Financial support from the Faculty of Medical Sciences Student Travel Grant enabled me to attend the prestigious international meeting of The Lancet Commission on Obesity (LCO), held in Washington DC, USA on 18-20th October, 2016.

The LCO was convened in order to stimulate action on obesity and strengthen accountability systems for the implementation of agreed recommendations to reduce obesity and its related inequalities, and to develop new understandings of the underlying systems that are driving obesity, with the aim of developing innovative approaches towards making those systems less obesogenic. The Commission is led by Professor Boyd Swinburn and Professor Bill Dietz, and involves 22 other multidisciplinary Commissioners from across the globe, with world-leading expertise in differing aspects of obesity, undernutrition and climate change. The Commission is supported by 15 international Fellows who work alongside the Commissioners to undertake coordination duties and provide assistance with research and writing.

I was appointed a LCO Fellow in April 2016 and have supported the work of the Implementation group of the Commission. This has involved researching the UK Public Health Responsibility Deal as a case study to identify lessons learned from a voluntary public-private partnership. I have also commenced a project to compare international food policy recommendations from climate change, obesity, and undernutrition to identify areas of agreement, and opportunities to inform the LCO’s work and broader efforts to develop coordinated global food policy recommendations. My Fellowship with the LCO overlaps closely with my PhD studies at Newcastle University, which focus on investigating the determinants and health outcomes of home food preparation, including the links with dietary-related diseases such as type II diabetes and obesity.

The LCO International Meeting involved a range of presentations, discussions and working group sessions on varied aspects of the Commission’s work. These included insightful perspectives on the lived experience of obesity, interactions with business and the food industry, and systems approaches to multi-faced problems. I presented and received valuable feedback on my work for the Commission to date, and gained invaluable experience in team working and international collaboration. The LCO’s work will be taken forward over the next 18 months to two years, and will result in a final report, and a number of prestigious peer-reviewed publications.

Following the meeting of the LCO, I was supported by Professor Dietz to pursue emergent work and my ongoing PhD studies at The George Washington Milken Institute School of Public Health in Washington DC for three weeks. This enabled me to further strengthen my personal global research collaborations, and to gain experience of working internationally in a research institution.

I would like to thank Newcastle University Graduate School for their support in facilitating this experience, which has helped me to establish links to global networks of expertise, contribute towards international publications, and gain personal experience in presenting to and working alongside world experts in obesity.

Dr Susanna Mills
Institute of Health & Society