

Master's degrees in science

Alexa Hime (Science Education Manager)

A Master's degree in science is a postgraduate taught qualification offered by many universities, which allows you to specialize in a certain aspect of your Bachelor's degree course, or a related scientific subject. Usually the course consists of several taught modules and a research project. The organization of a Master's course is similar to that of a Bachelor's academic course, except that it generally lasts 1 year, depending on the course, institution, nature of the research project and whether it is being studied full or part-time.

Gaining a Master's qualification in a particular field of science can provide you with increased job prospects in many fields of employment. Although not required to begin a PhD in science, many students who did not gain a high-grade Bachelor's in science take a Master's to aid their application to study a PhD, or improve practical laboratory skills and therefore their employability.

When choosing to study for a Master's, careful consideration should be given to why you want to do a Master's and how it will enhance your prospects,

since depending on your career ambitions, it may or may not be useful for you. For example, do you want to specialize more in a particular area of science or move into another area?

On completing the course, you will gain a Master's degree in the field you studied, abbreviated to MSc. This differs from the MSci qualifications gained by students who take an Integrated Master's degree course instead of a Bachelor's degree course at university. These specialized courses allow students to complete a project similar to that completed by



Links and further information

www.findamasters.com – a detailed search engine of UK Master's courses available in the UK, providing location, course details, funding information and links to the institution providing the course.

www.npc.org.uk/page/1082154863 – a guide on postgraduate funding for home and international students in the UK (The National Postgraduate Committee).

www.postgraduatestudentships.co.uk – a database of postgraduate opportunities provided by a range of institutions.

www.gov.uk/funding-for-postgraduate-study – list of ideas and links to potential sources of funding for postgraduate study, including funding from charities and learned societies, provided by the UK Government (DirectGov).

www.scholarship-search.org.uk – suitable for those seeking funding for both PhD and Master's level postgraduate study, this robust search engine provides basic details on funding available for postgraduate study from a range of institutions across the UK (Hot Courses).

<http://bit.ly/YezKUy> – a guide for bioscience students, with information on options after a degree, including information on the wider range of Master's degrees on offer.

many Master's course students, and prepares the student for postgraduate education.

Funding an academic Master's course

Similar to Bachelor's courses, Master's courses have a tuition fee that needs to be paid to take the course. However, unlike Bachelor's courses, there are no student loans available from the government to cover tuition fees for Master's courses, and, unlike PhD study, studentships can be few and far between. Many students rely on their own savings or part-time work to fund a Master's course. But the courses can be very demanding and finding time for part-time work can be a challenge.

However, some institutions and charities still offer some form of studentships or bursaries for those wishing to study Master's courses. The seven UK Research Councils offer funds to university departments directly for them to fund students wishing to study for a Master's course. These studentships and grants are often highly competitive, and are based on academic excellence or other circumstances. Shortage subjects, such as bioinformatics, may also have studentships available to encourage people to get expertise in these areas. It is highly advised that you check the website of the institution you are applying to for details on bursaries and studentships offered. ■

 Celebrating women
in biochemistry



Valerie Gladwell
(University of Essex, UK)

What I wish I knew when I graduated

I did not leave university straight away, but I decided to stay for a PhD in Cardiovascular Physiology (University of Birmingham, UK). I thought that I might be able to balance my studies and my love of sport and continue competing at a high standard, which I managed to some extent. Little did I know that I would meet my husband-to-be (he had just finished his PhD with the same supervisor, Professor John Coote). Both were very influential in what I have become. I found my PhD tough and I needed perseverance, determination and support to get through it, but I believed in my work and myself. Confidence combined with luck enable me to gain a lectureship in Exercise Science (University

of Essex, UK), where I am today, occasionally taking maternity leave (well, three times) and getting a few large grants. Although I was lucky to have a permanent position, I am so glad that I did not wait until getting a large grant before having children, my first big grant came when I was 38 weeks pregnant with my third child. The challenges of being a woman working in science are tough, particularly getting that balance right, but it is very possible with the correct support network, both at work and at home. I am very lucky with my job as I get a real buzz from being a science educator whether the audience are students, staff from within and outside the university, the general public, or children. ■