

Postgraduate study

Are you keen to study your subject in more depth?

Do you want to develop specialist knowledge or skills?

Are you aiming to gain a professional qualification, eg in teaching, law or social work?

Is postgraduate study a way of changing career direction?

Are you hoping to gain a competitive edge in the job market?

There are many reasons for students to consider postgraduate study and it is useful to clarify in your own mind what you are hoping to gain. If you are unsure as to the pros and cons, the [Prospects](#) website highlights points to consider, whilst the [FindaMasters](#) site explores the link between postgraduate qualifications, employability and long term earnings potential.

For some courses (although not all) a 2:1 or above will be required and for vocational courses, eg social work, you will also be expected to offer relevant work experience. It is therefore always important to check entry requirements.

There are many different types of postgraduate courses, and you will see a variety of titles used eg postgraduate certificates/diplomas, masters (MSc, MA, MRes, MPhil) and PhDs. Usually a full time postgraduate diploma is a taught course lasting one academic year - many Masters courses also last for one academic year but in addition students complete a dissertation over the summer months. Some masters are taught courses, although research based masters are also available.

PhD programmes are research based and involve at least 3 years of original supervised research activity leading to a thesis which adds to the body of knowledge in your subject area. Many students will initially complete a masters as a stepping stone to PhD study. When considering your choices, you are therefore thinking not just about the subject area, but also about the length of time involved, the type of study that suits your learning style, and its relevance to your career goals.

Applications

Applications are usually made direct to your chosen institutions. The majority of courses begin in September and many do not specify a definite closing date, but obviously popular courses will fill up as the year progresses, so it is best to start exploring your choices in the autumn term of your final year.

There are a few exceptions and for some vocational courses, for example accelerated nursing or medicine, teacher training and social work, applications are made via [UCAS](#). For some of these courses closing dates apply, for example the closing date for accelerated medicine is usually mid-October, whilst the initial closing date for social work is usually in mid-January.

Applications for the Legal Practice course and the Graduate Diploma in Law are also made through a clearing house, the [Central Applications Board](#).

A very small number of universities use an applications system called [UKPASS](#) for postgraduate courses.

It is therefore important to check what the procedure is for each course and whether a closing date applies.

Funding

The University's [Student Money and Accommodation Advice Service](#) provides information sheets on possible funding sources for postgraduate study in general, as well as specific information on funding for teacher training and social work courses. UK and EU students studying in English institutions can apply for a loan for a masters course from [Student Finance England](#). Full time, part-time and distance learning courses will all be covered by this scheme and the loan can be for a maximum of £10,609.

Loans of up to £25,000 are also available for PhD study and more information on this as well as research council funding can be found [here](#).

In addition, many institutions will offer their own bursaries or scholarships, so it is always worthwhile to check.

The supporting statement

Most postgraduate applications will involve a personal or supporting statement. Here the selectors will expect you to include:

Evidence of your motivation – Why does the subject area appeal to you? why do you want to study at that particular institution?

Evidence of your suitability – what have you covered in your undergraduate degree that would help you to succeed at postgraduate level? What knowledge have you gained and what academic skills have you developed (you could include the ability to conduct independent research for example, to analyse data or to produce concise written reports). For vocational courses in particular, you would be expected to offer some relevant work experience and this also can be used to illustrate what you can offer.

An insight into your career plans – where do you hope this course will lead? What job areas are of interest to you and how does this course fit into your short and long term plans?

Once you have completed the first draft of your supporting statement you can arrange a meeting to discuss it with a careers consultant and you will be given feedback and ideas for development.

Additional Resources

[The Prospects website](#) provides extensive information on the range of postgraduate options available, including a searchable database of both taught courses and research opportunities. It also discusses in more detail the main issues to consider, as well as sources of potential funding. Similar information can be found on the "[find a masters](#)" site, or alternatively "[target postgrad](#)".