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.

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

**Masters 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. Make a start by evaluating your skills, values and personal qualities; investigate and research possible career options; gain relevant work experience wherever possible and take advantage of all 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.findamasters.com and funded PhDs or research posts on www.jobs.ac.uk, 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 provide information on the range of courses available and 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
Unfortunately it can sometimes be much easier to get an offer of a postgraduate place than it is to obtain funding. The major source of postgraduate funding is the relevant Research Council, although competition is very strong. Full details of the application process and the type of support available can be found on the websites of the individual Councils. Links to all of the Research Councils can be found on the Research Council UK website - www.rcuk.ac.uk
Specific funding schemes exist for certain types of vocational courses such as teaching and social work. Some institutions can offer bursaries or fee reductions and occasionally small amounts of money might be available through charitable trusts or similar organisations. Eligibility for the latter is often dependent on factors such as where you live and the course of study that you plan to follow. Many postgraduates have to self-fund their courses. For information on financial support, see - www.prospects.ac.uk/links/postgrad

FURTHER INFORMATION
Available from the Careers Service:
- AGCAS Special Interest Series - ‘Postgraduate Study and Research’, ‘Your Masters…What Next?’ and ‘Your PhD…What Next?’ are available to download from www.prospects.ac.uk
- Online - look up courses on www.prospects.ac.uk/links/postgrad
- Directories - The Prospects Postgraduate Directory is published annually and is available for reference at the Careers Service Reception
- Studying Abroad - information on postgraduate study abroad can be found at the rear of the Information Room in the ‘Exploring Further Study’ section. AGCAS Country Profiles provide an overview of postgraduate study throughout the world. Paper copies are available in the Careers Service or online at www.prospects.ac.uk – search for Country Profiles.
- Funding - Careers Service files on funding study, in the UK or abroad, are in the ‘Exploring Further Study’ section. Directories, e.g. ‘Directory of Grant Making Trusts’, are available for reference in the Careers Information Room. Information on postgraduate study, including a comprehensive guide entitled ‘Prospects Postgraduate Funding Guide’, can be found at: www.prospects.ac.uk under ‘Postgraduate Study’

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