Master of Science in Reproductive Health

Course Prospectus

2013
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Mission Statement

The Department of Obstetrics & Gynaecology will provide a comprehensive theory-based course of studies to enable the medical doctor to upgrade key aspects of knowledge relating to reproductive health. The course will facilitate learning within a structured framework covering relevant aspects within the basic sciences, the speciality of reproductive health in females and males, and those aspects of medicine, surgery and paediatrics relevant to the practice of the speciality.

The ethos of the course is to ensure that future graduates will be in a position to make significant contributions not only towards clinical care, but also towards promoting the academic aspects of the speciality in teaching and research.

This course of studies does not in any way assure the graduate any specialist status since it does not include any attempts to teach practical clinical skills. Specialist accreditation in Malta is legally determined by the criteria set by the Specialist Accreditation Committee in consultation with the relevant specialist representative body.¹

Curriculum Philosophy

The curriculum should enable graduates to gain theoretical competence in the field of reproductive health within the hospital environment and the community. They will be encouraged to become self-directed learners engaged in an ever changing environment. The degree of MSc in Reproductive Health will equip graduates with the intellectual and practical skills to enable them to combine the theoretical knowledge with the clinical skills through the merging of evidence-based medicine with

¹ Refer to Part VI of the Health Care Professions Act, 2004
clinical experience. It will thus strengthen links between the academic and clinical disciplines thus most appropriately translating knowledge into know-how.\(^2\)

**Academic Needs\(^3\)**

Reproductive health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of reproductive disease or infirmity.\(^4\) Reproductive health thus should not simply be assumed to include a list of diseases or problems, but must be looked at in the context of overall wellbeing.

Reproductive health deals with the reproductive processes, functions and system at all stages of life. It is a crucial part of general health and a central feature of human development. Reproductive health is a universal concern, but is of special importance for women particularly, but not exclusively, during the reproductive years. Men too have reproductive health concerns and needs though their general health is affected by reproductive health to a lesser extent than is the case for women.

The speciality of Obstetrics and Gynaecology includes two specialities that deal primarily, though not exclusively, with female reproductive health. The specialist obstetrician-gynaecologist is apt at providing appropriate care and advise to women and their partners throughout their reproductive life, and be competent in providing the medical and surgical management of clinical pathology involving the female reproductive organs and during pregnancy. In addition to the above, the specialist obstetrician-gynaecologist should be adequately versed in the ethical, legal, and public health facets of his speciality.

**Aims of the Course**

The course of Masters Degree in Reproductive Health aims to, in terms of;

*Personal and Professional Development:*
- Develop graduates with knowledge in reproductive health matters with the appropriate intellectual and cognitive skills to attain the standards of knowledge adequate to serve as a basis in the quest to specialise in the field of reproductive health, thus supplementing but not replacing the clinical skills attained through a formal clinical apprenticeship and training obtained in a recognised substantive training post recognised by the Specialist Accreditation Committee.

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\(^3\) As identified by the Training Programme in Obstetrics and Gynaecology prepared by the Malta College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in December 2007 and approved by the Specialist Accreditation Committee on the 21\(^{st}\) February 2008. Mirrors the Syllabus of studies for the Part I and Part II examinations defined by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologist [U.K.].

• Develop graduates with knowledge in reproductive health matters with the interpersonal skills required to enable them to work either individually or in a team to address reproductive health care problems in the care of individuals.

• Develop graduates with knowledge in reproductive health matters with a broad population-based approach to their speciality thus enabling them to serve as leaders, administrators and researchers in the community. This includes the ability to apply appropriate screening and case finding skills for specific risks and the development, implementation and evaluation of use of guidelines.

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Structure of the Course

**Entry Requirements**

Prospective students should be in possession of a medical degree approved in accordance to Part 1a of the Second Schedule of the Health Care Professions Act or the equivalent as determined by University Senate on the advise of the Board of Studies. Students whose primary language is not English should provide evidence of proficiency in the English Language and must have a minimum of IELTS 6.5 [International English Language Testing System] with no individual section scoring less than 5.5.

The course shall be limited to 10 students. If there are more eligible applicants than the number of places available, selection will be made in terms of the criteria established in the Regulations with preference being given to those individuals who have working experience in the speciality.\(^5\) The minimum number of participants that need to take part to make the course a feasible project shall be 6.

The course will be open to medical practitioners who wish to further their academic basis for the theory and practice of reproductive medicine. It is designed as an academic program and serves to supplement the students’ requirement to engage in self-directed or assigned practice-based learning.

Applications shall be made on the prescribed form and within the time specified by the Office of the Registrar. Students shall register for the study-units prescribed in their Programme of Study within the time specified by the Office of the Registrar. They shall not be considered as students on a study-unit unless they have so registered.

**Course duration**

This is a six semester part-time course for medical practitioners with an interest in Reproductive Health, in which the work of the speciality is examined from multidisciplinary, personal and population-based perspectives.

The taught course extends over 5 semesters over a 3-year period.\(^6\) The sixth semester will be dedicated to the completion of the thesis. The thesis must be submitted not later than September of the third year of studies.

To be eligible for the award of the Master of Science degree, course participants will need to accumulate a total of 90 ECTS credits, inclusive of a dissertation to which 30 ECTS shall be assigned.\(^7\) Students who obtain 60 credits assigned to the taught study-units with an average mark of

\(^5\) Refer to General Regulations for University Postgraduate awards 2008 and Bye-laws of 2013 in terms of general regulations for University Postgraduate awards for the Degree of Master of Science in Reproductive Health under the auspice of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery.

\(^6\) An academic year consists of two semesters, each incorporating fourteen weeks of teaching, two weeks of recess, and examination periods of two weeks and of four weeks at the end of the first and the second semester respectively. 30 credits are assigned to the study-units that students are expected to complete over one part-time academic year.

\(^7\) The number of credits awarded for successful completion of each study-unit. The allocation of credit to study-units forming part of a Postgraduate Course follows closely the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) proposed by the European Commission, a relevant extract from which is attached as Schedule 2 – ECTS Credits – to the General Regulations for University Undergraduate Awards, 2004, published as Legal Notice 127 of 2004.
at least 50% and do not proceed with the course, or having proceeded do not successfully complete the dissertation, shall be eligible for the award of the Postgraduate Diploma in Reproductive Health.

**Educational delivery strategy**

The learning strategy is designed on the basis that the students following the course are competency-based learners who want to acquire knowledge that they can pragmatically apply to their chosen career. Thus, the course teaching ethos will be not simply to transmit knowledge, but primarily to use a proactive learning approach with emphasis on active student participation to initiate a process of inquiry, analysis and decision making. The learning experience that is interactive, collaborative and respectful of students’ needs.

Several learning approaches will be used throughout the course study units.

- Lectures/Presentations – these should be interactive and dynamic to provide opportunities to the students to assume a prime role, i.e. a Socratic style of teaching. These should be structured in such a way as to make full use of the small-group environment presented during the course so that the trainer presentation session would allow for adequate discussions to allow development of self-directed learning.
- Facilitated Group Discussion – to incorporate student presentations with discussion, tutorials and case studies.
- Self directed learning packages with individual reading assignments and group projects.

The course will provide a safe, secure and orderly learning and working environments, and excellent educational activities which challenge and extend student learning. Whenever applicable and according to University rules, support services and special programs will be available to meet individual needs particularly in situations of disability.

**Dissertation**

The dissertation (15,000 to 20,000 words) will be based on a research study in reproductive health as approved by the Board of Studies. It must be handed in by not later than the end of September of the third year of studies.

The dissertation involves in depth research on a topic approved by the appointed supervisor and the Board of the Faculty. In certain instances the Department may also appoint a co-supervisor from outside the University. All supervisors shall possess a higher degree and are familiar with the field of study in that particular area of study. The Dissertation must be a research-based project presenting innovative insight into the reproductive medicine practice, planning, teaching or policy. The supervision of students for the dissertation shall be regulated by the provisions of regulation 50 of the General Regulations for University Postgraduate Awards, 2008.

**Assessment**

Assessment of study units shall be made through formal examination and assignments, as well as regular participation during seminars and tutorials. The dissertation shall be regularly assessed by the supervisor and by the Board of Studies as the latter may deem necessary from time to time. An additional mark for the completed dissertation will be given at the end of the second year.
The degree classification at the end of the 2 year course shall be based on the candidate’s performance in the study-units and the dissertation with 30 ECTS allocated for the dissertation and the dissertation viva out of a total ECTS of 90.

Students are expected to attend at least 80% of the scheduled teaching activities, failure to do this would be noted and the Board of Studies will take the necessary action according to established rules and procedures.

**Appraisal**

Individual appraisal can be an effective formative assessment tool. It will consist of some form of reflection on the student’s practice. The relevance of these methods together with the inherent flexibility allows the individual to determine his/her own educational objectives.

**Course Evaluation**

Course evaluation will be an ongoing process done by the course co-coordinator, the students and the faculty, particularly in terms of reaching students and faculty’s objectives and the whole process of achieving these objectives. The evaluation will be carried out by qualitative and quantitative methods including subjective and objective criteria in the whole process. This programme will be evaluated after the first cohort of students has qualified.

**Standards**

The curriculum has been peer reviewed by foreign academics and the Academic Programmes Quality and Assurance Unit of the University of Malta.

The programme of studies for this course has been compiled in line with the General Regulations for University Postgraduate awards 2008 and the Bye-laws of 2010 in terms of general regulations for University Postgraduate awards, 2008 for the Degree of Master of Science in Reproductive Medicine under the auspice of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery. The Academic Program Quality and Regulations Unit have been overseeing the development of the program. The Program Validation Committee has validated the program and was approved by Senate in 2010.

The Board of Studies will oversee the implementation of the program and maintain the academic quality through the whole course. It is constituted by means of and according to the University of Malta rules and regulations.

**Student representation**

One student representative should be selected by the students of the course upon commencement and he/she will be able to ensure effective communication and representation between faculty and participants on the Board of Studies.

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9 Legal Notice 120 of 2008 – Malta Government Gazette No. 18,227 – 11 April 2008
Facilitators and Teachers
The teachers of the course will be predominantly local experts in the respective fields of study. The Departmental staff will be involved in teaching duties along with invited local speakers for specific topics. The Board of Studies shall appoint an academic supervisor for each candidate and in certain instances, may also appoint a co-supervisor from outside the university. The co-supervisor shall be expected to be in possession of a higher degree and occupy, at least, a middle level position in a public or private organisation.

Curriculum communication
The curriculum will consist of the Syllabus, workbooks and timetables. It will be available to students over the internet and as hard copies whenever this is appropriate or requested. Given the difficulty and the uncertainties involved in the planning of such a course, departures from the planned schedules can occur.

Course management
The overall responsibility for the planning, implementation and monitoring will be that of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology through the course coordinator and the overall monitoring by the appointed Board of Studies as per University of Malta rules and regulations. Change, innovation, flexibility and development will ensure that the Department keeps abreast of students’ needs and the emerging social, academic, institutional and professional issues relevant to the course. The course shall be overseen by a Board of Studies presently composed as follows:

- Prof. C. Savona-Ventura MD, DScMed, FRCOG, FICPI, AccrCOG [Chairman]
- Dr. Y. Muscat Baron MD, PhD, FRCOG, FRCPI [co-ordinator]
- Prof. M.P. Brincat [member]
- Dr. R. Galea MD, PhD, FRCOG, AccrCOG [member]
- Student representative
Content of the Master Degree of Science in Reproductive Medicine.

*Study Units Overview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Study Units Compulsory</th>
<th>Co-ordinator</th>
<th>ECTS Credits</th>
<th>Contact hours</th>
<th>Independent learning hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>OBG5001</td>
<td>Bio-Medical Sciences relevant to reproductive health care</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>OBG5002</td>
<td>Medical History &amp; Sociology, Law &amp; Ethics in reproductive health care - Principles of Research Methodology</td>
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<td>OBG5003</td>
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<td>OBG5004</td>
<td>Basic Principles of Epidemiology, Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methodology</td>
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<td>OBG5010</td>
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<td>Dissertation Thesis and Viva.</td>
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<td>Year 3</td>
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