

Beyond the BSc.

A brief, personal experience of Postgraduate Applications.

By Tom Jordan

Having completed a round of postgraduate applications prior to Christmas and (fortunately!) gaining a number of offers, and with many more students braving the idea of applying to masters schemes now, a personal account of sorts can shed some light on what is a daunting process!

Is Postgraduate study right for me?

There is no shortness in the array of career paths that an Economics degree can provide. These range from public sector positions to the City, anything in between, and perhaps work in a different area altogether.

As I see it, no route is right or wrong so long as the means meet the ends: a well-deserved career, a fulfilment of lifetime interests, a healthy environment for future work and so on. My personal preferences never fitted in with accounting or work in the city, for many others it of course does. I thoroughly enjoyed the BSc, and so looked towards further study and the doors it could open.

If you're someone who can see an economist career requiring more in-depth knowledge, or indeed in academic research and teaching, and a keenness to learn more, then this is certainly a path looking at. But to weigh everything up, be aware that such courses are expensive and, if your aspirations lie elsewhere, over-qualifying. Make sure you consider the choices carefully. Many companies may value soft skills (leadership, responsibility etc.) just as much or more than whether or not you have a masters. When applying, I made sure to consider that the masters course had returns for the fields I wanted to enter. For some grad schemes, they may not be necessary be needed.

What to study, where to apply?

Courses can teach a straight overview of Economics, or specialise in particular disciplines where strength exists in research – UEA's School of Economics for example offers courses in Industrial and



I'm a third year BSc. Economics student. Having recently applied to a number of universities and courses nationwide, I recently confirmed a postgraduate Health Economics course at the University of York. From here, I intend to enter into the healthcare sector as a consultant economist.

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Experimental Economics. Another distinction between courses is whether they're MA or MSc. To tackle these differences, I conducted good research of different courses and universities before applying.

The variety in courses is very distinct. An MSc is more technical and mathematically rigorous (so make sure you are a fan of maths!). MA courses provide a more qualitative study, this isn't necessarily a disadvantage: for example, joint honours MA's may focus on other areas of interest such as International Relations.



Where to apply depends on your specific interests, abilities and where you see yourself going. Industrial Economics would match you up perfectly with competition authorities. My choice to enter into Health Economics was combination of preference – I have worked as a research intern in the field – and career ambitions, with the field being a niche in the jobs market.

The application process.

So you have researched where to apply and probably have clear picture of top choices. As a first pointer, which is true of all applications, go crazy applying. Universities run masters applications separately, hence the number of applications you can make is endless. The more you apply, the more you keep doors open. It's literally as simple as filling out web forms.

Most universities application processes will be the same, or with superficial differences. In my own experience of applying, most economics application processes require a transcript of **current grades**, a **personal statement**, and **references**. They will generally also require a **CV**. Some of the higher up or specialist universities may also interview, though most do not and this isn't something I experienced. For help on interviews, contact UEA careers.

Let's start with the grades, the point is blatant: keep up the good work! Lecturers have said to me in the past that the marks speak more than all else, so the higher the better. These after all are the most accurate forecast for your predicted grade, so aim for a good 2:1 or first.

There are obviously other measurements. A compelling personal statement is important. Firstly, I made sure that each statement wasn't generic, i.e. it addresses the specific university in question. A copy/paste job looks incredibly lazy. This is the main opportunity to provide the university with a couple of major, and specific, points.

1. Why you feel the university specifically is ideal for you?
2. Why you feel the course is ideal for you (why would you choose it there over all others?)

3. Why you're the best match for the course, what makes you stand out?

For the most part, I was academically driven in the statement. Some required me to talk about further aspects of university life e.g. societies. But again, the academic contributions speak miles. The statement is generally around 500 to 1000 words. Addressing points 1 and 2, what about the university can you say: Does it possess a particularly prestigious department, research area of interest, and specialist course? Is the course particularly focussed on a specific aspect of economics that you enjoy? I applied to the UEA Industrial Economics course, making sure to outline my interest in learning from key "*Centre for Competition Policy*" researchers.

When it comes to talking about why you're the ideal candidate for the course, I outlined my greatest academic contributions, or those to the university in general. I was able to refer to specific assessments which related to my interest in the course. A good example of this was a presentation I gave on obesity policy in second year which applied to Health Economics. I referred to my past internship. For those who have done one, there will most likely be linkages towards the course to bring up.

I also mentioned the fact that I had previously appeared in the NEP, and modules in which I had particularly performed. I also briefly mentioned contributions elsewhere, in the department and again through clubs and societies. A good example for some, which is relevant to the School of Economics, may be tour guiding or student ambassador schemes.

As for the references, all the UEA lecturers want you to do well. It is best to ask for the help of post-doctorates who know you quite well and who can talk about more than just what the network allows them to see of your grades (e.g. Past seminar tutors can talk about your keenness and contributions). No doubt, most individuals will still provide a promising reference. If you are friends with a particularly senior lecturer in a certain field, their prestige may make an impact on admissions tutors.

For further help with writing personal statements, practicing interviews, CVs, and general inquiries towards postgraduate study, I highly recommend again that you capitalise on the UEA Careers service – contact details are above.

Financing the course

There are numerous sources for financing an economics course, though less accessible than the undergraduate student loan. Of course, you can acquire a loan from the Bank (such as a Graduate Loan), however these aren't guaranteed and hold a generally high rate of interest. Other routes remain, such as research council (e.g. ESRC) and charity grants, though these may not cover the full fees or are contingent on certain conditions (e.g. having to do a PhD or having a low household income). If you don't feel you can personally finance a masters, you can also look to scholarships and studentships at specific universities. Many specialist courses offer them, and I have been lucky to

have been offered one in this respect. If you want to be considered, make you sure you stand out as a candidate to be considered.

Many financing schemes will only fund an incomplete amount of student living, so make sure you're financially aware even before applying. Also, by no means do you have to enter into this instantly. The option is there to work for a few years and amass the costs to later qualify for an MSc and enter your preferred profession.

I recommend that you check <https://www.gov.uk/funding-for-postgraduate-study> for more comprehensive funding suggestions.

Then Where?

Further study can springboard you into an economics-specific job otherwise unavailable, or further into academia. My intention is to use the masters course to enter into an area specific to the course. So long as you have thought clearly about the future, the masters can be a very rewarding opportunity. The path I've chosen to take is but one of many, after all, everyone is different!

Thanks for reading, and I hope you have gained from this article.

