

2.2 Current international students and recent international graduates who studied in the UK

If you are a student or recent graduate from outside the UK and have studied at undergraduate level in the UK, and are now considering postgraduate study, these are some of the areas you may find it helpful to think about:

1. Does the application system for postgraduate courses work the same way as for undergraduate courses?

The application system for postgraduate courses is generally very different from applying for undergraduate study in the UK. If you are from outside the EU, you will need a visa to study in the UK and this is likely to be for a specific course so your visa allowing undergraduate study will not be sufficient. Also you may find the rules have changed since you applied for a visa for undergraduate study, so it will be important to check this early on.

In most cases, you will need to make one application per course, per institution, for postgraduate courses. There is no central national system covering entry to all courses or institutions, although the UKPASS scheme handles applications to selected institutions, and there are some common application schemes for certain professional/vocational courses including law, teaching, social work and clinical psychology. Generally each institution will have its own application system and could have its own deadlines. If you are applying to a range of institutions, application deadlines may differ widely, and there can even be different deadlines within one institution for different courses. Most but not quite all institutions have online application systems for postgraduate courses, although they may differ somewhat in the questions they ask and some may ask for a CV or resumé too.

2. How do UK postgraduate-level degrees compare with those from other countries?

In many cases, postgraduate or Masters-level courses in the UK are well respected internationally and can be valuable in the international jobs arena. They can differ in some important ways from postgraduate courses in other countries. One of the main differences is in the length of the course because most full-time Masters courses in the UK are studied over one year, whereas in many other countries they often take two years or more. If after your taught postgraduate course you are planning to progress to higher level study (such as doctoral research) outside the UK, you may find it wise to check with that country to ensure that the UK course will be a sufficient entry qualification.

Tip: If you are from a European country and want to understand how many ECTS credits a particular UK course is equivalent to, you should check with the institution.

3. Is it better for me to stay at the same institution or move to a different one for postgraduate study?

There could be advantages for you in either strategy. Staying at the same institution could make sense if:

- you like where you are currently studying;
- there is a relevant course that you hear good reports about;
- there could be discounts on course fees for alumni; and/or
- you make good use of the opportunities you have to find out more 'from the inside'.

On the other hand:

- you might not want to stay at the same institution;
- a course somewhere different might be better and/or that new institution have a better international reputation;
- it could be good to experience a different part of the UK; and
- there are often benefits of moving to a new and unfamiliar place in terms of the personal challenge and experience.

It is a good idea to try to get a better idea of other possible institutions, by talking to the course director and ideally to students, and if possible physically go there – institution websites will advertise their open days which are specifically for this purpose. The more informed a choice you make the more likely you are to be confident that you have chosen the right course and location for you.

If you need a visa to study in the UK, don't be discouraged from looking at different institutions – all UK higher education institutions have an International Office or Department which welcome international students and will be happy to advise to varying extents on studying at postgraduate level in their institution as an international student.

Ideas to Try: Quiz yourself about how you would feel about moving to another institution, what you might gain, and what you might lose, and what worries you about either staying or moving. What extra information would you need to help you decide whether to stay or move?

4. How do the fees work at postgraduate level, and are there any loans?

Postgraduate course fees can vary widely by subject, even within one institution, but in general, students from the EU are charged under one band of fees, and students from other countries under a different fee band. If you were charged as an international student from outside the EU for your undergraduate degree, it is worth checking residency requirements but it is likely you will be charged under the same band for postgraduate study. If in doubt, check this with the International Office of the institutions you are considering.

There is no national loan scheme in the UK available for postgraduates from outside the UK, but there may be schemes in your home country. You will need to have sufficient money for course fees and living expenses. Both fees and costs of living can vary substantially by institution. It's usually best to consult potential institutions' websites to find out about course fees and also local costs of living. In some cases the institution may offer bursaries for students from certain countries or other funding help; this is not always obvious from the website so ask the International Office.

Take a Look: The Fees and Funding section in Stage 3 of this toolkit can tell you more about sources of information for postgraduate funding.

5. What is life like as a postgraduate student?

Most institutions have fewer postgraduates than they do undergraduates, of whom many will be doing specialist courses with different timetables, and there could be a wider range of age and experience across each course cohort. This can mean that the postgraduate community you are part of is based primarily around your course and/or academic department. There are often postgraduate societies centred on a department or subject, which may cater for both taught postgraduates and PhD students. As you may have experienced already, there may be Students' Union societies for particular countries or regions where you can meet others, generally including both undergraduates and postgraduates. You will probably also find that your institution will run a particular induction for students from outside the UK – although this may not be only for postgraduates. Many students' unions have a specific International Officer and/or Postgraduate Officer with the remit to support the interests of those students.

6. I was provided with accommodation for my undergraduate course – can I expect the same at postgraduate level?

Most institutions have at least some postgraduate accommodation but there may not be enough for all international students. How many places are on offer can depend on the environment (for example, campus or non-campus) as well as the number of postgraduate students and the proportion who are international students new to the UK (and tend to be

given priority, understandably). Institutions will generally set out their criteria for allocating postgraduate accommodation. They will often have additional lists of local landlords and may provide opportunities for new cohorts of postgraduate students to contact each other when looking for accommodation. If you are likely to want accommodation, or have particular accommodation needs, finding out from the Accommodation department what the institution offers at an early stage can be helpful for your planning purposes.

7. Will I be allowed to work or gain work experience in the UK?

If you are from an EU country, you should be allowed to work subject to any restrictions that are in place in relation to your specific country.

If you are of non-EU nationality and studying a full-time postgraduate course, the current regulations of the relevant Tier 4 visa permit you to work for up to 20 hours per week during term time, and to work full-time during vacations (but not necessarily the summer vacation, depending on the course). You can also undertake a work placement if it is a formal part of your course. It will be important to ask potential course providers whether a work placement is a formal part of the course, because if it is not, then you may not be able to gain some valuable types of work experience such as an internship or work placement.

Provided you have studied a course of at least 12 months in length, your Tier 4 visa should expire four months after your course completion date (or after two months for a shorter course). During this period you can continue to work full-time subject to the student employment restrictions including those above, so you cannot take up a permanent job. At the end of the period you must either leave the UK or have applied for another visa, such as being sponsored by an employer for a working (Tier 2) visa, although you can continue to work while the UK Border Agency processes the application.

It is important to consult the UK Border Agency website about visas and working restrictions; links can be found in Stage 3 of the toolkit to the UKBA website and also to agencies providing good guidance such as UKCISA and the British Council.

8. I have been studying in the UK for some years but there are still some things I need help with – whom should I ask?

Most institutions have support services for their students including an International Office with staff who will be happy to help and advise you as an international student on anything related to studying in the UK, so don't be afraid to ask for help even if you are already studying in the UK.