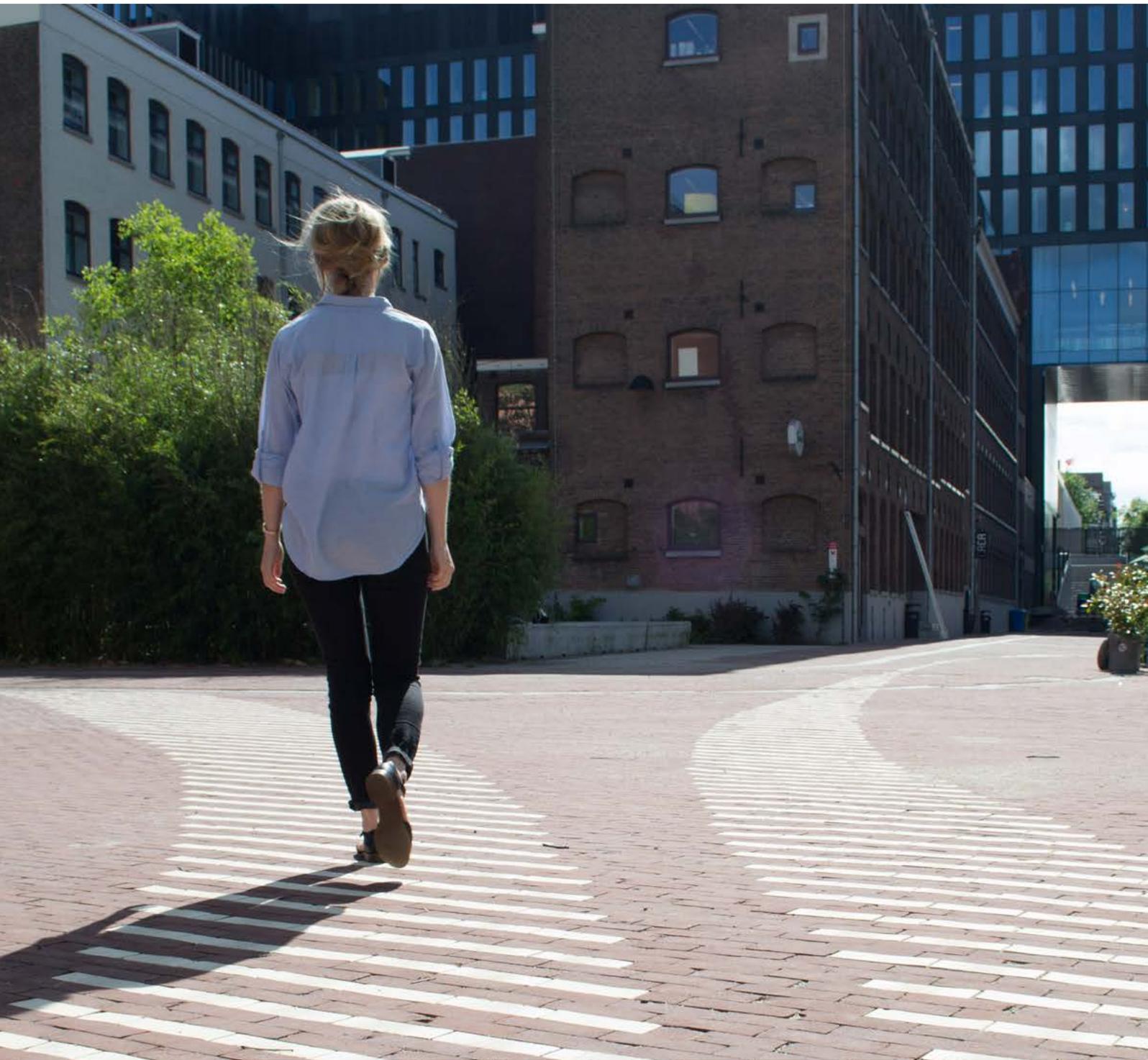




UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM



The Master Plan

How to choose a Master's?

career.uva.nl/choosingyourmasters

We are 

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career.uva.nl
studentcareerscentre@uva.nl

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1. INTRODUCTION TO THIS MASTER PLAN

This step-by-step Master Plan will provide you with tips and tools for taking a structured approach to deciding which Master's is right for you.

You can also use this Master Plan as useful and effective preparation for attending open days at universities.

By helping you to more consciously shape your choices and your career, it will prove useful in the future during your transition from study to work.

Choosing a Master's and your career

If you already have a general idea about the type of work you would prefer after completing your current studies, the Master's programme you are going to do can act as a stepping stone to help you on your way. Conversely, you might not yet have a very clear picture of your future prospects; in fact, that is quite common

You are the guiding principle

Do not be afraid to base your choice on your own talent, interests and motivation and learn to cope with the uncertainty of what the future might hold.

How important is choosing a Master's programme?

A Master's degree provides a specialisation in a specific field of study. This, in turn, provides your career with a boost in a specific direction. At the same time, we see that many alumni end up working in a field other than that of their Master's within five years following graduation. These alumni view their programme as a broad basis or have chosen to focus on other areas in the course of their working lives. In other words: the Master's you choose is not the only factor that will define your career.

A number of fields require a specific Bachelor's and/or Master's degree because the profession demands certain qualifications – such as is the case with physicians, clinical psychologists, lawyers and judges, for instance. If you are looking to pursue a doctorate a Research Master's will be required in virtually all cases.

If you already have a good idea of what kind of work you'd like to do, that offers a good starting point from which to look for the Master's that suits you best.



Steps involved in making a choice

The decision-making process can be broken down into different phases (based on the work of psychologist Otto Taborsky). Choosing a Master's is no different. These phases and the various corresponding aspects are addressed in this Master Plan:

- 1) Realising that you must make a choice – section 1
- 2) *Accepting uncertainty* *
- 3) Open exploration of your options – section 3
- 4) Comparing your options – section 4
- 5) Conscious decision-making – section 5
- 6) *Implementing your decision*

* Step 2, accepting uncertainty, is not discussed separately in this document but is important to mention. Making a choice can make you feel uncomfortable and uncertain. You may feel insecure. This is normal. If you can accept that this is part of the process, you give yourself space to follow the next steps in the process.

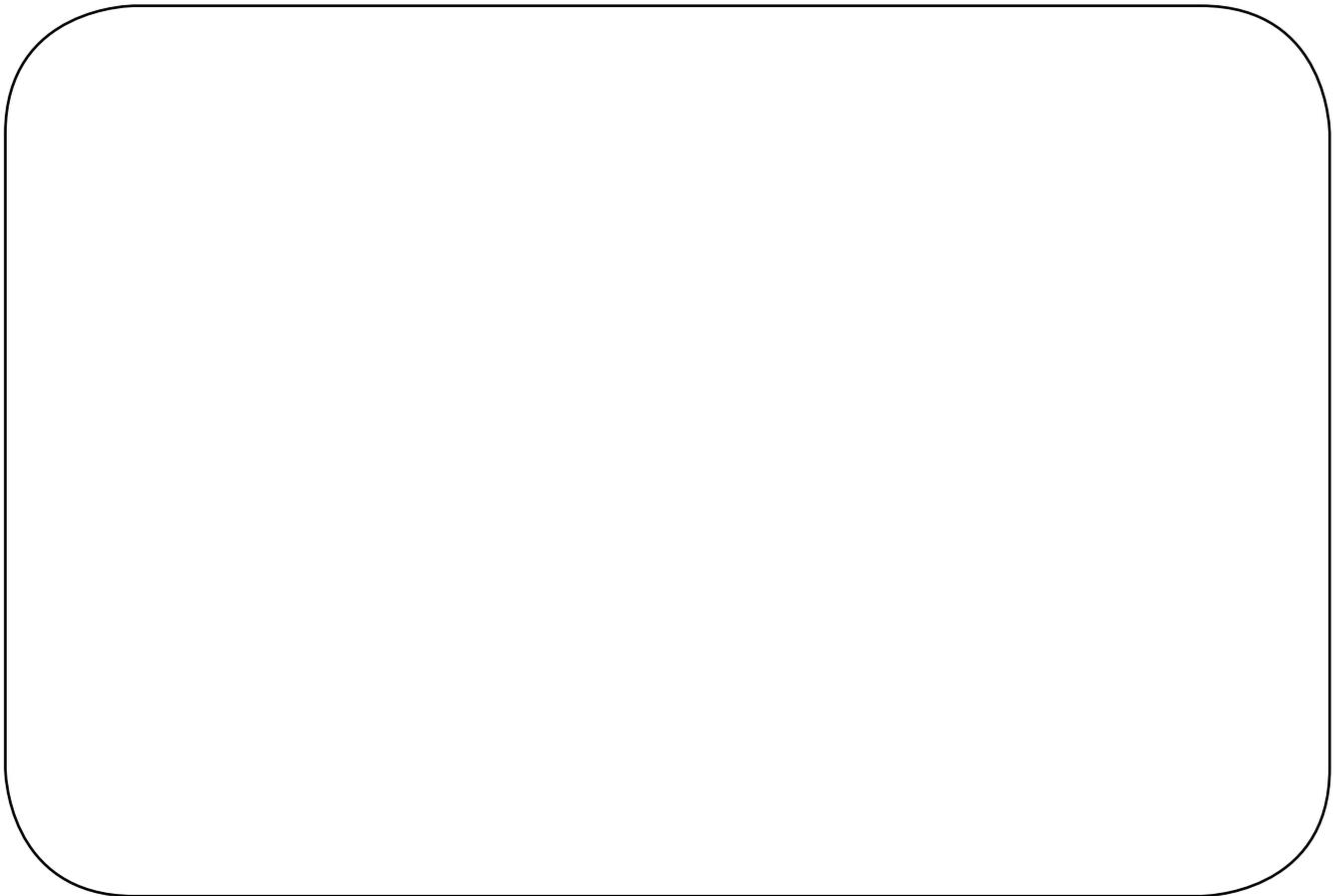


Photo: Vera Maliepaard

2. YOUR CURRENT SITUATION. WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Clear your head

Where are you now? Determine your starting point. Is a Master's programme right for you? What do you already know about choosing your Master's? Are you trying to decide between two Master's or do you have a whole longlist of options? Are you planning on taking a gap year or considering pursuing a Master's abroad? Below, write down everything that comes to mind in connection with orienting yourself to the next step in your study or work career: dreams you may have, potential doubts or concerns, questions you would like answered, and so on.



What would you like to focus on first as you explore the matter? Write it down:

.....

.....

.....

List your motivations and interests

Just for yourself, write out the answers to the following questions as concretely and in as much detail as you can. Having trouble getting past a general answer? In that case, ask yourself the following question: 'Why is this the case? What is the reason that I do x?'



Motivation & ambition

1. When you chose your current Bachelor's programme, what induced you to do so? Did you have a specific goal?

2. What motivated you to choose your minor or specific electives, or (if applicable) to change your course of study?

3. Looking back, would you make the same choices now, or would you rather concentrate on different subjects? If so, what subjects would you choose?

4. What are your study results? Which courses did you find easier and which proved challenging for you?

5. If you could choose any professional field, specific role and organisation, what would you choose? If you can't yet answer that question: what kinds of activities do you most enjoy?



Specific interests

1. If you look at the courses you took during your Bachelor's programme, with which did you have the most affinity? Which aspects of them (topics, skills, etc.) appeal to you?

2. About which topics would you like to learn more? Consider subjects outside your field of study as well. What topics catch your eye when you read a newspaper? What piques your curiosity?

3. Can you detect an overall theme in the subjects that appeal to you? What have you already emphasised? Can you already identify the fields of research or professional practice that focus on these subjects?

4. Might you be interested in a Research Master's? Are you considering earning a PhD down the road?

5. Do you want to keep a broad focus or study something in depth? Are there any interdisciplinary Master's programmes that effectively combine your areas of interest?



Qualities and skills

1. By now, you will have mastered a good number of academic skills. Some examples of these include: analytical thinking, writing, quickly processing information, presenting, doing research, making a critical contribution to social debates, and so on. You will also have acquired subject-specific skills, particular those related to research methods and practices. Which academic skills are you good at? And which ones would you like to develop?

2. When you look at any work or management experience you have gained while studying, what appeals to you in particular? Consider, for example, working with a team, organising events, advising on policy, a subject you were involved in or anything else that might be relevant. Many times, it's a good indication when you can look back on something with a smile and feel proud of your input.

3. Which other skills have you developed in the course of your studies? These might include chairing working groups, dealing with stressful situations, contact with clients, teaching, advising, and so on



Practical considerations

1. Do you wish to continue on to a Master's in the same discipline as your Bachelor's, or would you like to switch to a different field?

2. Do you want to remain in your current student city? Would you like to continue your studies at the same university? Or would you like to go abroad? How heavily does each of these aspects weigh as you attempt to choose a Master's?

3. Would you like to do an internship as part of your Master's?

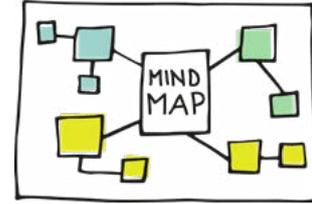
4. What is your financial situation like? Can you afford to live in a city where the cost of living is high? Are you still eligible for student grants and/or loans? Or would you like to apply for a grant to study abroad?

In summary: what stands out?

- Which topics or subjects would you definitely want to work on/with during your Master's?
- Which qualities and skills should definitely be required for your Master's programme, (and your job after that)?
- Which field of work do you find most appealing so far?
- What practical requirements do you have for a potential study?

Mindmap

In the space below, create a mindmap of your most important results



A large, empty rectangular area defined by a dotted border, intended for the student to create their own mind map of their most important results.

3. OPEN EXPLORATION OF YOUR OPTIONS

Now that you have gained an idea of the subjects and skills that are important to you, you can start looking for Master's programmes that suit your preferences. During this phase, it's particularly important to explore your options with an open mind. There's no need to make any decisions yet. Take your time and let yourself be inspired

Draw up a longlist of all the Master's you find appealing

1. Aggregator websites such as universitairemasters.nl and icares.com allow you to filter the Master's offered in the Netherlands using various search terms, so you can find ones that suit your preferences. Experiment with using different terms. For a list of Master's programmes offered at the UvA, visit uva.nl/masters.



Are you considering completing an entire Master's degree at a foreign university? In that case, refer to the information at buitenland.uva.nl as well, as your search area may be considerably larger. The site mastersportal.eu lists Master's programmes from all over the world. You should be aware that the only institutions mentioned are those who have paid to be listed, meaning this list is not exhaustive.

2. Search LinkedIn for professionals working in your field to see which Master's degree they hold. Did you come across anything interesting?
3. In the space below, list the Master's that interest you and describe what you find appealing about each one, along with any aspects you have doubts about. This can be anything at all: the curriculum, the deadline for enrolment, the city or country, admission requirements, tuition fees, intensity, duration, just a gut feeling, etc.

Master's	What appeals to you	Doubts / Questions

What do you need in order to make your choice? Is it insight into yourself or your desires, or more information on the Master's programmes available?

Tips for gathering relevant information

The diagram above may reveal that you need more information in order to continue the decision-making process. Applying the following tips may help you to further investigate the Master's programmes on your longlist.

Study programme and courses	Take a good look at the study programme; use the digital Course Catalogue to explore the courses, literature, lecturers and learning outcomes of the programme. Try to get hold of some of the textbooks. Check whether the programme offers the option of doing an internship, if that is something that interests you.
Research schools	You should also look at the research schools to which the lecturers are affiliated; what are they involved in? Are you interested in the same things; are you inspired by this?
Open days	Attend information sessions, where you will get to speak to lecturers, students and alumni of the different Master's programmes. Prepare for these sessions and ask any questions that have not been covered by the information you found online
Fellow students	Talk to students attending the Master's you are interested in – during an open day, for example. This provides a more complete picture of what you can expect. Do you feel a click?
What are the alumni doing?	Look on LinkedIn to see what alumni of the programme are up to in their professional lives. On the university's school page (www.linkedin.com/school/university-of-amsterdam) , you can select and view alumni based on study programme, field of work, location, etc. Then, on their individual profiles, you can see their professional experience and what kind of work they are currently doing.
Career events	Attend career events in the field and explore the potential opportunities at the companies and organisations on hand. Most Master's programmes and/or specialisations also have their own study association which maintains contact with the relevant professional community.

Check the feasibility as well:

- Deadline: when is the deadline for applications?
- Is there a selection process and if so, what does it entail?
- Admission requirements: is a specific course (that you haven't yet completed) necessary to be eligible for admission?
- Too difficult/too easy: how likely is it that you will successfully complete this Master's?
- Financial considerations: how much will this Master's cost?

4. COMPARING YOUR OPTIONS

Now that you have a longlist of Master's that appeal to you, it is time to compare your options. Think back: what is your goal? What is most important to you? Review your answers from section 2 of this Master Plan, particularly your mindmap, and choose which aspects are most important to you:

1

2

3

Is a particular Master's starting to emerge as the winner? If not, compare the Master's left on your list two by two. Consider the aspects that weigh most heavily for you personally, along with any practical matters.

	Master's 1	Master's 2
Aspects • • •		
Practical matters		

Luckily, you have intuition to guide you as well!



It can be helpful to simply choose one of the Master's on your list. Just pick one and 'try on' that decision for the next few weeks. Write the name of the Master's on a blank sheet of paper and hang it up in your house. Put it in a place you pass by every day. Pay attention to your response when the name catches your eye: does it make you happy? Or not? This intuitive response can tell you a great deal about what you really want. Try this out for every Master's you have on your shortlist.

5. CONSCIOUS DECISION-MAKING

Choose a Master's programme for yourself.

Does this master spark joy for you?

If you have, congratulations!



It's possible that you will still have a slight sense of uncertainty, as you are now closing the door on other possibilities. This often happens when we make a choice. But rest easy: you have taken a well-considered decision and should feel confident about your choice. It is rare for any one choice to answer every desire and ambition a person has. Try to have faith that anything 'missing' now can still emerge in a different form or at a later point in your career.

After making your choice, you will probably feel inspired and energised, and will want to share your choice with others. You can tell them the following:

- What does the Master's entail?
- Why am I so enthusiastic about it?
- Why does it suit me?

If you still have questions about your choice of Master's or how to fill in the Roadmap, the career advisers at the UvA Student Careers Centre will be happy to assist you further. You can schedule an appointment via career.uva.nl.

If you have any questions about the study programme, please contact the student desk for your Master's. They will refer to you the proper person if necessary. You can also seek advice from your own study adviser.

Good luck!

The UvA Student Careers Centre
career.uva.nl