Undertaking further study is a big commitment, both in terms of time and money, so it is important to make sure it's the right option for you.

Postgraduate study has the ability to open doors to new career path however additional qualifications do not guarantee a job - you still need to tell prospective employers why you chose your course and how it has made you a better candidate for the role. If your main motivation is to improve your chances of entering your chosen career area, make sure you find out which qualification (if any) is required by the industry - especially as in some industries recruiters value practical experience over further study. Find this out by reading job descriptions and speaking to employers.

What are your options?

**Masters**
These are most commonly an MSc and an MA (master of science and arts respectively), which are yearlong taught programmes, requiring in-depth study plus a significant research project or dissertation. Masters courses can be theoretical or have a more vocational focus and applications tend to be made directly to the institution.

**Postgraduate diplomas**
Also known as Graduate diplomas or conversion courses, the course content is identical to a master's programme, but without the dissertation. They can be a bridge into a profession e.g. the graduate diploma in law provides a route for non-law graduates to qualify for legal training.

**Professional qualifications**
Some professions have an examination system to ensure those working in the industry have the required knowledge and ability. Examples include accountancy exams such as CIMA or ACCA, the CIM for marketing and the PGCE (Post graduate Certificate in Education). These qualifications are commonly studied alongside working in industry.

**PhD**
A PhD or ‘doctorate’ is a research degree and is required for an academic or research career. It consists of an original research project and typically last three to four years. Many people will take a Masters before embarking on a PhD. Some PhDs are advertised through websites such as jobs.ac.uk and findaphd.com. Alternatively, prospective PhD students can approach an institution’s department directly.

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**WHY?**

You may want to study towards a postgraduate qualification if:
> This is needed by your chosen profession
> To demonstrate your commitment to a particular area
> To take the first step towards a career in academia/research
> To meet like-minded people and start building a professional network
> If your home country standard is 4 – 5 years in Higher Education

**Points to consider**
> Why do you want to pursue postgraduate study?
> What are your reasons for wanting to study at a particular institution? E.g. reputation, facilities, location.
> Why does this particular course interest you?
> What aspects of the course interest you? E.g. specialist modules, placement opportunities?
> Is it taught or research based?
> Do you meet the entry requirements?
Funding
The first place to start your search for funding is the institutions website, which will usually tell you if the course has any Research Council Funding or bursaries for study. For a list of UK research councils, see www.rcuk.ac.uk

Some charities and organisations offer grants and scholarships. Careers Tagged, our online careers library is a good place to start researching this area. See the funding databases on www.prospects.ac.uk and www.targetpostgrad.co.uk or browse www.careerstagged.co.uk. If you are a student from outside the UK, try the scholarships section of www.educationuk.org

Some government funding is available for courses in health, social work and teaching (certain subjects). Your intended course provider will be able to give you further details.

Professional and career development loans may be available. See www.gov.uk for the most up-to-date information.

Part-time study may be an option worth considering if there is no funding available. It could be a chance for you to spread your payments and work part-time to cover your living expenses.

How to apply
To understand the application process for your provider, check the details on their website and if in doubt contact their admissions office.

Many applications will require a personal statement, which should highlight your skills, grades, experiences and motivation for the subject and institution. Follow the guidance regarding word count and content exactly.

PERSONAL STATEMENT TIPS
> Do not use the same statement for each application
> Give yourself enough time – it can be tough and take some time
> Always use good vocabulary and grammar
> Keep the tone positive and enthusiastic
> Do not use over long sentences
> If the course provider hasn’t specified a length, your statement should be one side of A4.
> Ask (ideally a careers consultant) to review it before submission

What you should mention
> Why you are choosing to apply for further study
> Why you have chosen that particular course
> Which topics are of particular interest to you and why
> How you would like to broaden your research
> Examples of your proven academic ability to date
> Details of any extracurricular activity and work experience you have that reinforces your interest in your subject
> Any relevant ‘soft skills’ that you have already developed that would make you a good candidate

Notes