

Postgraduate qualifications

If you want to carry on your studies after a BA degree, or learn more about a particular subject, there are a range of postgraduate qualifications available. Some are linked to a specific profession, while others allow you to complete an original piece of research.

What they are

Some higher education qualifications require that you already have a bachelors degree. These are known as 'postgraduate' qualifications.

Generally they are:

- postgraduate certificates
- postgraduate diplomas
- masters degrees
- doctorates

Most types of postgraduate qualification will include taught and research elements. Postgraduate qualifications are at 'masters' and 'doctoral' level.

Who can take them

Normally, to study for a postgraduate qualification, you will need to have a bachelors degree with a grade of lower second (2:2) or above. Some London colleges will expect a first class honours degree. To find out the entrance requirements for a particular postgraduate course, you can search for courses online at Directgov.

Postgraduate diplomas and certificates

Postgraduate diplomas and postgraduate certificates can be academic or vocational qualifications. They normally take 9 to 12 months to complete full-time. The number of lectures and seminars you attend, and projects and research papers you produce will vary depending on the type of course and the college or university you attend. They would allow you, for instance, to become a studio technician in a department.

Subjects available

There are a huge range of subjects to choose from. You can study a subject that's new to you, or choose a subject that builds on the knowledge and skills you gained during your bachelors degree.

Grades

Grades are normally awarded as:

- distinction, merit, pass or fail

Where they can lead

Postgraduate certificates can lead on to postgraduate diplomas.

You can also use a postgraduate certificate or diploma as a route into a specific career or onto further study, such as a masters degree.

Masters degrees

A masters degree is a qualification of academic study. It can be research based, a taught course, or a mixture of both, and will take at least 12 months of full-time study to complete.

The number of lectures, seminars, projects and research papers will vary depending on the type of course and the institution.

You may also have to submit a lengthy dissertation at the end of your course.

Subjects available

The types of masters degrees available include:

- MA: master of arts
- MSc: master of science
- MBA: master of business administration
- MEd: master of education
- MPhil: master of philosophy

Grades

Most masters degrees are normally awarded as either:

- Distinction, merit, pass or fail

Where they can lead

Some masters degrees, such as in business administration and law, prepare you for a career in a particular field. Others, like the master of research can prepare you for a doctorate qualification. Some MAs, such as Industrial Design Engineering and Product Design at the Royal College, will have direct links to industry and prepare you to enter very specific creative fields.

Doctorates

A doctorate qualification gives you the opportunity to undertake an original piece of research. It will usually take at least three years of full-time study to complete.

Throughout the course, you will be expected to work independently, with guidance from a supervisor. The supervisor advises you whether your research is on track and about deadlines you have to meet.

During the first one to three years of your doctorate, you will research your chosen topic and plan your dissertation.

In your final year, you will normally write up your dissertation.

Many doctorate courses lead to a qualification such as a Doctor of Philosophy - a PhD.

Grades

Doctorates are usually awarded as either a pass or fail; in rare cases with a distinction.

Who offers them

Doctorate qualifications are offered by universities that offer research opportunities.

Find out more

To find out more about getting a postgraduate qualification, contact universities and colleges, or visit their websites. Their prospectuses will list both taught courses and research opportunities.

Some colleges have a postgraduate open day, which is a chance for you to meet prospective tutors or supervisors.

The Higher Education and Research Opportunities (HERO) website also has information about research careers and funding.

As a process, researching postgraduate opportunities may take 12-18 months, so it pays to think seriously about it in your 2nd year

Search for courses on www.prospect.ac.uk