Is pursuing a post-graduate degree always useful? Nancy Verhoeven It is, if the post-grad degree gets you closer to the career or personal goals you’re working towards. It’s important to really think about what you want to do in your life.

Elizabeth Ho I enrolled for my MBA, not for career advancement, but for personal development. I wanted to take myself out of the working world for a few years to accompany my husband, who was posted to Shanghai. I wanted to keep my mind occupied, and I thought a post-grad degree would be a good way to keep abreast of developments in the corporate world.

What should one consider when choosing an institution? NV Factors to keep in mind are the institution’s reputation and ranking, and where its graduates find jobs and what their average income is. Also, does the course offer the kind of specialty or classes you want? Are the professors well known in the field? The course fees and location of the institution – local, or overseas – are also important factors. EH I chose U21Global for its reputable affiliate universities, wide-ranging curriculum, and its online facilities. Being in Shanghai, the availability of good Masters courses in English is limited, so this was a good option for me. Francis Koh Institution to institution, programmes may be more theoretical, such as at Stanford University or the University of Chicago. Others are more applied, or more professional. Some courses at SMU employ more participative learning, whereas online courses, while offering flexibility, are limited in that they lack that face-to-face interaction – you do learn a lot, listening to other students. Choose a programme that’s a good fit to your preferred learning style. Is it useful to get work experience first? EH It’s definitely useful to have three to five years’ work experience before taking on a post-grad course, as it helps you to better understand the issues presented. FK Tackle your post-grad degree immediately after graduation only if you’re very clear about your career objective in life. Two to three years is time enough to ascertain your real lifelong career intent. NV Work experience gives you a better understanding of yourself, what you like to do and how life works outside of school. Full-time or part-time? EH Studying part-time allows me to continue with my career, but it adds tremendous strain to my work-life balance because of the competing demands. Working mothers, especially, have to sacrifice time spent with the family and time for themselves. The need for discipline and good time management goes without saying. NV I always say if you can, study full-time. This way, you can completely submerge yourself in your studies, and the social, academic and political aspects of the university. Going part-time gets you the same degree, but you may not have the same social network and full experience. FK If you can afford it, take a year to 18 months off to refresh yourself in a campus environment. But not everyone can afford to stop working; others don’t want to disrupt their career progression...

Should You Go Back To School?

Are further studies worth the time, money and effort? Grace Tay takes notes, as a mature student, a career coach and a professor weigh in

Advice for working women considering further studies?

FK Choose a time in your life when you’re less burdened by family responsibilities – before you’ve started a family, or when your children are older. Get extra help if you have a young family so you don’t feel so stretched. NV Do your post-grad degree only for the right reasons. Ask yourself: What do I truly want to do with my life, what is my vision and mission for myself? ❖

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