

FURTHER STUDY FAQs

POSTGRADUATE STUDY IS A BIG COMMITMENT. MAKE SURE YOU PICK THE RIGHT COURSE FOR THE RIGHT REASONS, AND THAT YOU'RE AWARE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES.

QA **What types of postgraduate study are there?**
Masters: MA (Master of Arts) and MSc (Master of Science) courses are taught

programmes usually lasting 9–12 months (although in many European countries masters can be two years in length). They generally combine lectures, seminars and tutorials with an in-depth research project or dissertation. Masters programmes are often undertaken as a precursor to a PhD.

PhD: otherwise known as a doctorate, the PhD is a research degree. It consists of a research project and a substantial thesis, outlining the research methodology, results and analysis. Typically a PhD will take at least three years, including up to a year for writing up.

See 'To PhD or not to PhD? That is the question' PAGE 18

Postgraduate diploma: sometimes these courses have very similar content to that of a masters, but without a dissertation. Postgraduate diplomas can also allow entry into vocational or professional work, for example the Graduate Diploma in Law, which must be undertaken by graduates without a law degree if they wish to then train as a solicitor or barrister.

Professional qualifications: many professions have an examination and accreditation system to ensure that its practitioners have the right knowledge and skills to perform their work effectively. For example, a certificate in journalism from the National Council for the Training of Journalists, or a Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development qualification for a career in HR. Professional qualifications can sometimes be useful for entering a profession, alongside practical experience, or they can be studied while the graduate is working and be paid for by the employer.

QA **Will further study improve my career prospects?**

No postgraduate course will guarantee you a job on graduation. Some jobs might require a postgraduate qualification, and many will call for the kinds of skills that you might be able to develop as a postgraduate student. But a further degree will never speak for itself on your CV. Instead, you'll need to communicate to prospective employers why you chose your course and how it has made you a better candidate for the role. Some careers may even value practical experience over further study – would you be better off spending a year working in the sector rather than gaining a masters? Asking these questions now will help you later to articulate confidently to employers why you chose to do a particular course.

QA **If I don't go onto further study immediately after graduation, can I come back to it later?**

Absolutely. While many graduates go straight into further study, it is also common to do something else for a year or longer, and then return to study. Taking time out before embarking on postgraduate study can help you to focus your decision-making. For example, doing some fieldwork in international development before starting a masters could give direction to your research project, and you may have a greater understanding of the practical applications.

QA **If I do a PhD, does that mean I'll go on to an academic career?**

Not necessarily. A PhD is generally a requirement for becoming an academic researcher or lecturer, but this is an extremely competitive route so doing a PhD will not automatically qualify you to become an academic. Conversely, doing a PhD doesn't mean that the academic route is the only option. In fact, many people go into other sectors after completing a doctorate, for example curating in a museum or researching for a pharmaceutical company.

QA **I didn't get a very good undergraduate mark. Will a masters help?**

There is no evidence to suggest that a good masters result will counterbalance a disappointing undergraduate degree result. However, while doing a masters you may be able to develop additional skills and experience that will make you more employable overall. It's important to consider whether further study is the best way of doing this; would it be better to gain more practical experience in your chosen sector? The bottom line is – don't do a masters purely to improve your academic record.

QA **What can I do with my career? Can't I delay making a decision by doing some postgraduate study?**

It's very easy for employers to spot a candidate at interview who completed a postgraduate course purely as a delaying tactic. What does this say about your motivation and planning? It's fine if you don't know exactly what you want to do but another course won't necessarily help you figure it out. So if this is your only reason, think very carefully and speak to a careers consultant for guidance.

QA **When do I need to apply?**
Most applications are made directly to the institutions, and enquiries for doctoral research are best started around December. For most masters courses there isn't a specific deadline and you can apply throughout the academic year. However, popular courses tend to fill up quickly, so it's a good idea to try to complete your application in the autumn term. Some vocational courses have their applications dealt with via clearing-house systems with immovable application deadlines.

QA **Where can I find funding?**
There are a variety of funding sources available, but it pays to start as early as possible. It can take a long time to make funding applications, and some sources such as research councils have strict closing dates. However, there may also be last-minute funding opportunities so keep your eyes open nearer to the start date. See the box below for more information on funding.

QA **I just really love my subject. Is that a good enough reason?**
Yes! Continuing to study a subject you are really passionate about can be a very rewarding route, as long as you have considered all the practical implications such as applying and finding funding. If you are thinking about a research career, check whether you need to do a masters first, as you may be able to go straight on to a PhD.

QA **Can I study abroad?**
Studying abroad can certainly be an excellent option, giving you the chance to experience new cultures and develop your skills in an international context. However, the wealth of countries, institutions and courses on offer make the decision an even more complex one. You may also be far away from your support network. So do your research thoroughly – this checklist might be useful in helping you to determine whether international study is the right choice for you: prospect.ac.uk/postgraduate-study/study-abroad/study-abroad-checklist. 

Funding sources

Funding may involve some lengthy applications, so always remember to apply well in advance and check the deadline.

Postgraduate loans

As of September 2016, loans of up to £10,000 have been available to UK and EU students for all masters degrees at all UK universities. For full details and eligibility requirements see gov.uk/masters-loan

College bursaries

Most colleges and some departments have their own awards. Check with the department, university website or Postgraduate Admissions Office to see what you might be eligible for.

Career development loans

These are available for a variety of courses. An information pack is available by calling 0800 100 900 or from gov.uk/career-development-loans.

Charities and trusts

They will not fund all of your studies but can contribute up to a few hundred pounds for specific items such as books or transport. See the Directory of Grant Making Trusts or the Grants Register for more details. You should be able to find copies of these in your careers centre or your university library.

Graduate teaching and research assistantships

Working as a research or teaching assistant within the department may entitle you to a bursary and/or a waiver of your fee. Look in the Times Higher Education, Guardian and on jobs.ac.uk for these posts.

Employer sponsorship

This is rare unless you are already working for the employer, in which case you may get funding to study for a vocational qualification.

Research Council grants

There are seven government Research Councils which fund both masters and PhD study. Universities are responsible for distributing Research Council grants.

Check with the department you're applying to so you can find out if they have Research Council funding for your course and, if so, how you can apply for it. Grants from Research Councils can be very competitive. Make sure to get as much help and advice on the application as you can.

International students

There are a number of organisations that offer funding for international students. Check prospect.ac.uk for a list of these.