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Characteristics of Master's graduates

QAA

QAA (2015) 'Master's Degree Characteristics Statement' [Online]. Available at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Masters-Degree-Characteristics-15.pdf> (Accessed 11 April 2017) (Emphasis - text highlights - provided in the context of the Activity)

Core attributes

Much of the study undertaken for master's degrees is at, or informed by, the forefront of an academic or professional discipline. Successful students show originality in the application of knowledge, and they understand how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research. They are able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, and they show originality in tackling and solving problems. They have the qualities needed for employment in circumstances requiring sound judgement, personal responsibility and initiative in complex and unpredictable professional environments.

Master's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice
- a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship
- originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
 - to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
 - to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
 - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
 - decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations
 - the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

Beyond these core attributes, master's graduates are diverse, with wide-ranging strengths and abilities. This is a reflection of the diversity of master's programmes available as well as students' different aspirations, motivations, learning needs and personal circumstances.

Nonetheless, **all master's degree graduates have in-depth and advanced knowledge and understanding of their subject and/or profession, informed by current practice, scholarship and research. This will include a critical awareness of current issues and developments in the subject and/or profession; critical skills; knowledge of professional responsibility, integrity and ethics; and the ability to reflect on their own progress as a learner.**

Graduates of research master's are likely to be further characterised by their ability to study independently in the subject, and to use a range of techniques and research methods applicable to advanced scholarship in the subject. **Graduates of specialist or advanced study master's** are likely to be characterised in particular by their ability to complete a research project in the subject, which in some subjects includes a critical review of existing literature or other scholarly outputs. Meanwhile, **graduates of professional or practice master's** are able to apply research and critical perspectives to professional situations, both practical and theoretical, and to use a range of techniques and research methods applicable to their professional activities.

Graduates of all types of master's degrees are equipped to enter a variety of types of employment (either subject-specific or generalist) or to continue academic study at a higher level, for example a doctorate (provided that they meet the necessary entry requirements). Graduates of professional/practice master's programmes in particular possess the skills and experience necessary for some professions or areas of practice.