

# What's the real value of a Master's degree - 04

## July 2024

ROB MOORE: Hello, everyone, and welcome to the Student Hub Live. You're here with me, Rob Moore, in the Study Shack, and today we're going to be talking about master's degrees and postgraduate qualifications. So hopefully this is a topic that you're thinking about, something you might be considering once you've finished your undergraduate programme.

And I've got a whole range of guests with me today. We've got some support on the chat. We've got Emma and Sinead, who are going to be answering your questions, sharing some links, and letting you know some places you can visit to get more information. So if you've got any questions you want answered, pop them in the chat and Emma and Sinead will do that with you. And of course, I'm here with Heidi. Hi, Heidi. How are you?

HEIDI: Hello. I'm all right. Thanks, Rob. We did a show about a week ago, and we were all melting, weren't we, in the boiling heat? And now it's really cold again, so can't keep up with the weather.

ROB MOORE: Yes, absolutely.

HEIDI: I know. Yeah.

ROB MOORE: So who have we got with us today, Heidi, and where are they from?

HEIDI: Busy in the chat already so far this morning actually, Rob, which is great to see. So lots and lots of students joining us this morning. So welcome to everyone. So I'd like to say a few hellos. So we've got lots of people that are studying creative writing and advanced creative writing, so at master's level, which is fantastic. So we've got Andrea in South East Kent who says, I start advanced creative writing in October, going into her third year, and Andrea is hoping to study creative writing at master's level. Glenn's from Kent, and Glenn is looking forward to advanced creative writing in October. And Glenn says, we have sun, so it's nice and warm where Glenn is. Lorraine in Fife. I see a few people are starting advanced creative writing in October. Me too. So we've got lots of people in the chat studying that one. I'd like to say hello to Suzy. So she's starting the final year of psychology with counselling in October, and Suzy is looking at postgraduate options and she's in a rainy and cold Perthshire. I love Perthshire, Suzy. I was up in Crieff not that long ago and it's one of my favourite parts of the UK.

Jacqueline joining from Glasgow. Jacqueline has just been to vote, says that it's rain and sun that's alternating here, and I'm studying postgraduate English literature. I was up really early this morning and I forced my teenage son to get up super early, which he was really cross about, because I wanted to be the first one in line to vote this morning up at the village hall. But I got beaten to it by a farmer. He got there before me, so I was not impressed. But anyway. I want to say hi to India.

So India- I actually work with India. She's an intern that works in the Faculty of Business and Law, and India is joining us this morning, which is great. We've got Bruce, planning to study MSc psychology conversion. So Bruce's degree was in business, so he says he's got a big change for him. And then hello to Katya, who is studying law in Bedford, which is just down the road from me. I'm near the Open University in Milton Keynes, so it's great that you're with us this morning, Katya. And then we've got Christine from Bristol, who has just finished art history and is eagerly awaiting her results.

So you might see on the screen that you can put exactly where it is you're joining us from in the widget there. So these are very interactive sessions, and we'd love to see where you're joining us from. And it's really nice because it helps to build that sense of community when you can see there are lots of other students around you. And just within the chat, we ask that you don't share anything too personal. So not email addresses or contact information or anything like that, and that's just for your own safety and well-being. So lovely to have you all with us. I know it's going to be a really busy show, so enjoy.

ROB MOORE: Thank you, Heidi. That's great. Great to see so many of you with us already. So as Heidi said, we've got the widgets going there, and we've got one at the moment which asks you the simple question. Do you know what we mean by the term postgraduate study? Yes, no, or not quite sure. And we asked that because when I was studying, I didn't really know what the difference was or what classed as postgraduate studies. So if you want to answer that question, we'll look at it later.

And you've already been saying this, which is great. Have you considered studying or are you studying at a postgraduate level? So if you are, tell us what you are studying, what you plan to study, and why. So that would be great. And now it's time to introduce my three guests. We've got Jay, Jan, and Bjorn. Great to see you guys. Really appreciate you coming out today, and looking forward to our chat. So we'll start with Jay. So Jay, do you want to tell us a little about yourself before we start?

JAY RIXON: Sure, I'd love to. Morning. Morning, Rob. Morning, everybody. It's lovely to be back at Student Hub Live again. So my name is Jay. I work in the Pro-Vice Chancellor's Office- and I always stumble over that sentence- and I'm a senior manager there. But one of my roles there is that I'm a qualification manager for a lovely qualification called the MA/MSc. And then inside the OU we have a little nicknames for things. So sometimes it's called F81 or sometimes it's called Open Masters.

ROB MOORE: Excellent. Thank you, Jay. And Jan, welcome.

JAN KOWAL: Hi. Yeah. I'm Jan and I'm a senior lecturer in engineering, and I'm in charge of the capstone module for the MEng, which is a team engineering project module. I spent 20 years in industry, actually, so I'm not a sort of a bona fide complete academic, but that's all to the good, I feel.

ROB MOORE: Excellent. Thank you. And now Bjorn, who's actually my boss in the business school, so you'd think I'd behave myself. But what's the chances of that, really? Hiya, Bjorn.

BJORN CLAES: Good morning, and thank you for inviting me to the show. My name is Bjorn Claes. I'm a senior lecturer in operation management, supply chain management, but I'm also the teaching director for the master's programmes in the business school. So I'm in charge of the MBA, the master's in finance, the master in human resources management, the apprenticeships, and some other programmes that are related to that. And yeah, that's me.

ROB MOORE: Great. Thank you. We're going to start with Bjorn. So Bjorn, just in a nutshell, what do we mean when we say postgraduate qualifications? What are they?

BJORN CLAES: Look, it is the next stage in the learning process after you've done your undergrad studies. And what we do in undergrad studies, at least from the business school perspective, up to the moment that you finish your undergrad business studies, it's all about acquisition of knowledge, concepts, theories, frameworks, et cetera. What we do in the postgraduate studies that we pick them up, we'll go back to them, and start the sense making process around it. So what we really want you to do, if you start in postgraduate study, is to apply the theories and the frameworks to your experience and to your own professional context.

And that's a really important process because that is part personal and part of it is also what you talk about with your with your course peers. Because when you apply business concepts in your own personal environment, it's very, very different as what somebody else does in a completely different sector or in a completely different function. And that's that sense making process about how the theories and the frameworks apply to these settings is really what the postgraduate studies focus on.

ROB MOORE: Thank you, Bjorn. And we've got our widget ready for the first question. So we have a look at that. So do we know what's meant by the term? 2/3 of you, confident. 66%. And actually, I would have been in the 26% when I was studying of the not quite sure. I think I know, but not quite sure. So hopefully we'll help to clarify that. So can I ask Jay some questions now. When we talk about postgraduate qualifications, there are different titles that we use. What are the different things that we might call a postgraduate qualification?

JAY RIXON: Well, we have different stages and different levels, so we sometimes have certificates, we have diplomas, and we have a full master's qualification, and each of those different stages requires a kind of credit, so stacking your credits. And so, for example, a full master's, you need 180 credits. So sometimes you will talk about stacking learning in chunks and awareness. A student comes to look at the OU for their study, they'll start to have a look at the different sizes of credits that they'll be studying. And sometimes that's up to students to think about how they'd like to structure their study, how they'd like to time their study, and how flexible they want to be with their study.

ROB MOORE: Excellent. And also, we can look at doing multiple qualifications. I know I did this. This is where I did my MBA with the OU, but the OU allowed me to take some of those credits to a second master's degree so I didn't have to do the full 180 credits for the second one, which was great. It really felt like I was getting something for nothing.

But if you're doing postgraduate study, you don't have to carry on all the way to do the master's degree. You can actually take a certificate, postgraduate certificate, or a postgraduate diploma. So if somebody signs up- and I think the OU is really flexible in this. If you need to take either a break or a pause or for whatever reason, you can't complete the full 180 credits for your master's degree, you can still take a postgraduate qualification en route. That's right. Yeah, carry on.

JAY RIXON: No, I was going to say absolutely, and that's the beauty of the flexible approach that we have at the OU. And often for students studying as well, you're thinking about in the context of which you're studying as well. So that might be around the job that you have or the job that you want to have, and it might be about the learning that you want to acquire in order to get the job that you want, or to be better at the job that you have as well.

So we never study in a vacuum too. We have a context as to why we study. And it might not be for employment at all. It might be for a love of learning. And actually, it's what you have the time to do as well. So I think the beauty- and some of our students might tell us, there's lots of reasons why we study. And I think it's really exciting because we have got that flexibility at the OU for students to be able to stack their learning accordingly.

And also, do you know what? If you study for a bit, take a break. You can always come back. We always welcome you back. And a little bit later on the show, I'm sure I'll get to talk about my qualifications that I'm obviously very biased about. But the beauty of that is that there's lots of options that we have for students to come back to study, even if things change. So I'll leave that hanging there so we can pick it up later.

ROB MOORE: Definitely. The flexibility of your qualification, I think, is- well, I think it's unique in the world. Your qualification-

JAY RIXON: It's very, yeah.

ROB MOORE: It's unique and-

JAY RIXON: I love how we're calling it my qualification as well.

ROB MOORE: Your personal one.

JAY RIXON: Yeah, I know. I'll take it.

ROB MOORE: And Jan, when we were talking before the session, Jan, you told me about something I found really interesting and quite exciting. This is the integrated masters. I hadn't really understood what this was before. So what is an integrated masters, and how does it work in your area?

JAN KOWAL: [AUDIO OUT]

ROB MOORE: Oh. Ah, I think you're on mute there, Jan.

JAN KOWAL: How did that happen? Sorry about that.

ROB MOORE: There we go. You're back again. That's great.

JAN KOWAL: Didn't mean to do that. OK, sorry. Yes. In engineering we have the bachelor of engineering, which is the normal undergraduate degree. But there's also another one called the MEng, and it's called an integrated masters, and it has an additional 120 credits of study at the end of what's very similar to the BEng undergraduate programme. I think it still counts technically as an undergraduate degree.

So from the point of view of getting a student loan, you can get a student loan for an MEng. But for engineering, it has the advantage that if you have an MEng degree for getting recognition as a chartered engineer, it's better than a BEng in that it qualifies as fully meeting the academic requirements for chartered engineer status. Whereas if you just have a BEng, you require a bit of extra study to prove to the engineering institution that you're applying to that you have sufficient academic knowledge.

ROB MOORE: So just in terms of credit- because this is the bit that fascinated me, because normally it's 360 credits to get your undergraduate degree and then it's a further 120 to get the MEng. Is that correct? So it's 480 credits in total?

JAN KOWAL: That's right. Yes.

ROB MOORE: Which is 60 credits short than if you did the undergraduate and then went on and did the master's. So there's effectively, with the OU, you're saving a year on that particular route.

JAN KOWAL: Yes. Yes, indeed. And a lot of our students do that. In fact, in engineering, we've made it easier than it is in other universities to switch between doing the BEng and the MEng. There's really no difference until you get to one of the last modules in the stage three of the BEng between the two. And we don't apply a threshold that you must have achieved certain grades of pass in your studies at the BEng to get onto the MEng thing, which is something other universities do. We decided not to, that it was up to students, really, to decide whether they were sufficiently prepared to do the master's degree- sorry, the MEng degree.

ROB MOORE: So our open approach continues right up into the MEng. Is that right?

JAN KOWAL: It does. Yes.

ROB MOORE: Brilliant. So we're going to come to Heidi. Heidi, what comments are we getting? What sort of things are people studying? Have they got any questions yet? What are we hearing?

HEIDI: Yes. Yes, of course we've got questions, Rob. Yeah, lots and lots and lots of questions coming in. So we've got some questions that are coming in around post graduate study in Scotland, and we've got my colleagues in the chat are responding to those queries because it's obviously very specialist. So the question around- Scotland's got the fantastic system whereby you can get funding for your undergraduate studies, but does it apply to postgraduate study? So anybody that's interested in that, I do recommend, if you're not already following the chat, do go dive into the chat and then you'll find lots of information from my colleagues who are real specialists in that area. But yes, we do have some questions. So first question from Simon, then, Rob. Do you have to have passed at certain level to be able to move on to a master's?

ROB MOORE: Good question. Anybody want to take that one? Well, Jay's nodding, so I'll go to you first, then.

JAY RIXON: Thank you. I'll start and other colleagues can help me out with some of the technicalities. So, yes and no. As ever, simple answer. We have something called sort of entry qualifications or advice and guidance on the website. So depending on the qualification you're looking for, the module you might want to start with, you need to have a look at the requirements that they're looking for. And we sort of come up with phrases like ordinary degrees or honours degrees, and it does get a bit tricky.

So if you ever have any questions, call your SST, your student support team, and they're there to help. And there'll be advisors there to help you run through some of the language. And so some modules will request certain levels, certain expectations, and some will have different expectations. They're not barriers to block your learning. They're not things to overcome. But they're there because ultimately we want to help you to set up to succeed. We want you to be able to study and study as well. So, Rob, sorry, I don't know if that helps some of the question, but maybe it gets the ball rolling and other colleagues can help me.

ROB MOORE: Yeah, no, that was great. So Jan?

JAN KOWAL: Yeah. From the point of view of the engineering masters, the MSc in engineering, which is another qualification we offer, we recommend that students have a numerate degree, a bachelor's degree, but they don't have to. And we offer a sort of self-test quiz to allow you to assess whether you feel that you're ready. And we also have a module- I think somebody will come on to it. I can't remember the name or number of it- about preparing yourself for postgraduate study, which is a nice way, again, to decide for yourself whether you're actually ready for this level of study.

ROB MOORE: Yeah. And I think the course you refer to is the OpenLearn course on postgraduate study, which is- hopefully somebody in the chat will be able to put the link to it. But absolutely amazing module, and what I would say is don't wait until you're thinking of postgraduate study to do that. Some of the best advice that I give to students is from that particular module. So yeah, if you want to improve your study anyway, have a look at the stuff we expect for postgraduate study, and it will inform from whatever level you're working at. So Bjorn, anything specific for business about master study?

BJORN CLAES: Yes. In business there's actually two approaches. It depends a little bit on the qualification that you're after. When we look at the MScs, the MSc in finance and the MSc in HRM, human resource management, yes, you need to have a completed undergrad degree at honours. That is just to make sure that you have the underlying knowledge that is required to participate in the discussions that take place during the study.

For the master of business administration, the MBA, we also expect that you have at least three years managerial experience. And again, that is to assure that the conversations around that sense making of the business concept that I referred to earlier takes actually place with a degree of reference in the real world. The practical application of the management concepts are really, really important, and therefore, if you want to embark on an MBA, we also expect that you have the three years of managerial experience in your organisation.

ROB MOORE: Thank you. And I know that was what I had to complete before I did my MBA, the check to make sure that I was in the right place to apply what I was learning. I've just been told that the link is now in the chat. So for the OpenLearn course, succeeding in postgraduate study, the link is there. So if you want to follow that, great tip. And we've had another question come through about how long it takes. So how long does it take to do a master's degree? Is it two years? Is it three years? What's the answer? I think I know, but I'll wait and see whether the experts have got a different view. so did I see somebody wave there?

BJORN CLAES: Yeah, I can. I can.

ROB MOORE: Go ahead, Bjorn.

JAN KOWAL: Look, it's in good OU fashion it depends. It depends how much time you want to dedicate, within certain limitations. So in the business school, you need to complete your qualification within seven years. So whether you are able to do it quicker, I'd say you are encouraged to do it quicker. It's best to get these things completed as soon as you can because that's when you get the full benefit of the qualification. The fastest that you can do the master of business administration, the MBA, is about two years. But for those students who are interested in that, we typically have a bit of a chat before students enter in that option because it does increase the workload significantly. Most of our students take about three years.

ROB MOORE: Yeah, I think three and a half years was how long I took. Basically, I didn't want to do too many things at once. I like to have it nice and steady level all in a row. But that worked for me. But if you wanted to do it full time, then there are definitely ways that you can do it, which is fantastic. There's a question here. I don't know if we've got the answer to this one, so we might have to come back to you on this. Why are there no natural science related masters at the OU apart from mental health? And I don't know if that's one that the group can answer. If anybody's got an insight on that, let us know. If not, we'll definitely find an answer for that and come back.

JAY RIXON: Yeah.

ROB MOORE: But yeah. To be honest, I wasn't sure if we'd know that one. That's great. So we're going to move on to the next element now. We're going to talk about how different is postgraduate study to undergraduate study. And we've got a new widget. This is a word cloud. So this will allow you to put three entries, three statements into the word cloud. You have to put three in.

And what we want you to tell us is what you think the skills are that are needed to succeed at postgraduate study. And once we've got that, we'll have a look at your thoughts, your ideas and see how they compare to our experts. So we're going to come to Jay first on this one. So, Jay, what would you say are the essential skills for postgraduate study, and how do they differ to the undergraduate skills, would you say?

JAY RIXON: I think in a lot of ways you're deepening the skills that you've learned at undergraduate study. You're taking techniques, skills, and approaches, and you're pushing them a bit further. You're

going into them a bit deeper. So I've got a little bit of a list next to me because I wrote them down, but I think reflective thinking is really important. I think your writing, your style of writing is really important, or the way that you approach assessment.

And I think also maybe there's a bit more of you in some of the assessment in the way that you're being able to showcase your skills. It's about using information wisely. You know, Rob, a couple weeks ago, you did a great session on Gen AI. There's some really interesting talking points in that whole section and that sort of emerging technology. I don't want to take them all, but also thinking critically, analytical skills is going to be really, really key as well. So, you know, there's loads of talking points, and it'll be really interesting to see what that word cloud sort of pops up.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. Yeah, as somebody who tutors undergraduate and postgraduate, I think one of the big things for me, it's how much do I lead students and how much do I point students forwards. And I know that's quite an obscure way of thinking, but with undergraduate, I tend to think we're encouraging people to come along on the- we love the J word.

We don't mind being cheesy on Student Hub Live. It's all good. But come along on the journey with us. Undergraduate, I feel like it starts, I'm sort of pulling people, then they're sort of coming alongside. Whereas postgraduate, it's more, right, that's where you go. Go and explore and come back and tell me. So a very unacademic scientific description there from me.

JAY RIXON: No, I think that's good. I think that's really good, because I think there is also that increasing sense of independence and also you'll be allowed a lot more independence as well. And that's, in part, to prepare you for some of the work that you're doing. It took me, like I often say, I think I'm a really good mentor but a lousy coach, because I really like to help people. But the problem is I can't let them help themselves. I'm desperate to do it for them. So, you know, I know my limits. You know, I'll be a fantastic mentor, but yeah, don't come to me for coaching sessions because I want to do it for you. Can't let you do it.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. And you've used the big word as well in your description, critical thinking. For me, that's the big differentiator. It's the difference between taking what we're given and using it and then challenging it. Again, one of my very academic descriptions is take a theory, a dirty great big hammer, whack it on the head till it's broken, and then put it back together in a way that's suitable for the purpose that you've got.

And that's what I like my postgraduate students to do. It's not just take things at face value, but accept that there's value in there that you can use, perhaps in a way it wasn't designed for. So I'm going to bring Jan in. Yeah. So Jan, anything on engineering? What would you say is the big difference between studying engineering at master's level and undergraduate level?

JAN KOWAL: I think there's not so much a qualitative difference, actually. It's the same thing. And I was going to refer to something called Bloom's taxonomy. There's an educationalist called Bloom. You may have heard of him. But that he divides up the levels at which one might understand subject matter or become an expert in an area of endeavour, if you like. So you can start at the most basic level, which is about knowledge, which is about remembering information. And then you go through various things. There's comprehension, explaining it, application. Analysis is another stage.

But then you get to the two highest stages. One is synthesis, which is where you're putting bits of information together to create new information, in fact, in some ways. And then there's evaluation where you're critically assessing the things you know and creating new stuff and knowing deeply how that's

come about and what the basis- what the actual deep background of all of that is. And so at postgraduate level, we're operating, possibly at all levels, but I think the emphasis is more on those deeper levels of understanding.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. A very academic alternative to my whacking it with a hammer analogy. Thank you for that. I'm going to ask Heidi to come in, because I think the word cloud's building up quite well. So, Heidi, would you like to talk us around the word cloud? What are people thinking the skills are? Are they agreeing with our chat so far?

HEIDI: Absolutely, yes. So the number one that's coming out at the moment is critical thinking. And then that's closely followed by time management, which, of course, is absolutely key and fundamental for studying at postgraduate level. We're getting a few questions that are coming in, Rob, and I think it's really great to differentiate between the term as well. So Pauline has asked us, is postgraduate study the same as master's study? And I thought it would be really great if we could just clarify that for students in the audience, because I think that's a great question.

ROB MOORE: OK. So hopefully my explanation- we can have some- I can have it clarified if I don't quite get this right. So postgraduate study is anything you do after you finish your undergraduate degree. It would also include- though, we're not talking about those at the moment- doctorates and PhDs. But if you look at the OU structure, we have postgraduate study that leads to the master's qualifications. You have to do 180 credits to get your master's degree. I'm looking at Jay in the window below here. So Jay, you can correct me if I get this wrong.

The first 60 credits of postgraduate study is what we would call the certificate of higher education. So you can stop after 60 and you've got a qualification that recognises your progress. You then do another 60. So you've got 120 credits of postgraduate study. That would equate to a diploma of higher education. And then the master's degree comes with the final 60, which is added on. So did I get that right, Jay, or is my maths wrong?

JAY RIXON: Again, I like how I'm the one to say yes or no. But the whole point is, is that that's a great question, because actually terminology is really important. And I think we assume we know- we think people know the answer, and actually, Rob, you did a really good point there because I'm not sure I could have done that quite so elegantly. But yes, you're right about the levels and some of that terminology there. It's really good to call that out, because actually it's not clear and we assume that people know. So we shouldn't do that.

ROB MOORE: And this would be a great time for you to tell us how your Open Master's works, because you can do all sorts of weird things. You can have peculiar little combinations that, as I say, they don't exist anywhere else in the world.

JAY RIXON: It's really unique in the sector. And, you know, when it came in in 2018, that was something that we were well aware of, and this is one of the reasons why we're really excited to bring it in. So I'll call it the Open Master's because that's what we sort of call it, but on the website it's known as the MA/MSc, which is really great in its own way because you can study either a master's, an MA, or you can gain an MSc. And that's up to you depending on what you study as well.

So really, this is an opportunity for students to take lots of different types of subject and discipline-based learning and bring them together in a qualification that is bespoke, that is personalised to them as well. So it's really exciting. So we have a little structure. We have a little framework. And again, I wrote it out just to make sure that I'm really clear about it. So we have something called route one. With route one we



say we would like you to study the required amount of credits to get your master's degree, and you can study from- we've got four study groups.

So basically, it's a really broad group that you can choose from and you can find breadth and depth in those subjects. Or- stay with me- you can study route two and you can study- again, we're going to ask you to study 120 credits of subject area study. But then what you can do is you can take 60 credits of study from any of those choices, and also a lovely group that we call group five, which is full of professional development modules as well. So they're really kind of quite employment focused.

And the beauty of this qualification is you can structure something that works around you. Maybe it works around what you've studied in your undergraduate degree, it helps you to work towards something that you're studying in the future or you want to study in the future, or sometimes, again- Rob, I like some of your explanations because I wouldn't say I'm particularly academic-minded. But what I love about this qualification is that you can have the head knowledge, but also the street smarts.

So that we find people taking brilliant combinations of things, whereas maybe you're taking something around like a STEM-based subject, but you're putting leadership and financial planning and mentorship with it as well, so that maybe you go into an employment where you've got the head knowledge, but you've got the street smarts as well. So I think it's a fantastic qualification. I'm very biased because I'm the qualification manager for it. But I think it's really exciting and I think it gives students that flexibility. And, maybe we'll talk about it a bit later on the show, but also, we change our minds. Sometimes we know what we want to study, and other times, life comes along. And also, it's a really good opportunity for students to be able to flexible with their learning if things change.

ROB MOORE: Yeah. Absolutely. And we have the experts that put programmes together and qualifications together that are designed for a particular purpose. But if that doesn't quite fit, I don't know, just build your own. Make your own choices, bring it together. Now, of course, there will be some exceptions where you might need to have something before, so certain qualifications. You need to have studied a particular module before, but the website explains all of that, and I think that's absolutely fantastic.

JAY RIXON: Yeah.

ROB MOORE: I've just got a note here from Jacqueline who took the Open MA over two courses. One was 120 credits and one was 60 credits. This helps decide what I want to do for the named master's as well.

JAY RIXON: Amazing. That's a really lovely, lovely example to hear. Fantastic. Great. Thank you.

ROB MOORE: And, can I just check- and I haven't prepped you for this question. If somebody does a combination on the Open Masters and find that it actually aligns with the named Masters, it's up to them which they claim, isn't it?

JAY RIXON: Yeah. So the structure of the qualification that we have- and we really put a lot of effort and thought into that structure because in a sense, we don't want to recreate another qualification. So when we've been talking about the cert, the dip, and the main master's, with Open Masters, the Ma/MSc, we only offer the whole qualification. We don't offer- again, this is a bit of a term, internal- nested qualifications. But what we do offer out is that there'll be other places for you to get those. So there's lots of different guidance. So again, I always say to students, go to our website.

Please have a look at the range of modules that we have. We normally have about 60 live modules and about 40 discontinued modules, so that's a lot of choice. And have a look. And what I will say is on that

website, we've got a little document called a Study Plan as well, and that will just help you think about the study, help you prompt your way through it as well, because otherwise it could be a bit overwhelming. We never want to put students in that position. So again, there's the study plan there. There's help from your SST, support out there as well. But Rob, I've also now forgotten the question, so you might need to remind me what you asked.

ROB MOORE: No, no, no. That's absolutely fine, because I'm going to bring Bjorn in for the next question. This is one about gradings. So the question is, with an undergraduate qualification, you need to get 85% for a distinction and 40% for a pass. Is that the same with a master's qualifications or the postgraduate qualifications?

BJORN CLAES: Oh, Rob, you put me a bit on the spot here.

ROB MOORE: It's good to check that.

BJORN CLAES: Actually, before I answer that one, can I just make a comment? I'm dying to make a comment on the previous topic, actually, because I think-

ROB MOORE: Oh, sorry. Carry on.

BJORN CLAES: It was a lovely conversation. I think the analogy that I always use for the difference between undergrad, postgrad, and even research degrees, and that links in also very nicely with Jay's conversation about or comments about the about the Open Masters, I think it's really useful here to use this toolbox analogy, right? If you're doing an undergrad, the focus is really on identifying and explaining all the tools that you have available in a respective area, right?

If you then go to a master's degree, then we start- the discussion becomes much more, which tool do I use for which job and why? If I choose one tool, why don't I use another tool? And that is really where the discussion is focusing if you're in a master's degree. If you don't progress onwards to a research degree, the question is not so much about the tool or even the difference between the tools, but why do I need to do the job in the first place. Right? And I think that would explain, really, really interesting, the differences between these different levels of qualifications. Right?

It is kind of thinking, OK, what's the job that I'm aspiring to do? The job broadly defined, right? That's not just your professional job, but also your personal interest. Right? What are the tools that I need to know to really understand what's going on there? And that's what we do in an undergrad. We point that all out and we explain it. And then in the postgrad, certainly in a business degree, many of those tools return to the scene. But then the question really becomes, why do I use this particular tool?

Because there are other tools that potentially can do a similar job, but maybe with different emphasis in it. Right? And that is really what we do in this master's degree. And as I said, the research degree just focuses on the job itself and why is this job even reported. Right? So about the level of distinctions, you really put me a bit on the spot here. I know that it's slightly different in master's degree, mostly because- in the business school, at least- mostly because the nature of the question becomes a little bit different. What you see in many undergrad degrees, that you have many more kind of factual questions and a question to which there is a single answer. What we do in the postgraduate, it's a lot of essay type of evaluations. So you need to show not just that you have the knowledge and the insight of the tools that we bring to the scene, but also your thinking process behind it. And whilst the levels of assessment and performance will be very, very similar, they may deviate a little bit here and there slightly.

ROB MOORE: And I think from my experience, again, this is only from the modules that I teach. Don't know if this is across the board. But the only difference is that the pass rate is 50%, not 40% on the

master's modules. The distinction level is still the same. I think we got quite a few questions coming in. So Heidi, do you want to put some of those questions to us? How are people feeling? Are we encouraging them at the moment? Are they feeling good?

HEIDI: Yeah, loads coming in. But first of all, before we dive into the questions, Rob, we've got some really constructive feedback, which we love at the OU, and I wanted to share that. So it's a really helpful comment that Jane has put in the chat. So thank you so much for this, Jane. So hopefully the panel can respond to this and help. So Jane has said there's a problem with the Open University, that students struggle with getting academic references for their MA's from tutors.

So the OU apparently, and I wasn't aware of this, has a rule that a tutor cannot provide an academic reference more than two years after a student has finished the degree. So this is a problem if a student doesn't go straight onto a higher degree. In addition, some universities require two academic references. I had the same tutor for both of my level three modules, so this means I cannot provide two academic references. And even further, some universities require tutors to submit references directly via their portal. The Open University wants you to submit references to them, and then they'll send a generic reference to the master's university, which is not what they want. And then Suzy's picked up on that and said, I didn't realise that the OU references were going to be a stumbling block if we can't get the type of reference that perhaps the next university they want to move on to is looking for. So is that something the panel can expand on, offer some reassurance or some explanation behind that OU rule?

ROB MOORE: I can answer a little part of it. One of the things- and this is since we had the GDPR regulations brought in. This is about data protection. We have to delete your information after two years. So as a tutor, I'm not allowed to keep information on you after two years, so it would be very difficult to give it. Now, I don't know if that's the reason behind it, but that was introduced quite recently. Anybody on the panel got more information on that? I think it's Something- yeah, go ahead, Jan.

JAN KOWAL: Yeah. It's not so much information, but I think it's a recognition that there's a problem here that the university ought to address. I think it would be very useful if the Open University were to explain to other universities in the UK what our process is and why we can't provide references at the moment. But actually I think it would be better if we somehow addressed this. And one approach might be that there is a reference provided by a tutor as a matter of course at the end of a module.

ROB MOORE: Yeah.

JAN KOWAL: That can lie on- well, it can be sent to the student, I suppose. But then again, we would even then have to explain to other universities that the reference- why the reference is coming directly from the student rather than from us. What puzzles me a little bit is if GDPR applies to us in that way, why doesn't it apply to other universities in that way? Or maybe it does. I'm not sure about what the position is at the moment. But I think for me, I'm certainly very concerned that that's an issue.

ROB MOORE: I think that's something that we definitely need to take back and ask that question. I mean, somebody put the post, could we have a- similar to what you've just said there, Jan, could we have a reference that's kept on record with the OU that can be provided when needed? Because I know I provide a lot of references. It's not a problem getting a reference, it's the two year timescale, I think, is the problem. And then the format it needs to be in.

So I think that's a really good- a good question. Which we can't answer here now, but we will look into it and see if we can get you a little more information on that. Heidi, any other questions before we move on to the next topic?

HEIDI: Yes, plenty of questions. So a question from Hannah. How flexible is the Open University around the overlap between waiting for the final degree module results and beginning the first module postgraduate study? So, for example, my final result will be due around November or December 2025, but I'd like to commence postgraduate study in the October 2025 presentation. So for those that want to go straight into postgrad study, I have so much admiration for you. But if that's what people want to do, how does that work?

ROB MOORE: Good question. And do we have an expert with the answer? I know what I think the answer is, but have we got anybody who knows? Again, we can confirm this and we can put something on the website. But I think the answer is that you can progress, but there's a caveat that says if you don't meet the requirement, then you may have to defer and take the next presentation. Now that sounds like it's quite mean, until you realise that the number of students who actually complete the qualification who don't pass is very, very small.

So it's almost everybody that gets to the end and submits the EMA or the exam will have a pass. Not necessarily the pass they were hoping for, but will pass, which is, again- so that statement and the process, as I understand it, is we proceed on the assumption that you will pass, but on the very rare occasion that you aren't, there are mechanisms that allow you to retake- do the reset and then pick up the qualification next time round. And I think that's the way it's worked, but we will confirm that. We'll put something on the website. Nobody's arguing with you, which is a good thing at this point, but we will confirm that for you just to make sure. Anything else, Heidi, before we move on?

HEIDI: I think Jan wanted to come in then, so should we just let Jan respond to that first before-

ROB MOORE: I did not notice Jan waving. Sorry. Yes, Jan?

JAN KOWAL: Yeah. I would just say that I think that probably applies only to those master's degrees where they require you to have an undergraduate degree. If it's not a requirement, then it doesn't matter that you haven't passed that module. So that's just a little modification, I suppose, to what you said.

ROB MOORE: Yes, Bjorn?

BJORN CLAES: No, I just wanted to reinstate what you already said. I think those who really want to continue, these are usually not the students that have to worry about whether they pass or not. Most of the students that I know of that struggle to make the pass marks are not the ones that aspire to continue. They will be happy when they finish their degrees as it is.

ROB MOORE: Yeah. I don't think anybody who fails fails unexpectedly. I think you will be- if you're comfortable with your studies, the chances of not passing are really remote. So yeah. It sounds like a bit of a cop out saying we'll assume you're passing, and in my experience, I think I've only known a couple of cases where it hasn't- where the students had to take a short break. And in one instance, they were allowed to do the reset whilst they carried on with the study. As long as they passed the reset, it was fine. So yeah, very rare.

But always you would have a conversation with your student support team and talk through them on that. So we're going to move on to the next topic now. So the next kicker question is, think about situations where a master's degree or a postgraduate qualification are essential. So let us know of any that you're aware of.

And we're going to go through now and we're going to talk about what is the value of a master's degree. What can you expect from it? So Jan, we're going to start with you first. So in terms of the qualifications

you're involved with, what would you say are the benefits? What should somebody expect to get at the end? And I'm thinking more career progression or something similar.

JAN KOWAL: I think with the master's in engineering, we do have these project modules which are very valuable for students who want to demonstrate that they've actually done some engineering in practise and have had some results is often a really useful topic for interview questions, looking for work. I've mentioned the chartered status, that it's not something- you can practise as an engineer in the UK without being chartered. Let's not pretend otherwise.

But it is something that I think increasingly will become expected that there is some sort of professional recognition. You can be a chartered engineer, you can be an incorporated engineer. And I think in other professions- for example, in psychology, I don't think you can be a chartered psychologist without a master's qualification in that area. I'm pretty sure that that's true. And there they are- that really would restrict your employment options if you didn't have that.

So that's from the very formal perspective. I think a master's degree can also be a great gateway to a change in direction in career. And I know that from my own personal experience, I certainly wouldn't be here had I not done a master's degree. I'll just give you a short anecdote about that, if you like.

ROB MOORE: Yeah, absolutely.

JAN KOWAL: So I graduated in physics a long, long time ago. I was not a very diligent student, so I got a pretty mediocre grade on that degree. It took me a little while to get a job, but I eventually did get a job as an engineer working for the then GEC. Some of you may or may not remember it. It was a huge engineering company in the '80s. So I got a job there. It wasn't really quite what I was interested in. So I did a part-time master's at Birkbeck College while I was working as an engineer in a different area from my job. So I wanted to be a medical physicist. Didn't turn out that way.

But what it enabled me to do was some of the stuff that I had learned there specifically about ultrasonics allowed me to move into a different company. So that was good. And just in time, actually, because GEC sold the site that I was working in. So made redundant, but jumped into another job the next month. So that was great. But when I came to joining the OU as a lecturer, the normal requirement is a good undergraduate degree and a PhD or equivalent.

Actually, I had neither, but I did have a masters and I had 20 years of experience working in industry. And that was enough. Academically I fall far below the standard that the OU normally requires of a lecturer. So that's my story, and that's how it worked for me. And other people will have stories of their own, but it was a great thing. I hadn't realised when I took it on how life changing it would actually be.

ROB MOORE: I think we've got a few more anecdotes coming up, Jan, so thank you for sharing that. And I believe Bjorn's got some figures, some general figures. Not necessarily all Open University-based, but from a financial point of view, what we can see what the general benefit of master's level qualifications are. So Bjorn, what sort of things is your pretty table telling you?

BJORN CLAES: My pretty table, yeah. Look, the value of a master's degree in many instances is, well, certainly because many job specs who require master's level thinking. You need to be able to demonstrate the level of that, so your diploma will be fundamental in that. But if I talk to students in our master's programmes, in our residential schools, many of them are practicing managers, and they feel they themselves have hit a particular ceiling and they just need to know more knowledge and more perspective in integrating all these different aspects of doing business that they have gotten to. And so they themselves feel the need for it.

And yes, if we don't look at the tables and you pick out the Financial Times MBA ranking, it does have, oftentimes for most students, salary implications as well. If you progress in the organisation to a higher level of management, that translates oftentimes to higher salary bands. And I think the value of a typical MBA is also there because it opens students' ability to start making connections and see opportunities where otherwise they may have not seen them.

And the fact that they can actually introduce innovations and introduce improvements to the organisations, lead them also to being in the spotlight, which then again leads to career progress, and with that, salary progress. Look, if you look at the MBA rankings in FTE, we talk about salary increases of 100 plus percent oftentimes. I don't think that is necessarily the case for our typical MBA students simply for the fact that many of them are already in managerial positions, so for them to go from a manager to an even better manager, a jump in salary is- they will make some salary progress, but not what many of the ranking tables would lead us to believe.

And that is really for career starters that, without a master's, would be able to go in a certain level of jobs, and with the masters, they would be able to apply to a higher level of job, and that just simply has implications for their remuneration. But I think it needs to be emphasised that the value of the MBA is- or the value of a business master's is that it allows you to make different connections. It allows you to see different opportunities, and some people may see them naturally.

An MBA is not a recipe for- a guaranteed recipe for success. But what the MBA does or what the master's in finance and HRM as well, it allows you to take the step back from the reality that you're familiar with and then reevaluate, critically assess, analyse, and see the opportunities. That's what we encourage. That's the way we assess in our master's programmes to encourage that level of thinking, because ultimately that leads to career progress and the likes.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. And I'll share my example now, while we're talking about this, because it fits into this part of the description- part of the discussion. And for me, when I did my MBA there were two big benefits. The first one was salary. Second one was the opportunity to change and do something different, which you've all covered. So this is my story, if you like. So I was working in manufacturing management during my MBA, and when I got towards the end of the MBA, I was offered an opportunity, an internal promotion opportunity that would not have existed if I hadn't been studying the master's degree. So it was there and I took the opportunity. And you can't guarantee this, but the relocation allowance alone that came with the job more than covered the cost of the programme I was on. So I'm one of the few people that can say my MBA paid for itself within the first 12 months. That's my story. And not only did it pay for itself in that time. Also during the study, I was looking into one of my modules was about creativity and innovation.

And that's the point that made me decide that, yes, I'm quite good at this leading people manufacturing-wise, but what I really want to do is teach. And that's where I made the decision to move from manufacturing management into training. And that's why I'm here today, because it gave me the opportunity. Yeah, and it gave me the qualifications I needed to be able to become a lecturer. So yeah. Bjorn, sorry, I noticed your hand went up there.

BJORN CLAES: Yeah. Just building on your argument, and perhaps bringing in my own experience of doing an MBA, by now already more than 20 years ago. And it links also a little bit back to what I was saying before when I talked about the toolbox analogy, right? If you get to a master's level, it is increasingly not so much what you do, but why do you do it. That why question doesn't only apply to

business decisions, but as you with your anecdote illustrate, it is much broader than that. So why am I doing this in the first place? Right?

It's, why do I take a particular decision? Why do I apply it here? Why? So that question of the why comes back time and again, and the choice of the tools that you apply to solving a particular challenge. But even, is this the area in which I would want to work? And I think that is really, really important. To me, my experience with the master's, with an MBA 20 years or so ago was, yes, I learned some new knowledge, but it was most of the time my time in the MBA almost looking like in a mirror.

And it's always asking, OK, why do I do this? Why do I propose this? Why do I apply this? And then being challenged by my peers as much as by my professors at the time to come up with the justifications.

Right? It's, this is what I'm doing. Again, this is why I'm doing it. This is the assumptions that I took. These are the arguments that I brought in and that may lead me to the best solution in the context that I'm trying to apply. But it even leads me then to challenge my own.

[CLEARS THROAT]

Sorry.

[COUGHS]

ROB MOORE: So there's a comment-

[COUGHS]

There's a comment in the chat, Bjorn, saying, how did you manage to get your MBA at the age of 15?

[LAUGHTER]

BJORN CLAES: Usually the students that are this kind of questions get guaranteed pass, right? That's-

ROB MOORE: Sucking up to the boss. So I know Heidi has got a few a few points people want to raise. So Heidi, what are some of the comments we've been hearing?

HEIDI: I don't even know where to start in the chat. We've got so many lovely comments coming in, which is brilliant. So we talked a little bit about why people are studying for a master's. So Sarah says, I'm going to be doing a master's because it has been recommended as good practise before my PhD and it will help with my funding application. So I also think it will help bridge the move from distance to face-to-face learning. Emma says that she's doing an MSc in health psychology, as it's a requirement of the main pathways.

Jacqueline says, my master's is considered utterly irrelevant in my work. People want to know if I have O-level maths and English, but I'm nearing retirement, and the master's was a personal challenge. I get respect from people who hold one and I know- sorry. She gives respect to people who hold a master's and know what it entails, particularly if that's been completed while working full-time. Because as we know, that's really tricky with the juggling of time management. So moving on. So Ian says, I have an MBA and a DBA, and the key benefit was in how it deepened my thinking and helped me realise my ignorance. So I love that honesty there, Ian. That's great.

Simon says, I'm retired and I have no interest in working again. What would the value of a master's degree be for me? So it'd be great if we could put that to the panel. But Katya came back and responded and said, Simon, according to many research studies, continuing with your studies really helps to keep dementia away for longer. And if you get a PhD afterwards, you might end up on TV. So I thought that was quite a nice comment. But can we pick up on that one in terms of the value of a master's for someone who's retired?

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. And it actually brings us really nicely into the next topic that we want to talk about, which is how to make an informed choice about a master's degree. And while we're having this chat, if you want to send any questions in to Heidi, because we'll be having the ask the panel part after this.

So if you've got any questions you want asking, we're going to have about 15 minutes at the end that we can explore those. So in terms of that, does anybody want to take that point about, what's the benefit of a master's if you don't need it for work? And also, while we're having this chat, any tips on how to make a good decision? What is it that we should consider before we sign on the dotted line? So, who wants to go first? Go on, Bjorn.

BJORN CLAES: Look, I greatly admire somebody who can pick up a master's or even a doctoral degree for not necessarily professional reasons. And I would almost go as far as if you don't do it out of personal interest and if you think you purely, 100% do it for career progress, that's probably not going to help you that much. I think you have to have this personal drive for knowledge and understanding and sense making that will also help you with your job, but with it, it needs to be this personal satisfaction of being able to analyse it at particular problems in the particular areas that you study at that level.

And I think the- I believe it was a gentleman who said he did an MBA and a DBA and he only realised his ignorance about so many things. Yes, the more you study, the more you realise how much you do not know. And that's where the personal drive comes in. Right? It is this personal challenge or the desire to know- not just to know, but to make broader sense of the things. And I would almost argue that the higher you come up in the levels from undergrad to postgrad, the less the area specifically starts mattering. Yeah?

Because I did a PhD, and I used that not just to look at a very, very narrow set of topics. I look at every topic in my life almost from a very kinda, easy approach where you said, what are the arguments? What are the assumptions? What evidence do I have? Et cetera, et cetera. Right? So I think that personal drive to want to know more and to open up your mind to different perspectives, that is fundamental. And I can only applaud those who do that not necessarily with career progress in mind.

I think there is this immense personal challenge and satisfaction of seeing and learning how the world, or a small part thereof, kind of works. And just a quick response to the lady who said that it was good practise to have a masters for a PhD. As far as I know, it's not just good practise, it's a requirement. So you will have to have a masters before you can embark on a doctoral study. It's more than just good practise.

ROB MOORE: Excellent. Thank you. Thank you, Bjorn. Jay or Jan, would one of you like to add to that?

JAY RIXON: No, I've been making notes while we've been having those conversations, and I love the anecdotes from people, because I think learning is really personal and it's always going to have that sort of personal value. And I think some of the things that I was making note of is around confidence. I know that when I've embarked on learning, whether that's carried credit or whether that's sort of what we might call an accreditation of the learning environment, it's given me confidence. And that confidence helps both in your personal life and your professional life.

But I think I went to an event the other day and it was talking a bit about the value of learning, and actually there were some great words around critical thinking, around reflection. But also the one that really stood out to me was curiosity, and it was about the value of learning making you curious and asking



questions and thinking about things. And actually, we can be curious in our personal lives as well as in our professional ones as well.

And a phrase that we often use on the Open Masters is about standing out from the crowd. What makes you stand out from the crowd? And actually, that can be in a personal context as well as a professional one as well. So I think learning really has a value, and that's not always about the paycheck that you get at the end of it. It's about the passion that we have when we learn more. And I loved Bjorn's point about the more I learn, the less I know. And that is really true, isn't it, in so many topics.

ROB MOORE: Definitely. And we've got a comment from Maureen where she says, I'm keeping dementia at bay by studying and hoping to start my master's at 80, which I think is fantastic. Absolutely. So I'll give- Jan, have you got any comments that you'd like to add to that topic?

JAN KOWAL: Yes, I would, although it's perhaps slightly going backwards to another aspect. And I just wanted to give a figure, and that is that, according to Universities UK, there are now 34% of people in Britain have an undergraduate degree. So increasingly, the way to differentiate oneself is to go the next step and have the master's degree. I mean, I think it's a great success. I think it's great. The more people that have undergraduate degrees, the better. But of course, it means that the bar is set higher for everyone to show that they are special, perhaps, and deserve that job more than other people do. But yeah, I would also concur that, really, you should be studying this because you want to, because you're interested. And I think before jumping in, you can always look- I'm sure everyone here does anyway- at the module descriptions, what it says that you will study before you jump in. And there's quite a lot of detail there, and I think you could even get more information by talking to the student support team who would be very happy to give you very much more personal guidance, perhaps, on what you might do.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. And our audience wants lots more because we've told them how many have an undergraduate degree. Do we know how many have a master's degree? Was that in that research? If it's not, don't worry, Jan, we can always pop that on the website afterwards. If you haven't got that, we can look it up.

JAN KOWAL: Well, I can tell you- I've got the figures in front of me for the people who, in the year '21 to '22, how the qualifications that were awarded were split. And that was that 57% were undergraduate qualifications and 43% were postgraduate. That, of course, includes PhDs as well. So I'm quite surprised. It's quite a large proportion.

ROB MOORE: Yes.

BJORN CLAES: So yeah.

ROB MOORE: Yeah, that's a much bigger proportion than I would have expected. Excellent. So in terms of- coming back to the point now. So if I'm considering going and doing a postgraduate qualification, what two or three things should be top of my list to check out? Now you've mentioned the module descriptions, and of course, OpenLearn has a lot of our master's modules. We have samples on there.

So the one that I teach on supply chain management, you can actually go and play our supply chain game on OpenLearn. It's a bit of some of our content that we put there so you can have a play with it. But any other tips? What should people look at before they sign up? So Bjorn, what would you say? One or two things that somebody should check before they can go forward.

BJORN CLAES: Well, first would be, are they driven enough? Do they really want this? I think that's really, really important. And I do also think it would be recommendable for potential students or even

actual students. Why do I want to do this in the first place? What do I try to get out of it? There is- I wouldn't call it a downside, because it's not a downside, but there is a flip side of doing an MBA and then perhaps even doing a doctoral degree afterwards. The more you understand, the more you actually see. When I did my MBA, when I went back to my company at the time, I actually realised all the stuff that they were improvising on and just outright doing wrong, and I wasn't in a position to really change it. It almost frustrated me, actually to the degree that I started doing a doctoral degree. And that's how I ended up doing my PhD. So I think a good understanding of why I want to do this, and that is particularly important for those who will link to career progress. There's a number of students that we just talked about that before who just do this purely out of personal interest, and that is highly admirable. Right?

But for those who do it for career progress reasons have a bit of a vision where, OK, what will this lead me? Because it is not just studying a master's degree, because the master's degree is a generic tool, right? It needs to be applied and contextualised to your own career progression, and I think that is really, really important to make that distinction. So knowing where you are, knowing what you hope to achieve with doing this postgraduate degree, regardless whether it's a master or a PhD or a DBA. Right? Having that very, very clear is, I think, really, really important.

ROB MOORE: Absolutely. And of course, we've got our fantastic Careers Advice team. All OU students, you can access that team and arrange to have a personal interview to talk through how could I use- what's the best way to do this. So if you want some independent expert advice, talk to the Careers team. They're great on that. So, Jan, what would you say? What top tips would you give to somebody considering a postgraduate qualification?

JAN KOWAL: Well, I would say that there is a large community of students and past students, and I think consulting them, people who have studied a module. What was it like for them? What did they enjoy about it? So I would get on to the student forums or the social media and ask questions of students that have already tried these things.

ROB MOORE: Oh, yes. Our students are very blunt when it comes to what they think, both the positive and the challenging aspects as well. But yeah, absolutely get the views of others. Find out what they thought. So, Jay, your top tips, then.

JAY RIXON: Well, we've mentioned it already, and I think somebody's kindly put it in the chat, so maybe if they could pop it back in the chat. But Rob, you talked about the course on OpenLearn, which is a platform that has lots of free learning from the OU, and it was the short course that's called succeeding in postgraduate study. And I just cannot promote that enough. I think it is a brilliant tool. So it's 24 hours of learning. It's at sort of what we call level three. It's advanced, so it helps prepare you for postgraduate study.

At the end of the course, once you've studied successfully, you get a certificate of completion, you get a digital badge. I mean, why not score early? But at the same time, it goes through lots of brilliant things that we've been talking about. What is reflective thinking? I love that Jan mentioned Bloom's taxonomy. I've not heard about that since some of my postgrad days, as well as Berne's transactional analysis and all of these sorts of things.

But it goes through things like Kolb's learning theory and reflective cycle. It really helps you think about postgraduate study and think about what are some of the skills that I need. When we say critical thinking, what do we mean? When we say analytical thinking, what do we mean? So that is a free course that you can do now, just at the end of Student Hub Live, if you really want to.

So, you know, why not go away and explore that? Because that will help you think, is this right for me? Can I function at this level? Is this something that I'm comfortable with? And it's about the skills, it's about the knowledge. And alongside that course, you could be then looking at the module you want to do, the other materials available on OpenLearn, but also having a look at the websites from the OU about the qualifications as well. So I just think that's such a great starting point. It's well worth promoting and talking about again.

ROB MOORE: And I will get Kat to put that up on the website as well as a direct link. So thank you, guys. We're going to come into the bit that terrifies all my guests now, the ask the panel part. So, Heidi, they've been answering these questions far too easily. Let's give them some challenging questions. What questions have we got for the panel?

HEIDI: I know. I should have instructed everybody in the chat to make them as difficult as possible, especially for Rob. So, challenge given. Right. So we do have loads of questions. We've got such a lovely example here of how students support each other, and I just have been watching this conversation going on. I just want to share it with everyone because it's just so great to see. So Jacqueline says, if you want a postgraduate loan, there's an upper age limit for the first application, which I had no idea about. It just is bonkers to think that there would be any kind of age limit for a postgraduate loan. Why would we want to deter people from doing master's?

But anyway, so Jacqueline says that needs to be considered. She met the deadline by one month and she loved almost all of the work. Now, Natalie then came in and said, what is the upper age limit for a financial loan for first application for postgraduate master's study? And then Jacqueline came back saying, Sarah, I think the students loan was- I think it will be confirmed, but 60. That's what Jacqueline said, when she applied. And then Natalie went and checked really kindly and did a bit of research and then came back and confirmed and said, yes, it is 60.

So that's brand new information for me, and I'm sure for others as well today, that there is an upper age limit, which, as I said, just seems just truly bonkers. But lots and lots and lots of questions coming in. And I know that we're running out of time, so I want to get in as many as possible. So a question from Philip to the panel. For an Open Masters, are you limited to the modules in each group? So for example, group three STEM, or can you take other related STEM modules?

ROB MOORE: So that's definitely one for you, Jay.

JAY RIXON: Yeah, I was waiting for that. So we have a framework for the qualification and we manage that framework accordingly, and that's to protect our students, to make sure that you're going to get a really viable master's product, to a certain extent. So on the website, on study at the OU, we have the study groups and the modules that fit within those study groups, and we ask you to study 120 credits so you've got a sort of a weight of specialism knowledge.

And then with the remaining 60 credits, we allow you to think about where else you would like that to come from. So we do have a specific framework. It can feel a bit inflexible at times, but like most rules, they're there to support you. But if you have any questions, please go to a student support team. They will kind of dig into some of the questions for you. And then often what happens is, is the questions then work their way back to me anyway and I liaise with colleagues to help them out. So the answer is, it's a little bit yes and no, but there is a framework and it is there for a reason.

ROB MOORE: Yeah. Because ultimately you need to have a master's degree that's got the right structure that will be recognised as that.

JAY RIXON: Yeah. Definitely. And that's partly why it exists. I sometimes think about it as a major and a minor model. You've got something that is a really chunky bit of specialist knowledge, but then you've got the option to add on different skills and expertise as well.

ROB MOORE: Lovely. So, Heidi, next question then.

HEIDI: OK. On to the next one. So this is from Estevan, and I'm sure one of the panel is going to understand this question immediately. But this is one of these super tricky questions that if somebody put this to me, I would absolutely freeze. But OK, so Estevan says, I am on an M6 and integrated masters. Is it recognised as the same as an independent MSc if I apply for a PhD?

JAY RIXON: Wow. Wow.

ROB MOORE: If anybody knows the answer, then that's great. Oh, go ahead, Bjorn.

BJORN CLAES: Well, I wouldn't say that I know it, but if it's an integrated master's and at the end of the study, he would complete the master's, that would comply for a PhD. It is the master's level qualification that you need to demonstrate for your typical PhD.

ROB MOORE: So the answer is, we think so. It would seem logical that is the case. But if you note that one down, Heidi, we perhaps do a little more digging on that one just to confirm, because it sounded very specific to me, so it's the sort of thing I'd like to check with one of our advisors who will be able to tell you that. OK. A couple more questions. Got time for a few more.

HEIDI: OK, great stuff. So Paula says, I know the entry requirements for an MA in creative writing with the Open University is a 2:1 undergraduate level. If I get a 2:2 for my BA, will they accept me?

ROB MOORE: Oh, good question. Anybody know the answer to that one? My gut reaction is it doesn't hurt to ask and have an individual conversation. But I don't know the answer. I would say that you can't assume that you would be accepted, but it would be worth having the conversation with student support team, because we don't put many restrictions on, but where they are there, then they are normally enforced.

But there's always a conversation to be had. And it might be that it's a yes, with something additional. I've definitely seen that in the past where somebody's been accepted with something that didn't quite meet the threshold, but they were given some additional work to do either alongside or in advance of. Don't know if anybody's had any other experiences like that, but yeah.

So the advice there is nearly- it hope it doesn't sound like a cop out, but our student support team are really are the experts. They are the ones who can go into the nitty gritty, contact the module teams and say, we've got somebody in this position. Would you consider it? They are great at supporting you in those sorts of circumstances and they know a lot more about the nitty gritty than I would as a tutor. I don't think anybody's got anything to add on that particular one, so Heidi, another question.

HEIDI: These are proving to be tricky, aren't they?

ROB MOORE: Oh, yes. Yes.

HEIDI: -tricky, but they are.

ROB MOORE: You give me ones I've got to look up.

HEIDI: Yeah, that's it. So Kim has asked, is the master's graded like a degree, like a 2:1 or a 2:2? And are employers fussy about a master's pass level, if there is one?

ROB MOORE: Oh, good question, because it wasn't when I did mine. So when I did mine in 2000- I don't know. Can't possibly have been that far off. But when I did mine in 2000, it wasn't graded. It was just pass or fail. But it is now. Does anybody know exactly how the grading works? Ah, thank you, Jan.

JAN KOWAL: Certainly I know for the engineering master's- and I don't think it's different for most others- is that you have a distinction, a merit, or a pass, and those are the three grades. So it's not quite the same as undergraduate, but there is differentiation there.

ROB MOORE: And I think, was it about five or six years ago that was brought in? It's fairly recent, if I remember rightly. So it's about five or six years they brought that in so that those who achieved- this is going to sound awful now because my master's was a pass or fail, I had no intention of working hard enough to get a degree level pass. My target was somewhere between 60% and 70% for a nice comfortable merit level. Had the distinction level been in when I did mine, it might have actually encouraged a bit more work. Go ahead, Bjorn.

BJORN CLAES: No, I just kind of wanted to comment on the second part of the question, whether employers actually care about the performance. And I think the question that is really it depends, but it's important to keep that in mind. Again, I'm talking now from an MBA perspective. If students' aspiration is to work with any of the big consultancy or the big investment banks or things like that, performance, yes, is fundamental. So it depends a little bit on the competitiveness in the sector, whether your grades are really considered or not.

I think the vast majority of employers will probably just say, well, do you have the master's level of thinking? And see that as an almost dichotomous decision, yes or no. But the more competitive the area, the more that employers will start comparing between MBAs. And sadly that is not only the how well you perform, but sadly also where you've done your MBA and what references do you get in. So depending on your career aspirations, I think you need to keep these things very, very well in mind and do some research on what typical employers that you aspire looking for.

ROB MOORE: Yeah. Thank you. And I'm sure that it was brought in as a response to employers wanting to be able to differentiate between- sorry. Not everyone. Can't believe it. We're about out of time. So Bjorn, Jay, Jan, thank you. That's been fantastic. Really enjoyed talking with you today. It's great to have you with us. Heidi, any final comments from our audience?

HEIDI: Yes. I've been saving this one. This is my favourite comment throughout all of today's show, and it's from Lorraine, so I wanted to share it with everyone. Lorraine says, I'm 60, I'm working towards retirement. I want to teach life writing when I retire. I didn't have the opportunity to study earlier, but I feel like it's my time now. My kids are grown, both have degrees and are teachers, so I'm doing this for me with the additional benefit of possible earning something. And I just thought that was such a lovely comment to finish on, Lorraine. Good for you, and best of luck with your studies and all your endeavours.

ROB MOORE: What a fantastic comment. Thank you. And thank you, Heidi, for all of your work today. As always, you brought out the comments really well. And I've just been told that Emma from the student support team is trying to answer all those difficult questions that made me raise my eyebrows and stumble a little. Hopefully we're getting some good answers to those questions there in the chat. Just like to remind you all about the feedback form for this session.

This is the first one we've done on the master's programme, so we brought this in to see whether it's the sort of thing that people wanted to discuss and hear about. So let us know in the feedback form. If you tell us you like this sort of discussion, then we'll put more of them in. If none of you respond, then probably won't surface again. Use the feedback form to tell us. Do you like it? Are there topics you want us to bring in similar to this? And what you want us to do? And you'll see the feedback form. There'll be a link in the chat box, and there'll also be a link on the Student Hub Live home page.

So just to finish, just a couple more sessions that we've got coming up now. So on the 11th of July we've got Isabella and Margaret. They'll be talking to our neurodiverse community, specifically focusing on reflecting and consolidating learning. So if that's something that interests you, you can join them on July the 11th at 11 o'clock.

We then have a session on really understanding the questions. So this is the 18th of July at 11:00, and this is how to really get to grips with your assignment questions and your EMA questions. Then you're back with me and Nicky on the 23rd of July. That's at 11 o'clock in the morning, talking about how we can communicate effectively in an academic way. And effective notetaking is on the 15th of August.

We've got the new Student Hub Live year coming up with freshers week in September, and we're going to have a bit of a party celebrating 10 years of Student Hub Live. So watch out for those announcements. Come and join us when we have a bit of fun. And you know what? We might actually get to meet each other. So that's in the planning now, but keep your eyes open for that. So I'd just like to say it's been a fantastic way to spend 90 minutes with you all. Thank you for being here, and I'll look forward to seeing you at the future sessions. Have fun.

[MUSIC PLAYING]