



## Progression to Postgraduate Study at LU: 4. SHAPE Questions for reflection

PPS:LU is exploring the progression to postgraduate study at Lancaster University. It focuses on three groups of students namely: disabled students; students from a minority ethnic group; and students from a disadvantaged socio-economic background (e.g. low-income households). As part of the project, we are producing practical resources for staff and students which are informed by our research findings. This paper is for students to use to aid thinking and planning for progression.

### SHAPE: A progression pentagon

This briefing paper is for students, primarily undergraduate and Masters students, to use as a resource. It is organised around the acronym 'SHAPE' which stands for Support, Helpers, Actions, Planners, Experience. Each step or point in the progression pentagon is described followed by questions to facilitate thinking and planning. You may use these questions for individual reflection or as part of a group discussion where experiences and resources can be shared.

We have rearranged the steps in 'SHAPE' into their usual order but recognise the 'steps' may be visited several times and not necessarily in the order we suggest here. For example, you may work on a research project for your course (experience) which prompts you to explore PG study in greater depth (planners).

### 1. Planners: How much do you know about further study?

We found students may not consider postgraduate study as 'something for them'. Not because they had explored the options and reached an informed decision. But because of other things, such as a lack of confidence, viewing PG study as for 'other people, not like them' or because they think PG study is like UG study. This is why we are asking you to reflect on what you know **before** you decide.

Studying at postgraduate level is different to undergraduate, how it differs will depend on the discipline but in general there is greater specialisation in a particular subject with more independent study. If you are curious about something and you want to learn more, further study could be for you. Below are some questions you may want to ask and find out the answers: **Do you know:**

- a. **What skills you'd develop and how these might help you gain work in your chosen field?**
- b. **The difference between a Masters and a Doctorate?**
- c. **What courses you could do after your undergraduate degree, here at LU or elsewhere?**

There is lots of information available but it can be overwhelming, and you may not know where to begin.

If you are unsure, perhaps start with looking at [Prospects.ac.uk](https://www.prospects.ac.uk) which provides an overview of what Masters degrees and Doctorates are, or attend an [Open Day event at LU](#) or elsewhere.

## 2. Helpers: who might lend a hand?

Don't know where to start in thinking about PG study, let alone know what questions to ask? You are not alone, this is normal! It is a cliché, but it is true: there is no such thing as a silly question, apart from one that doesn't get asked. Often, we'll wait for someone else to ask, and if they do, other people breathe a sigh of relief and 'own up' that they didn't know either. Here are some suggestions regarding who might help...

- a. **Talk to a lecturer, tutor, or your academic advisor about the options.**
- b. **Make an appointment with a Careers Advisor.**
- c. **Ask a friend or peer if they know anyone who it may be helpful for you to talk to.**
- d. **Is there a space where you meet current postgraduates? Ask them about their journey and experience.**

## 3. Support: Is PG study practically possible?

If you've now had a look around and think PG study could be something for you, what next? One important step is to explore whether it is possible for you.

1. **Is it affordable? Find out what funding is available, and how and when to apply.**
2. **What are the course entry requirements?**
3. **How would the course fit with other commitments you have?**
4. **If you want to continue but not straightaway, find out who can help you to return to study.**

Answering these questions might need some digging, but there are people and resources out there to help. See the Helpers and Planners sections for suggestions.

## 4. Experience: can you get some?

From talking to students and staff we found that **experiencing** research can help in deciding about postgraduate study. PG study is very different from UG and often the best way of learning about the differences is to get a taste. Experience may also be crucial in making an application more competitive. Opportunities to gain experience vary across disciplines but here are some questions to consider:

- a. **Can you do a dissertation or research project as part of your current course?**
- b. **Can you do a research internship, here at LU or elsewhere? If it isn't paid, is there help with expenses?**
- c. **Is there any casual part-time employment as a research assistant available?**
- d. **Could you attend departmental seminars to learn more about the research being done in your field?**
- e. **What about placement experience, for example, in a research laboratory?**

## 5. Actions

- a. **Set aside some time to do some thinking and exploring.**
- b. **Write a list of some people who you will ask about PG study.**
- c. **Explore resources such as the website [Prospects.ac.uk](https://www.prospects.ac.uk) and attend an Open Day event.**
- d. **Get some research experience: always good to have whatever you decide.**
- e. **If you decide you'd like to go further, make it a priority to check deadlines for things like funding applications.**

**We cannot emphasise this enough: Don't miss out by not finding out.**

## SHAPE resource list

Please see SHAPE Record sheet and SHAPE checklist for questions and things to think about

### Learn about postgraduate study

Attend a digital or in-person at [Open Day at Lancaster University](#) or elsewhere.

Explore the website [Prospects.ac.uk](#) where you can learn more about [Masters degrees](#) and [Doctorates](#) and the differences between them.

Visit [Lancaster University's 'Get started'](#) webpage; remember, it's never too early to start thinking.

[Ask a current Lancaster University postgraduate student](#) about their experience.

### Get some experience

Check out the vacancies on the [Lancaster University Employment and Recruitment Service website](#) to see if there are any research internship/assistant jobs available.

Look at opportunities to do a research [internship at Lancaster](#) or elsewhere, find out about the application process and deadlines.

### Find a course

Search for courses on the [Prospects.ac.uk](#) website, and/or have a look at [findamasters.com](#) or [postgrad.com](#)

Want to stay at Lancaster? Visit [Lancaster University's 'Find a course'](#) webpage to explore your options.

Have a look on [jobs.ac.uk](#) for Masters and PhD studentships.

### Find out ways to finance your course

Want to know more about financing PG study, visit [Prospects funding](#) webpage.

Staying at Lancaster? Find out more about [LU fees and funding](#) (including scholarships and bursaries).

The PPS LU Project has identified that every student's progression to Postgraduate Study is different. To support future students, we are gathering examples of the Support, Helpers, Actions, Planners and Experience which others have used. Please use the following SHAPE record sheet to share your examples with the project.

Please send photograph or scanned copy to [reap@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:reap@lancaster.ac.uk) and we will contact you for ways of sharing your experience.

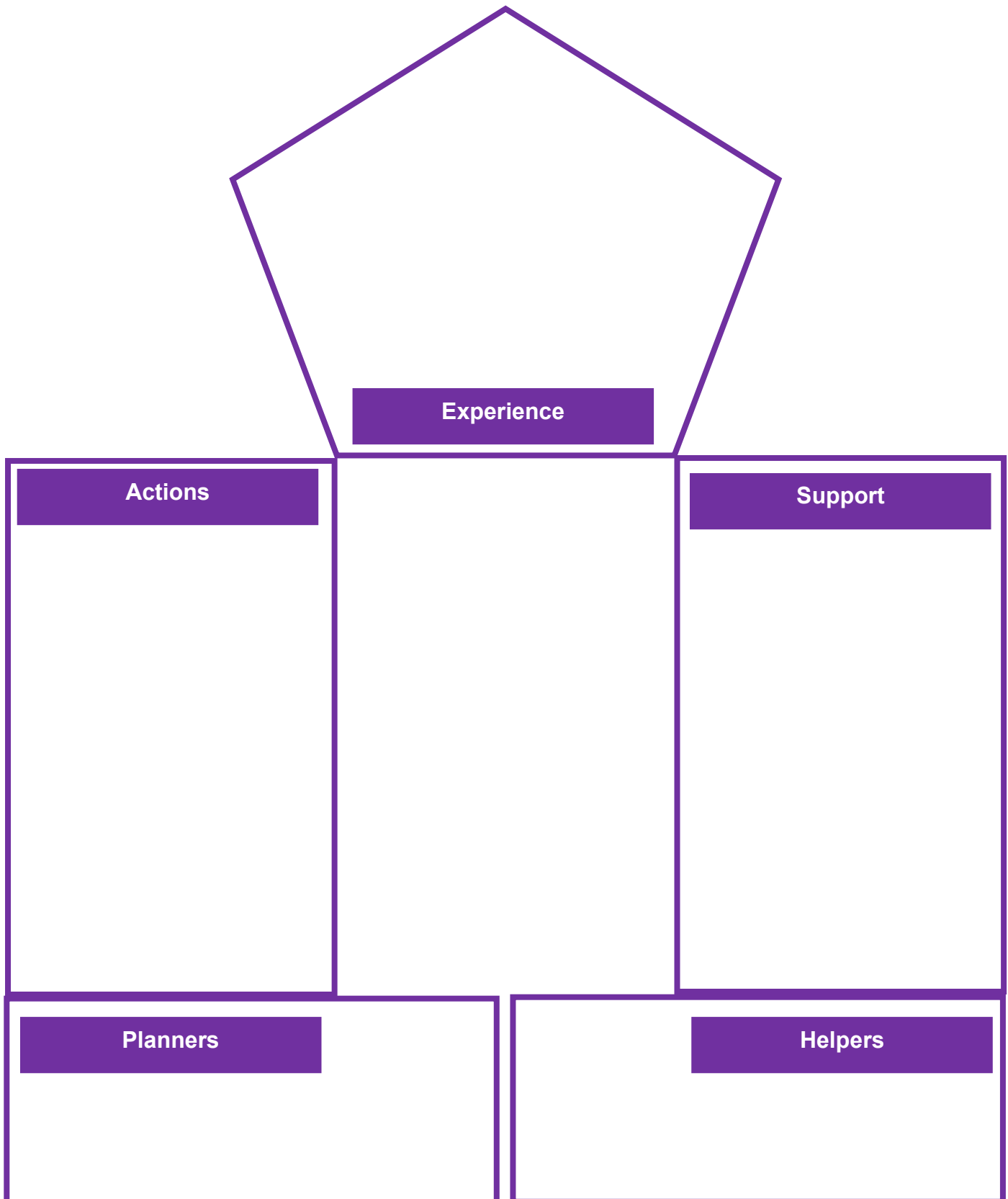
## References

**About us:** REAP Researching Equity, Access and Participation. We are a small team of researchers based in the Department of Educational Research.

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## SHAPE Record sheet:

What does your postgraduate SHAPE look like? Support, Helpers, Actions, Planners, Experience.



The diagram is a house-shaped structure composed of five rectangular sections. The top section is a pentagon labeled "Experience". Below it are three rectangular sections: "Actions" on the left, "Support" on the right, and a central empty space. At the bottom are two rectangular sections: "Planners" on the left and "Helpers" on the right.

## SHAPE Checklist:

This is a checklist of things you might do to support you in your planning. If you think of other things, then please add them to the list.

### Support

- What are the entry requirements for the course?
- Have you checked what funding is available and how to apply?
- Have you explored the list of resources on page 3?
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### Helpers

- Talk to a lecturer, tutor, or your academic advisor about your interests and options.
- Make an appointment with a Careers Advisor.
- Ask a friend or peer if they know anyone who it may be helpful for you to talk to.
- Is there a space where you meet current postgraduates? Ask them about their journey and experience.
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### Actions

- Have you blocked out time to do some thinking about and exploring of PG options?
- Written a list of some people who you will ask about PG study.
- Have you explored the list of resources on page 3?
- Have you got some research experience or found out how you might to do so?
- Do you know the deadlines for course applications and funding applications? Are these written on your calendar?
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### Planners

- Do you know the difference between a Masters and a Doctorate?
- Have you identified courses you could do after your undergraduate degree, here at LU or elsewhere?
- Do you know what skills you'd develop and how these might help you gain work in your chosen field?
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### Experience

- Is there an option to do a dissertation or research project as part of your current study?
- Is there an opportunity to do a research internship? If it isn't paid, is there help with expenses?
- Could you attend departmental seminars to learn more about the research being done in your field?
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## Notes

The PPS LU Project has identified that every students' progression to Postgraduate Study is different. To support future students, we welcome suggestions and ideas for resources or further prompts please email [reap@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:reap@lancaster.ac.uk) with further suggestions or questions.