genes.

Overall I really enjoyed my masters and I am really enjoying my PhD studies. I didn't find the gap between them too large of a jump so far, and look forward to obtaining more data. ■