

# Postgraduate Study & Research

Roughly 30% of Imperial College London graduates go on to further study or research. This information sheet helps you to decide if this is the right option for you and how to find out more. Possible options include:

**Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas** - These are usually related to a particular career, helping you to progress into that career perhaps, or gain a required qualification for entry into it. Examples include law, teaching and journalism, and courses can last from nine months to a year.

**Master's degrees** - An MRes, MSc, MPhil or MA can provide an opportunity to deepen and focus your subject knowledge or to change direction by studying a new subject of interest, possibly vocational or career-related. Entry onto a Master's is sometimes possible with a 2:2 class of degree but a 2:1 is commonly required.

**Master's of Business Administration (MBA)** - This is a specialised management qualification. MBAs at some of the best-known institutions require applicants to have had a few years relevant work experience at graduate level before acceptance onto an MBA.

**Doctorate** - A PhD, DPhil or EngD will enable you to pursue an area of research in more depth and take about three years to complete. A 1st or 2:1 degree is normally required for entry onto a doctorate. In some subjects, a Master's degree will also be required. Some research projects, e.g. EngD, are undertaken collaboratively with industry.

## WHY CHOOSE POSTGRADUATE STUDY?

As you will be spending a great deal of time and money undertaking postgraduate study, it is important that you make an informed decision.

**An interest in the subject** - All levels of postgraduate study will be challenging in some way and a real interest in the subject can keep you going when academic life is tough! However, a subject studied at undergraduate level may differ significantly to the same subject at postgraduate level, so do your research first.

**Help with career choice** - A postgraduate course which includes a placement or work-based project could confirm your choice of career or help you decide on a particular specialism. Sometimes, however, students decide to do further study as a way of postponing career decisions. You may feel that if you remain in education for another year or two then you will eventually find out what you want to do. Unfortunately, unless

you start taking action, you may still be undecided at the end of your postgraduate course. Start by evaluating your skills, values and personal qualities; investigate and research career options; gain relevant work experience wherever possible and take advantage of the help that the Careers Service can offer.

**Enhancing job prospects** - The value which employers place on a postgraduate qualification will vary. A Master's course in a subject closely related to the type of work for which you are applying may give you the edge over candidates with only a first degree. On the other hand, many employers only require an undergraduate degree for entry, so a postgraduate course may not add much more weight to your application.

Working for a year in a relevant area may be considered more useful experience by some employers. So find out about the value of further study in your chosen career area. Don't assume it is an automatic passport to a higher level position or higher salary as many graduate training schemes don't require you to have a Master's. Investigate whether the Master's is beneficial for getting into the specific role and sector you're interested in, by researching online and asking potential employers directly.

## FIND OUT MORE

You'll need to carry out some research to make the right choice for you. Factors to consider are:

- entry requirements
- cost of fees and living expenses and availability of funding
- advantages and disadvantages of changing institution

Consider the benefits to your career development of undertaking the postgraduate study/research, compared with gaining work experience during that period.

Depending on the type of postgraduate study, you may also want to find out:

- What do postgraduates do on completion of their course/research?
- If the course is related to a particular industry, how close are the links? Are work placements or work-based projects an integral part of the course?
- Is the course suitable for recent graduates or is previous work experience preferred?
- Who might supervise your research? What are their particular areas of interest?
- What facilities are available for research students? How is research training structured?



## WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE

Online databases and surveys as well as reference directories will help you identify postgraduate courses, research opportunities and institutions to contact.

Sometimes departments advertise courses on [www.findaMaster's.com](http://www.findaMaster's.com) and funded PhDs or research posts on [www.jobs.ac.uk](http://www.jobs.ac.uk), [www.findaphd.com](http://www.findaphd.com) or in the specialist press for that sector. If you are trying to identify departments that have a strong research record in your area of interest, talk to your current tutors and think about the significant academics in your field – where are they based? Look at prospectuses and course leaflets and contact admissions tutors for more information. Careers Consultants can help you consider the options. And talk to current postgraduate students to find out about the pros and cons.

## MAKING APPLICATIONS

There is no central admissions system for all postgraduate study. In most cases, you apply directly to institutions. Closing dates vary so find out about relevant deadlines. The deadline for receipt of applications for some research programmes, e.g. PhD/MRes/EngD, may be determined by the closing date set by the relevant funding body. Applications for a small number of courses (usually professional diplomas, e.g. teaching, law and social work) are made through clearing houses rather like UCAS. Courses which are handled through clearing houses will commonly have a set closing date.

You may be offered a place solely on the basis of your written application and your academic references. Depending on the type of postgraduate study, however, you may be invited for an interview and also be asked to take part in group discussions or make a presentation. Admissions tutors commonly use exercises when selecting students for vocational courses.

For guidance on writing a personal statement, pick up a copy of our 'Writing Personal Statements' handout, available from the Careers Information Room or via our website.

## FUNDING

### Master's and postgraduate certificates/diplomas

For some qualifications e.g. accountancy or actuarial you will usually be working while you study and fees will be paid by your employer, so financing your study will not be a barrier. However other types of postgraduate study, such as Master's courses, can be expensive. Fees vary by course provider and living costs vary by location, so it is worth shopping around. You may want to consider studying in different countries or working for a period of time before embarking on study. Many postgraduate students (excepting PhD students, who are usually funded) have to self-fund. There are a variety of approaches including:

- Savings
- Loans e.g. from the UK government or Erasmus+
- Small grants through charities or trusts
- Part-time study
- Being sponsored towards qualifications by an employer

[www.findaMaster's.com](http://www.findaMaster's.com) and [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) have useful guides to postgraduate funding which give more detail on the above.

Note that the 'Grants Register 2018 – the complete guide to postgraduate funding' and the Directory of Grant Making Trusts are available in the Careers Service library, 5th floor, Sherfield Building.

### PhDs

It is not advised to self-fund a PhD, as the courses are long and self-funding adds significant pressure. Most PhD students in the UK are funded by the research councils ([www.ukri.org](http://www.ukri.org)). This government funding is distributed to the universities who then allocate it to students. There are also other sources of funding which may come from a university itself or from other funders of research e.g. charities. The best strategy for funding a PhD is to start by focussing on finding the best PhD programme for you. A PhD is a big commitment of time and effort and you need to work out what topic you would like to research, with what research group and in what institution as your first priority. Don't compromise on these in order to get funding. To research options, find out what interesting work is being done in your discipline and by who – these could be potential PhD supervisors for you and you could informally contact them. Also, use [www.findaphd.com](http://www.findaphd.com) and [www.jobs.ac.uk](http://www.jobs.ac.uk). In parallel to researching your options, research how the funding works for the universities you want to apply to. Each university has different funding opportunities available so you need to learn about what is available through your specific target institutions. Make sure you know the deadlines for any funding, as these can be different (and earlier!) than course application deadlines.

You can also take the initiative to research separate funding options. Universities are very happy if you bring additional funding to them and there may be sources of funding available to you that they don't know about. The best place to start is by reviewing the 'Grants Register 2018 – the complete guide to postgraduate funding'. This directory is only produced in hard copy and is available in the Careers Service library, 5th floor, Sherfield Building. You may also want to research any funding opportunities available from the government of your home country.

## FURTHER SUPPORT

Available from the Careers Service:

- **Careers Service website:** [www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/further-study](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/further-study)
- **Bookable appointments** with Careers Consultants: book through [JobsLive\\*](#)
- **Reference books** - including: 'The PhD Application Handbook', 'Getting a PhD', 'Gaining Funding for Research', and 'The Alternative Guide to Postgraduate Funding', available in the Careers Service, level 5 Sherfield Building
- **Careers Service events** - each year we plan talks and workshops which are designed to enhance your chances of success in the application process - for details, see [JobsLive\\*](#)
- For information on the disclosure of disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia please see information on the Careers Service website: [www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure)

\* [www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/jobslive](http://www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/jobslive)

