

# Further Education

You may be considering further education in addition to your current degree. Graduate school is one option. However, there are different further education options that will allow you to achieve your personal and/or professional goals.

In this tipsheet, you will learn:

- What graduate school is (overview)
- The different options for further education
- How to figure out which path will help you achieve your goals

*This tipsheet does not discuss Medical or Law School. For these tipsheets, go to: <https://careers.queensu.ca/jobs-experience/career-support-tips>.*

## Graduate School

Graduate School is one way to gain the education you need to enter a specific profession or to expand your knowledge in a field of study. Generally, graduate programs can be broken into two categories: Professional programs and Research programs (which includes course work). “Course-based” is another common term which may refer to professional programs where there is a specific career outcome or an academic field where there is no thesis component. While research and practice may be a component in any of these programs, the focus of each is slightly different.

Program Type	Focus	Considerations
<b>Professional</b> Examples: MBA, Masters of Counselling Psychology, Masters of Public Health, Professional Doctor of Education, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare students for specific careers or industries</li> <li>• Emphasis on practical skills, professional development, applied knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shorter in duration (generally)</li> <li>• Specific career outcomes</li> <li>• Sometimes paid for by employer</li> <li>• Not generally funded through bursaries/grants</li> <li>• May not have a direct pathway to PhD programs</li> </ul>
<b>Research-based</b> Examples: Masters of Education (with thesis component), Masters of Chemistry, Masters of English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-suited for students interested in academic research</li> <li>• Develop research skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding provided (usually)</li> <li>• Opportunity to create knowledge</li> <li>• Often longer in duration</li> <li>• Generally, no specific career outcomes</li> <li>• Requires a supervisor</li> </ul>
<b>Course-based</b> May overlap with either professional programs or academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To acquire deeper knowledge in a field of study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shorter in duration</li> <li>• Not generally funded</li> <li>• May not have a direct pathway to PhD programs</li> </ul>

Graduate school has many benefits, but it can be expensive, time-consuming, and may not be the best path for your goals. When applying to a graduate program, consider:

- Do you genuinely enjoy learning within an academic setting?
- Do you have a research project you want to pursue?
- Do you want to deepen your knowledge in a specific area?
- Do your career goals require a specific graduate degree?

You do not have to answer “yes” to all these questions to know that graduate school is the right choice for you. However, it is important to examine and acknowledge what other factors may be influencing your decision, including peer or family pressure and career uncertainty. Many people have complex thoughts and feelings related to further education, so it’s a good idea to clearly define your goals and explore specific options. Working with a Career Coach can be very helpful in this process.

## Other Further Education Options

Further education does not have to contribute to your career though many choose different educational paths to help with their professional goals. Further education not only provides you with fundamental knowledge and skills needed to work within a field but can indicate a genuine interest and commitment to working within a profession.

Further education opportunities are often changing to meet the needs of employers and individuals. Currently, common options include:

Educational Path	Focus	Considerations
<p><b>Professional Certifications</b></p> <p>Examples: Pilot License, Real Estate License</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide specific skills and credentials for a certain career</li> <li>• May be provided through a traditional education institution or through the governing organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on specialized skills</li> <li>• Often quicker to complete than traditional degrees</li> <li>• Limited applicability outside the specific industry</li> <li>• May require ongoing renewal</li> </ul>
<p><b>Graduate Certificates</b></p> <p>Examples: Project Management, Business Analytics, Cybersecurity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide knowledge and skills in specialized areas with broader application</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transferrable skills across fields</li> <li>• Shorter in duration than degrees</li> <li>• Limited transferability to other degree programs</li> </ul>
<p><b>Diplomas</b></p> <p>Examples: Marketing, Law Clerk, Paralegal, Early</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typically awarded by colleges and vocational schools to provide practical training in a specific field or occupation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large variety of programs</li> <li>• Placements for hands-on work experience</li> </ul>

Childhood Education, Culinary Arts  (may include education for professional certifications)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often leads directly into entry-level positions</li> <li>• Can be “fast-tracked” if taken after completing a degree</li> </ul>
<b>Trades and Apprenticeships</b>  Examples: Millwright, Electrician, Carpenter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly structured to gain specific skills and on-the-job training to practice a trade</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-demand</li> <li>• Hands-on experience</li> <li>• Long-term commitment</li> <li>• Limited applicability outside specific trade</li> </ul>
<b>Continuing Education</b>  e.g., taking a bookkeeping course, learning a skill through mentorship or personal practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-study through taking individual courses or using resources to learn skills needed for employment or personal growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible and cost-efficient</li> <li>• Lacks formal recognition or credentials</li> <li>• Requires personal motivation</li> </ul>
<b>Bootcamps and Micro credentials</b>  Examples: Data-Science, UX Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short intensive training programs online or in-person focusing on specific skills often in high-demand fields or general work-related skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rapid acquisition of practical skills</li> <li>• Varied in quality and reputation</li> <li>• Limited depth compared to a traditional degree</li> </ul>

## Education for Career Goals

If you are pursuing additional education to further your professional goals, it is important to understand your goals in relation to the needs of employers. Fundamentally, employers want employees to have the appropriate knowledge and skills to do the job. Knowledge and skills can be gained formally through educational programs or informally through self-education and experience.

Regulated positions, where certain standards, qualifications, and practices are mandated by a governmental or professional body, often require specific education. Examples of regulated professions include Registered Nurse, Accountant, Real Estate Agent, Physiotherapist, and Social Worker.

For other positions, there may be a clear preference for graduates from certain programs which provide key skills to practice in the field. For example, while a position might not require a marketing diploma, the employer might prefer it and may screen out applicants without a marketing diploma.

Lastly, employers may not require any further education at all or may assist you in gaining the credentials you need to do the job and be promoted. Being on-the-job can often help you understand the various professional directions available to you and inform your professional goals. Not pursuing further education or waiting to see what an employer wants can be a strategic move, allowing you to gain practical experience and to clarify your career path before committing to additional education.

*How do you know what education you need for a job:*

- **Review job postings.** Look at job postings that genuinely interest you regardless of your current qualifications. Look at what the employer states as the educational requirements. Ask yourself, do you already have the educational requirements? And if not, how can you attain the education needed to qualify for that type of job in the future?
- If you are applying to a position, **contact the employer** directly (or seek networking opportunities) to find out more details about the educational requirements.
- **Use LinkedIn** to search and see what education professionals working within jobs or fields have attained. By scrolling through profiles, you can often see what education and certifications people have and where they attained these qualifications.
- **Connect** with professionals. Reach out to people doing the work that interests you. Ask if certain education or credentials are needed for their work.
- For regulated professions, **go to the websites of regulating bodies.** Most organizations for regulated professions will have a list of accredited institutions where you can obtain the education you need to work in the field.

## Understand Your Options

Whether you are going onto further education for a combination of learning, research, or career goals, it is important to research options to understand which program is right for you. During the research process:

- **Reach out to the program** to speak with the program coordinator or someone who can give you insight into the details of the program.
- **Speak to graduates and current students** to find out if the program is enjoyable, useful, competitive, etc.
- **Speak with faculty** about the program (especially if you are considering research graduate studies)
- **Use resources** (i.e. LinkedIn search) to find out about career outcomes by seeing where graduates are now.
- **Review** the costs, time commitment, and funding opportunities.
- **Pay attention** to application dates and processes since what is required varies from program to program.

Additional education can be a valuable way to expand your learning, gain key skills or credentials necessary to enter a specific field, and to improve your career opportunities. In your decision, it is important to know your goals (personal or professional), understand your options, and explore career outcomes from your chosen path.