

Opportunity to join Mental Health Sciences PhD Thesis Committee - Carlos Mena, PhD Student



Hi, I'm Carlos, a PhD student at UCL., and I'm looking to recruit people with lived experience to help me with my research. I have a background in clinical psychology, and I worked as a clinical psychologist for four years before I started studying cognitive neuroscience. Now, I am in my second year of my PhD and I am interested in understanding how anxiety disorders' symptoms occur in the brain and mind and how psychological treatments might intervene on them.

Anxiety disorders are the most common type of mental illness across the world, but we don't understand enough about how they arise in the brain. If we knew more, we might be able to target existing treatments at those who are most likely to benefit and develop new treatments for those who do not respond very well to current approaches.

In my research, I plan to focus on individual symptoms of anxiety, rather than treating anxiety as one illness, as every person's anxiety disorder is different. For example, I want to look at the symptom of "avoidance", where people avoid certain people, places or situations that make them anxious. I shall also look at "negative bias", where negative things or experiences have a greater impact on people's behaviour than neutral or positive ones.

I am looking to recruit participants with and without anxiety disorders using existing databases that have been used in previous studies conducted by our research group. If this is not enough, advertising via posters and social media might also be used.

I will ask participants to engage in different psychological tasks. For example, I might ask them to make decisions regarding different images that will be associated with negative or positive outcomes, and I will see how anxiety impacts these decisions. In a different task, I also plan to look at how participants respond to watching emotionally-charged movies.

I shall measure what happens in participants' brains during some of these tasks and will compare this between people with and without anxiety disorders. Also, I shall see what happens when we manipulate specific brain circuits and symptoms themselves. This new knowledge will hopefully offer insights into existing and novel forms of treatments.

Thesis Committee – Roles and Responsibilities

PhD students enrolled at UCL are required to have a Thesis Committee who provide oversight of the student's research. For Students in the UCL-Wellcome PhD in Mental Health Science, the Thesis Committee includes academics with expertise in different mental health themes, a mental health practitioner and individuals with lived experience of mental illness.

The role of the Thesis Committee is to support the student and their supervisor during the 3-year PhD project. You will be asked to attend a minimum of six meetings organised by the student. At these meetings, the student will deliver an oral presentation, and in some cases will produce a report to be read in advance. Please see the table below for information on timetable and format of the meetings.

The committee members have the following responsibilities:

- Meet with the student at the designated times (six to ten times) throughout the progress of the PhD. Note that additional meetings may be arranged on an ad-hoc basis.
- Read Student reports prior to the Thesis Committee meeting (including an Upgrade report which is a formal report to show that the research to date matches the standards of a PhD).
- Approve the meeting reports that will be entered into the student's online Research Log.
- If required, provide additional support for the student e.g. additional Thesis Committee meetings outside of those scheduled to monitor progress.

Meeting	Time post start of Phd Project	Format
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1. Research Proposal	3 months	Research Proposal (~1,000 words) and oral presentation
2. 9 months Report	9 months	9 months report (~1,000 words) and oral presentation
3. MPhil-PhD Upgrade Report	9-18 months	Upgrade report (~10,000 words) and viva
4. Progress meeting	18 months	Oral presentation only
5. Progress meeting	24 months	Oral presentation only
6. Thesis outline and writing plan	30 months	Written thesis outline and writing plan and oral presentation

If you have any questions or if there is anything that we can do to make this opportunity easier for you to apply for please let me know at carlos.mena.20@ucl.ac.uk

Payment of £25/hour is available for Lived Experienced Thesis Committee members should you wish to claim it. This will typically include 1hr preparation time for the meetings.

If you are interested in joining my Thesis Committee please send a paragraph explaining why you are interested to: carlos.mena.20@ucl.ac.uk , by the 31st January 2022, at the latest.