

REASONS FOR APPLYING TO POSTGRADUATE STUDY

Interest in the subject:

It is important to enjoy and be interested in an area of study. Think about the long-term implications of your choice. Does your choice of course fit in with your career plans? All post graduate courses will develop skills that but some will be of much more use to you than others. Try the Prospects Planner career interests exercise on www.prospects.ac.uk to help you make your choice.

Requirement for the profession you want to enter:

Some careers require a professional qualification, for example, law, social work and teaching. For some employment a postgraduate qualification is not essential but can provide a distinct advantage especially in competitive industries

Increased skills for job market:

Postgraduate study should help you gain number of transferable skills that employers value. These might include project management, working in teams, presentation and technical skills. Think about what skills you want to develop and whether your chosen course equips you with these.

Enhance employment prospects:

Research the area of work you are interested in to see how employers view applicants. For some employers postgraduate study will enhance your job prospects whilst others place more value on applicants' work experience and transferable skills.

Convert to a new area:

Many postgraduate courses provide a way of converting to a particular career area or changing your educational direction. These may be taught masters or diploma/certificate qualifications. However it is possible to convert to a new career area through employment and some companies will provide relevant professional training to graduates from all disciplines so do investigate the career area you are considering to find out more.

Postpone making a career decision:

Sometimes you might just want to do further study to postpone looking for work. This is not necessarily a bad thing but if it is just down to fear of entering the jobs market make an appointment with your careers adviser to discuss your options – the phrase “the eternal student” is used to indicate those who educate themselves out of the jobs market! If you still decide to undertake a course for this reason use your time wisely and actively. Research your career options and undertake self assessment to find out what your skills are, what interests you and what you want out of a career. Use the time to develop your employability skills through college activities and work experience

Employers views on postgraduate study:

Some employers place great importance in the advanced knowledge and skills gained through post graduate study. The willingness and ability to undertake further training might also be attractive to future employers but is not a guarantee of future employment – employers value employment experience as much as, and in some cases more than, education, depending on the sector.

TYPES OF COURSES

Taught options:

Postgraduate Diploma courses involve nine months of full-time study and usually incorporate a project. Conversion courses often take the format of a Postgraduate diploma. They may also form the initial stage of a Masters degree.

Masters Degree is usually a continuation of undergraduate study in a specialised area and involves one year of full-time study often with a major project / thesis.

Taught courses generally require a 2.1 degree but in some cases lower degree classifications might be acceptable. Postgraduate Diploma requirements can vary depending on the level of competition.

Both of the above include conversion courses.

Research options:

Masters by research will usually take two years full time to complete and may be attached to an industrial partner where the topic has relevance to industry. This qualification involves in-depth research on specific area and examination is totally by thesis/dissertation.

PhD usually takes 4-5 years to complete on a full-time basis. Examination is by Doctoral thesis which is considerably longer than a Masters thesis and has to be of a novel nature. Institutions are now offering what are loosely termed 'taught' PhDs but in short, they are programmes which include periods of in-class or guided research designed to help researchers finish their work within a reasonable time frame. Most will aim to complete their work in around three years.

PhD and research Masters normally require a 2.1 Honours Degree but some programmes accept a 2.2. Due to competitive factors the minimum grade is no longer a guarantee of a place. If you don't at least meet the minimum make an appointment with the course director to try and negotiate being, at the very least, considered, if not offered a place.

A PhD is usually necessary for lecturing posts and research positions. Competition for these posts in Ireland is very high at present.

MODES OF STUDY

Full time or part time?

- Universities are offering an increasing number of options to students – these include full time, part time, on-line, distance and blended learning courses.
- Competition for full-time courses is usually harder.
- Part-time courses usually have less likelihood of funding.
- Length of time of study is longer with part-time.
- Options / modules in courses open to part-time students can be much more limited.
- You have to stay motivated for longer when studying part-time.
- It can be difficult to find the time to study when working full time.
- Access to facilities and benefits can be different according to whether you study full / part-time.
- Distance learning courses can be lonely as a result of limited peer interaction.

RESEARCHING YOUR OPTIONS

Courses with the same name don't necessarily have the same content – get prospectuses and speak with course tutors and graduates in the institution you are applying to and in your own institution.

Remember also:

- Choice of subjects within a course will vary from college to college.
- There may be a requirement to spend some time outside the college in industrial placement, or carrying out projects etc.
- Practical content of courses can vary.
- The financial cost can vary widely amongst courses and institutions.

Find out about:

- The reputation of the programme – talk to lecturers, past graduates, employers.
- The employment record of past graduates – the careers service will have first destination statistics of those who have already graduated from the course.
- National/international profile of the course.
- Facilities available to you (IT support, car parking, accommodation for post graduates).
- Possibilities of funding and financial assistance.
- What resources are available – laboratories, technology, library etc.
- Class sizes.

RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

Research qualifications

If you're considering undertaking a research qualification you will need to think carefully about what you want to study and where you want to study it. Bear in mind:

- For a research qualification, your research topic will be very specific. You must choose your topic very carefully because you will become specialised in this area. In some colleges you can choose your own topic but often an academic member of staff will choose - make sure it is what you want.
- Try to meet with several staff members before making a decision. Make sure that your supervisor's has an area of expertise useful to your project. What is their reputation for research in your field?
- Your potential supervisor is a vital factor. Talk to previous students who worked under the same supervisor. Find out was he/she reliable, available, supportive, helpful. Poor supervision and a poor relationship with your tutor can have a detrimental effect on your studies. Get a few opinions if possible as sometimes a poor relationship can be due only to a personality clash.
- What support structures are in place for research students? Some schools have seminar and training programmes that postgraduate research students can participate in.
- What process will you have to go through to complete a PhD?
- Will you be working alone or as part of a research group?
- Is there the opportunity to earn extra money by teaching undergraduates? Some colleges may expect you to undertake duties as teaching assistants and tutors.
- What is submission rate for research degrees in your chosen department?

- To take on research you need to be very self-motivated. Are you good at planning your work? Can you work effectively to deadlines? There are more unfinished masters and PhDs by research in the world than completed ones. Are you capable of the self-discipline required?
- Be very sure of why you are choosing to do research, does it fit into your career plan? Do you want to become specialised in a particular area?

APPLYING FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDY AND RESEARCH

- Most applications for postgraduate courses are made directly to the relevant institution through their postgraduate admissions office. The application will usually include an application form, documentary evidence of academic achievements and references.
- Some institutions require applicants to use a centralised application system (www.pac.ie). These include TUD, UCC, DCU, TCD, NUIG; NUI Maynooth.
- Closing dates vary from course to course. Some may be as early as December/January whilst others stay open for applications until August. It's best to apply early - November is a good time to start making enquiries. Some courses require you to sit an entrance test/submit a portfolio and / or do an interview – these programme's closing dates may be much earlier than others.
- Please note closing date for application to the Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) is usually early December. Applications to Trinity College Dublin are made directly and the closing date is generally December 1st.

FEES FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDY AND RESEARCH

- Vary depending on the course and institution. The level of fees may depend on whether labs, special equipment or highly expert training is required.
- Fees for full-time and part-time study are usually the same. One advantage of part-time study is that the fees are spread over a longer duration.
- Often there is no difference in fees for courses taken at Postgraduate Diploma or Masters level.
- Fees for taught programmes range from €4k to €10k though they can be higher. Fees are considerably higher for non-EU citizens.
- Don't forget to take into account the cost of living - food, travel, accommodation etc.
- Check what extra fees you might be liable for – e.g. registration fees, exam fees, cost of course-related materials/uniforms/equipment etc.

FUNDING

- The best source of information on funding is the postgraduate office or department or institution to whom you are interested in applying.
- Many students finance part or all of their studies themselves, e.g. bank loans, part time work, employer funding.
- A student, who holds a Higher Education Grant (HEG) when completing his/her primary degree, may be eligible to apply for continuation of the grant from the Local Authority.
- Mature students may be eligible to apply for Higher Education Grant from Local Authority where his/her parents reside.
- Students may be eligible to apply for or continue to benefit from a VEC Scholarship.
- Funding through various programmes is often advertised in the national press.
- Scholarships are available from private and public sector bodies and bursaries, awards, scholarships/studentships and fellowships are available from higher education institutions themselves.

- For details of all funding and finance information related to education see www.studentfinance.ie
- The Graduate Skills Conversion Programme: Applies to certain taught one-year programmes particularly in the fields of Computing, Science and Technology. See the HEA website www.heai.ie for more information.

STUDYING ABROAD

There are many good reasons for studying abroad:

- Opportunity to study in an institution with an excellent reputation worldwide.
- Pursuing further study in a specialised subject area or topic not available at home.
- Opportunity to perfect a foreign language.
- Gaining life experience within an international, multicultural environment.
- Studying in another country takes a lot of careful planning and it is advised to start planning early.
- You will need to check the acceptability/transferability of your qualifications as higher education systems vary from country to country – see <http://www.qqi.ie/> . If you want to study in a non-English speaking country you may need to provide proof of your ability to speak the local language.

How to apply:

- Contact institutions directly. There is no central applications system for postgraduate study, instead each institution has its own procedures, usually incorporating an application form, documentary evidence of academic achievements and references.
- Obtain application forms – there may be a cost attached.
- Organise your references – do this early so that your referees have adequate time to compose them.
- Apply early - applications should ideally be made 12 months in advance for US /Australia.
- Check details of closing dates and fees with individual institutions - these vary from course to course. Fees are often much more expensive outside of the EU.
- Research the practicalities: living costs, accommodation, cultural aspects.
- Find out from individual institutions whether research qualifications are funded.
- Find out about admissions tests e.g. GMAT, GRE for the USA.
- Check dates for the academic year e.g. in Australia it runs from Feb/Mar - Nov/Dec.
- Find out whether you'll need a residence permit/visa (to obtain a visa you will need to provide evidence you have enough funds to survive for a year).
- Make enquiries about health insurance - do you have adequate cover?
- Contact embassies and cultural institutes for more information on studying abroad.