
SUBJECT SHEETS

Choosing your taught postgraduate programme and institution

The United Kingdom (UK) offers thousands of taught postgraduate programmes which are respected and recognised throughout the world. Every year thousands of international students come to the UK to enhance their careers and their knowledge. Whatever your subject, you will be able to further your academic qualifications in an environment that attracts some of the best intellects to study at some of the best institutions in the world.

Note : If you are interested in studying for a Master's in Business Administration (MBA), please refer to *Master of Business Administration (MBA)* in this series.

Checklist: Why study a taught postgraduate course in the United Kingdom?

- most programmes are completed in one calendar year – making a top postgraduate qualification more affordable
- all subjects are available at all postgraduate levels – diploma, Master's and doctorate
- if you initially choose a diploma or Master's course, you will be in a good position to go on to do a doctorate – the highest student award in the UK academic system
- many departments have strong and relevant links to business and industry
- you will improve your fluency in English – which is especially useful if you intend to work in business or commerce
- you can choose the type of institution at which you would like to study
- tight controls are kept on the quality of education and standard of degrees
- you may be able to get a scholarship or fellowship.

1 What can I study?

How should I start to choose my course and institution?

Start by deciding which subject you wish to study. It is usual to study the same subject as your first degree, or a related subject, but you do not have to do so. There are also conversion Master's, which are designed to help you to move into a new subject area. Conversion courses are most common in vocational related areas such as computer science, information studies, teaching and law. A typical example could be a student with a background in science or mathematics moving to computer science via a conversion Master's course. It is also possible for a graduate from an Arts based subject, such as history, to follow a conversion course in finance and accounting.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carries out 'Institutional Audits' which review the quality mechanisms set in place by each institution. The 'Institutional Audits' replace the Teaching Quality Assessments (TQA) which graded the quality of teaching and learning in particular departments. All teaching departments in the UK were reviewed between 1992-2002. Under the current system TQAs have been discontinued and although still useful and informative you may find previous TQAs increasingly out of date.

All of these external reviews carried out by the QAA can be found on their website at www.qaa.ac.uk/revreps/reviewreports.htm. For more information, refer to *Quality issues* in this series.

Checklist: Choosing the right course

- if career advancement is the reason for doing a postgraduate degree, you should find out from professional bodies in your own country which qualification you should aim for
- carry out thorough research into the programmes available – www.educationuk.org for course and institution information (*Postgrad : The directory of graduate studies* www.postgrad.hobsons.com and *Prospects : Postgraduate Directory* www.prospects.ac.uk are also helpful)
- obtain the institution's own postgraduate prospectus
- check the results of the Subject reviews www.qaa.ac.uk/revreports/reviewreports.htm
- consider whether the college is the sort of place where you would like to live (i.e. town or city, rural or urban), its accessibility and whether you will be close to any relatives.

What types of taught postgraduate degrees are available?

There are broadly four types :

- Master's degrees (such as Master of Arts, Master of Science and various specialisms, including Master of Laws and Master of Education)
- Master of Business Administration (MBA), either general or specialist (see *MBA*s in this series)
- Certificates and diplomas, such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), the Postgraduate Diploma (PG Dip) and Postgraduate Certificate (PG Cert)

Types of taught degree

	Duration	Qualifications needed	Special requirements	Comments
Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MSc), Master of Laws (LLM), Master of Education (MEd)	Usually twelve months, though it can range from nine months to two years	Usually a first degree in a relevant subject	International students may be asked to take a postgraduate diploma first, as entry standards are extremely high.	These are especially suitable for students with a very specific area of academic study, and a high level of academic achievement. Some institutions offer bridging courses for postgraduate admission, which increase a student's chance of being accepted. Sometimes you will be guaranteed a place on the postgraduate course.
Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)	Usually one year. Part time courses may last two years	Usually a first degree in a relevant subject	For secondary teaching the first degree should be in the subject to be taught.	This is the common route for secondary school teaching, although there are a number of courses for primary school teaching.
Postgraduate Diploma (PG Dip), Postgraduate Certificate (PG Cert)	Usually nine months.	Usually a first degree in a relevant subject.	You may be asked for relevant work experience in the subject.	Postgraduate certificates and diplomas usually follow the same programme as a Master's degree but without the thesis. They are often accepted as a qualification in the relevant field.
Conversion Master's	Usually twelve months.	A first degree in another subject		These are designed for students who have not studied the subject concerned but want to move into it. Computer science is a typical example.
Master of Business Administration				For more information, see <i>MBA</i> s in this series.
New Route Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	Four years.	A UK first degree or Master's with high marks, or equivalent.		New PhD programme offering a mixture of research and taught elements. May also include professional skills.

What is the difference between a Master's degree and a Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma?

The teaching for all of these consist of lectures, seminars and classes, but Master's students submit a written dissertation of 15,000-20,000 words at the end of the course.

In the Quality Assurance Agency qualifications framework (www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/nqf/nqf.htm) Postgraduate certificates and diplomas are recognised as being the same level as a Masters.

The three qualifications differ in the amount of learning involved. There is not yet a formal UK Higher Education credit framework but there is general agreement amongst those institutions that use credits. A typical expectation would be that a PG certificate equates to 60 credits, a diploma to 120 credits and a Masters to 180 credits.

The Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) lies slightly outwith this framework and the Department for Education and Skills hopes to clarify this in the near future.

Can I progress from a Diploma or Certificate to a Master's?

Yes. Some courses offer this specifically. They will be listed in course directories as MSc/Diploma or MA/Diploma.

2 Entrance

What qualifications will I need?

Usually equivalent to a UK first degree in a relevant subject (unless you are taking a conversion Master's). A Diploma in a professional area, such as library studies or management, will usually need some work experience.

Are there any English language requirements?

Yes. This will usually be an IELTS (International English Language Testing System) grade between 6 and 7, a TOEFL score of 550-600 or equivalent. Check with individual institutions for details.

3 Next steps

Checklist: Your next steps

- 1 Draw up a shortlist of institutions and courses. There is no restriction on the number of institutions to which you can apply.
- 2 Obtain postgraduate application forms from all of them (there is not a standard form and you will need to apply directly to each university).
- 3 Start your application procedure at least twelve months before the proposed start date (usually October).
- 4 If you are applying for a scholarship, apply at least one year before the course starts.
- 5 You must arrange for some accommodation (even if it is only temporary) before you arrive in the UK. Once you have been accepted on to a course, apply for accommodation immediately (either university owned or private).

4 Where can I find more information?

British Council Education information

Website www.educationuk.org

For further information, you can find details of your nearest office at www.britishcouncil.org/home-contact-worldwide.htm which includes links to all our country web pages and a worldwide address book giving contact details for all offices.

EducationUK Scotland

Website www.educationukscotland.org

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