

## Why study for a Masters qualification?

In many professions, being educated at Masters level is seen as an important stage in professional development. To achieve a Masters degree you must have a detailed grasp of a field and an understanding of how theory and research can affect practice. Some teachers question the value of a Masters for teaching, but it provides a theoretical framework and insights which help you think through the issues, problems and dilemmas you encounter in the classroom. It encompasses critical and innovative thinking and, in a profession that is continually facing change, it can equip you to make considered and informed responses to new developments in education.

### Choosing a course

A full Masters degree is worth 180 credits, which is usually made up of taught modules and an individual research project. Most PGCE courses now offer Masters credits (see [Teaching qualifications in geography](#)), but there are widespread differences in the number of credits they award and in their transferability. You also need to be aware that most credits have a time limit and can often be used only on certain courses. Specific information can be provided from the university you are applying to.

There are different Masters in education from general education courses, to those with a specific focus, such as SEN or leadership. There are also subject-specific programmes, including Masters in geography education. Your choice will depend on your interests and how it will support your personal and professional aspirations as well as matching your current employment.

When selecting your course, consider the programme structure and whether it suits your way of working e.g. on-line courses are available. Find out how much of the course is taught, how much is independent study and the form of assessment. Ask about the level of tutor support and whether their interests match the area you want to study. Finally, enquire about fees. Schools that are keen to support teachers to develop their professional capacity often greatly value Masters level study for their staff and may contribute financially.

### When to begin a Masters course?

Bear in mind that if you are using some previously earned credits, they will have an expiry date.

The decision when to begin must be yours and depends on your circumstances. Continuing your studies from a PGCE immediately you start your NQT year means you are used to thinking at Masters level and will have developed patterns of work for studying and writing while you are teaching. (It may be more difficult to return to this later!) If you have a teaching post close to the university at which you studied, it can be convenient to continue to study with some of your PGCE peers. Some universities have modules specifically designed for ECTs that you should investigate. However, taking on further study during your induction year, can be stressful. Some people prefer to undertake a

Masters when they have more teaching experience, although others find it difficult to return to academic study after a break. You may be looking for promotion to a subject leader post or mid-career and already a head of department seeking refreshment and renewal. It can be very helpful to seek advice from teachers, in similar circumstances to you, who have studied Masters themselves.

## What are the benefits of Masters study?

For those who undertake the course soon after their PGCE, a Masters provides support, stimulation and practical strategies during your early career as a geography teacher. For those in mid-career it provides an opportunity for curriculum focused thinking and provides frameworks and up-to-date evidence on which to base curriculum and pedagogic decisions. For schools, it strengthens 'middle leadership' and helps with the retention of talented and committed staff.

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence that undertaking a Masters significantly changes how teachers view teaching and learning in their classrooms. Masters students thrive on the stimulation and challenge the courses provide and particularly enjoy sharing ideas with like-minded individuals. Dissertations involving geography 'action research' can give teachers new insights into their classrooms and an opportunity to maintain their love of their subject.

Whenever you decide to start a Masters, you should be prepared for hard work. It will demand dedication and commitment, particularly when doing a dissertation. But it will also ensure that you take time out to reflect on your teaching, particularly if your dissertation is closely matched to your work in school. Masters graduates say it helps them to think deeply about their subject and the best way to teach it. They also say it helps them consider different perspectives, understand what underpins teaching and learning in schools, and ask critical questions so they make more informed choices in their own school. It can be difficult to prove a direct impact on teaching, but these qualities make more effective teachers. Masters graduates also find higher qualifications look good on their CV when seeking promotion!

## Further Reading

- Brooks, C and Freeman, D. Why study for a Masters qualification? *Teaching Geography*, Summer 2009

## Useful references for Masters geography

- GA membership gives access to back copies of the professional journals (*Geography*, *Teaching Geography* and *Primary Geography*)
- GA website [research section](#) and [bibliography](#) of research articles in geography education
- Butt, G. (ed) (2011) *Geography, Education and the Future*. London: Routledge
- Butt, G. (ed) (2015) *MasterClass in Geography Education: Transforming teaching and learning*. London: Bloomsbury Academic
- Jones, M. and Lambert D. (eds) (2018) *Debates in Geography*, Abingdon, Routledge
- Lambert, D. and Morgan, J. (2010) *Teaching Geography 11-18: a conceptual approach*. Open University Press
- Morgan, J. (2011) *Teaching Geography as if the Planet Matters*. London: Routledge
- Rawding, C. (2013) *Effective innovation in the secondary Geography curriculum: a practical guide*. Abingdon, Routledge.

(For further reading references refer to [Reading list for geography teaching](#))

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