

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

1	Awarding Institution	Newcastle University
2	Teaching Institution	Newcastle University
3	Final Award	MSc or Diploma
4	Programme Title	Biodiversity Conservation and Ecosystem Management
5	UCAS/Programme Code	5026F/P
6	Programme Accreditation	N/A
7	QAA Subject Benchmark(s)	N/A
8	FHEQ Level	7
9	Date written/revised	29/5/2014

10 Programme Aims

1 The broad educational purposes are to provide students with the theoretical and practice with the knowledge and skills needed for successful careers in biodiversity conservation. This training is aimed at graduates of biology, physical geography, or environmental science or related disciplines. The programme explains the rationale for biodiversity conservation and enables students to understand the implementation of conservation policy. It develops knowledge and understanding of the underpinning ecological science and improves key skills in experimentation, habitat assessment, and survey and monitoring methods for biodiversity. Students experience habitat and species management methods and learn to write management plans. The programme also aims to:

2 Provide an understanding of the range of temperate zone ecosystems and wildlife species, and a critical awareness of contemporary conservation issues and research insights, much of which is informed by our knowledge of how environmental, management and land-use factors influence ecosystems and wildlife species.

3 Provide a comprehensive understanding of scientific survey, habitat assessment and experimental techniques and the ability to identify common species from selected habitats

4 Provide an opportunity to demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to develop effective management plans for species and ecosystems.

5 Provide conceptual understanding that enables students to critically evaluate current research and attain advanced scholarship in the discipline; and to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

6 The programme also equips graduates with key skills such that they are able to:

(a) Deal with complex biodiversity and ecosystem management 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;

(b) Demonstrate initiative and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional level;

(c) Continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a

high level in the future;
(d) Develop the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment in the environment sector requiring: initiative and personal responsibility; decision making in complex and unpredictable situations; and the independent learning ability required for continued professional development.

11 Learning Outcomes
The programme provides opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate knowledge and understanding, qualities, skills and other attributes in the following areas.
Knowledge and Understanding
On completing the programme students should develop and demonstrate:
A1 An understanding of a range of ecosystems and wildlife species
A2 A critical awareness of, and new insights into, contemporary conservation issues
A3 Advanced knowledge and understanding of the influence of environmental, management and land-use factors on ecosystems and wildlife species
A4 A comprehensive understanding of scientific survey, habitat assessment and experimental techniques

Teaching and Learning Methods

Teaching Strategy

Specialist knowledge and understanding of the core material is taught via lectures (A1-A4) and field classes (A1-A4) in the compulsory modules. Compulsory and optional residential field classes allow students to experience a wide range of upland and lowland habitats in Britain (A1, A3 and A4). Optional modules enable students to concentrate on particular aspects of individual interest, and/or remedy deficiencies in the use of information technology, habitat assessment and biodiversity monitoring (A4) and a broader understanding of global ecosystems, sustainability and environmental change (A1). Other teaching methods include practical classes (A1, A4), literature reviews (A2) and the design and implementation of research projects (A1, A3 and A4), with the latter also being an important part of the learning strategy.

Learning Strategy

The understanding of lecture material is encouraged through independent reading (A1-A4) assisted by the provision of prioritised reference lists. Such learning is reinforced by formative feedback provided by literature reviews (A3, A4), with active participation in seminars, fieldwork and research projects (A1, A3 and A4), with some workshops (A3) and independent problem solving exercises (A4). The MSc project preparation module (10 credits), and the associated 70-credit research project, provides training in research methods and specialised experimental, analysis and survey techniques in addition to management knowledge. This is learnt through supervised tuition in the study of a particular question of interest to the student (A3, A4).

Assessment Strategy

Assessment strategy

Assessment of knowledge and understanding is by formal unseen examination at the end of the first semester in January or by coursework, particularly in Semester 2 (A1-A4). Examinations are usually of two hours with 2-3 out of 5 or 6 questions to be answered. Essays and other written assignments submitted as part of coursework provide a fuller test of student understanding of the relevant literature (A2, A3). Field class reports are also assessed (A1-A4).

Intellectual Skills

On completing the programme students should be able to demonstrate:

- B1 Ability to assess wildlife habitats and to identify common plant and/or animal species from selected ecosystems
- B2 Originality in the application of knowledge
- B3 The use of established techniques of research and enquiry to develop effective management plans for species and habitats
- B4 Ability to develop effective conservation and ecosystem management plans

Teaching and Learning Methods

Teaching Strategy

Research and enquiry skills are taught via lectures, seminars, literature reviews, practical classes and the MSc project preparation module (B3, B4), with policy planning taught via lectures and seminars (B4). The research project is particularly important to consolidate and extend these skills (B1-B4).

Learning Strategy

Independent reading of recommended references is important in understanding how knowledge is applied and techniques used (B1-B4). However, research projects (B1-B4), problem solving exercises (B3, B4) and coursework (B2-B4) are also important and fieldwork is of great importance in learning to identify plant species (B1).

Assessment Strategy

Assessment strategy

Formal examination (B3) is used to assess some subject specific/professional skills, particularly when additional reading reinforces learning. However, most of these skills are assessed by reports on research projects and coursework (B1-B4).

Practical Skills

On completing the programme students should be able to:

- C1 critically evaluate current research and advanced scholarship in conservation and ecosystem management
- C2 evaluate conservation methodologies and develop critiques of them
- C3 to propose new hypotheses, when appropriate
- C4 deal with complex biodiversity issues both systematically and creatively

Teaching and Learning Methods

Teaching Strategy

The compulsory modules are important for developing cognitive skills. In these modules the evaluation of complex management situations and the development of good judgement are important features of seminars (C1-C4), lectures (C1, C2, C4 and C5), research projects (C1, C4) and literature reviews (C1, C2). These skills are also taught in some of the optional modules.

Learning Strategy

Understanding of the taught material is reinforced by reading (C1, C2, and C3) and through experience of case studies, course work (C1, C2, C4) and problem solving (C2, C4). The design of the research projects is also important and is particularly useful for understanding the development of hypotheses (C3).

Assessment Strategy

Assessment strategy

Cognitive skills are assessed by both formal examination (C1, C2, C4) and reports (C1-C4), including that produced for the main project.

Transferable/Key Skills

On completing the programme students should be able to:

- D1 Communicate conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audience
- D2 Direct their own work programme
- D3 Show originality and initiative in tackling and solving problems

- D4 Act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional level
- D5 Take personal responsibility to independently advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level
- D6 Use library and other information sources skilfully and appropriately
- D7 Use IT resources skilfully and appropriately
- D8 Make appropriate decisions in complex and unpredictable situations

Teaching and Learning Methods

Teaching Strategy

The teaching of key skills is an important part of the MSc throughout many modules. Verbal presentations are encouraged in seminars (D1) and all aspects (D1-D8) are important in the research project. Field classes (D1-D4), workshops (D1, D3-D5, D7 and D8) and independent problem solving (D2-D8) teach students about the importance of communication skills, information sources and originality and independence in the professional implementation of their knowledge.

Learning Strategy

A wide range of methods is used to reinforce the teaching of key skills and aid understanding. Whilst there is some recommended reading (D1-D8) most key skills are better developed through the use of fieldwork (D1-D6), case studies (D1-D4, D6-D8), the research project (D1-D8), workshops (D1, D3-D5, D7), problem solving exercises (D2-D8) and presentations (D1). The project is particularly important in providing students with an opportunity for developing and demonstrating creativity and originality.

Assessment Strategy

Assessment strategy

Reports (D1-D8) and coursework (D1-D4, D6-D8) are the main methods of assessment. Presentations test verbal communication skills (D1).

12 Programme Curriculum, Structure and Features

Basic structure of the programme

This is a one-year, fulltime modular Masters degree programme. It conforms to the modular structure of other MSc programmes taught in the School in three phases similar to the undergraduate semester system. It consists of 10 credits in the taught component, 20 credits for a project literature review (ACE8103), and 60 credits for a research project (ACE8198), which takes place in MSc phase 3, University summer term and the summer vacation. The taught component is assessed throughout MSc phases 1 and 2, with most phase 2 modules examined by course work. The report for the project is submitted in very late August or very early September.

Compulsory taught modules are of 10 credits. There are 40 credits of compulsory modules in phase 1, (ACE8022, ACE8028, ACE8061, ACE8045), 20 credits of compulsory modules in the second phase (ACE8041, ACE8042) and 10 credits (ACE8030) in Phase 3 (May). These compulsory modules are part of the core biodiversity conservation material for the degree. They focus on the management of conservation projects and appropriate field techniques, conservation policy, and issues management of species and ecosystems, including habitat assessment. The core conservation material given in, ecosystem management (ACE8041) and global ecosystems and environmental change (ACE8061) will normally be taken by all students. Optional modules are chosen from a limited list that enables students to substitute and add relevant specialist topics according to their preferences and their prior knowledge.

MSc candidates undertake an MSc project preparation module (ACE8093) run over Phases 1 and 2, which precedes an independent project (70 credits) in Phase 3, leading to a project report (submitted late August). This will normally be a piece of applied ecological science concerned with a conservation issue. An initial project proposal is developed towards the end of Phase 1 (mid January) and requires students to submit a costed project, usually with links to a conservation organisation. Although not finalised or committed, students are encouraged to further develop their proposal plans during Phase 2, in view of the need to make the most of opportunities presented by independent work. A discussion with the external examiner will be in May when the exam board considers the exam and coursework results for the taught component of the degree. The external examiner will discuss project proposals with all, or a selection, of students at that time and moderate all final project reports in September for the October Board of Examiners. The optional module field identification skills (BIO8006) is also run in Phase 3 (June) when plant and animal material is available in a more readily identifiable form for students with little previous experience of species identification.

Students will have to satisfy the standard MSc regulations that apply to MSc degrees in the School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Decisions on fail, pass, diploma, MSc merit and MSc distinction awards will be made by the Board of Examiners in October after completion of the project work (ACE8198) and will be based on overall performance in all aspects of the subject.

Key features of the programme (including what makes the programme distinctive)

The MSc degree utilises a wide range of expertise available in the Faculty of Science, Agriculture and Engineering. It is innovative in enabling biodiversity conservation to be studied as applied ecology in the wider context of land use, particularly agriculture and amenity. Additionally it offers opportunities for students to understand how expertise might be used in subsequent employment and includes links with local and national, statutory and non-governmental conservation organisations. Practical skills are emphasised with local links to practical management problems on nature reserves and field work that provides experience in plant identification and habitat assessment from a wide range of upland and lowland habitats. The experience of practitioners is utilised in a programme of visiting speakers and visits to conservation sites in a number of modules, including ACE8042 (DEFRA, Northumberland Wildlife Trust, RSPB, National Trust, English Nature) and ACE8045 (RSPB, English Nature). The project (ACE8198) is an important vehicle for allowing practical, experimental and survey skills to be applied to a specific conservation or ecosystem management problem with possible links to a conservation organisation.

The structure provides flexibility of choice and, with the agreement of the Degree Programme Director, matches students' prior individual knowledge by offering a limited range of optional and specialist modules without forcing students to participate in modules that repeat material they have met as undergraduates. All students will be expected to take module ACE8041, unless they can demonstrate prior knowledge and skill.

The degree structure will fit within the normal modular MSc programme run by the School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. The 12-month course starts in mid-September, comprises 110 credits of taught modules and a conservation project (70 credits)

Programme regulations (link to on-line version)

<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/regulations/programme/>

13 Criteria for admission

Entry qualifications

A 2nd class degree from a UK university, or its overseas equivalent, is normally the minimum qualification for entry, though students with a lower second class degree will be expected to demonstrate commitment to the subject in their application and an upper second class degree is usually required. Preferred first-degree subjects are biology, geography or environmental science although it is expected that other relevant science and social science degrees will be acceptable. This should satisfy an expected demand from students from a wide variety of academic backgrounds.

Admissions policy/selection tools

Upon receipt of a completed application form offers of places will be made to suitably qualified candidates. These will be conditional upon a satisfactory reference and upon the applicant achieving a minimum of an upper 2nd class degree, if they do not hold such a degree at the time of the interview.

Non-standard Entry Requirements

Applicants who hold non-standard qualifications, and/or have relevant experience, will be considered on an individual basis.

Level of English Language capability

Applicant from whom English is not a first language must provide evidence of a satisfactory command of English, preferably by means of a TOEFL score of 600 or greater, or by an IELTS score of 7.0 or greater.

14 Support for Student Learning

The Student Services portal provides links to key services and other information and is available at: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/>

Induction

During the first week of the first semester students attend an induction programme. New students will be given a general introduction to University life and the University's principle support services and general information about the School and their programme, as described in the Degree Programme Handbook. New and continuing students will be given detailed programme information and the timetable of lectures/practicals/labs/ tutorials/etc. The International Office offers an additional induction programme for overseas students.

Study skills support

Students will learn a range of Personal Transferable Skills, including Study Skills, as outlined in the Programme Specification. Some of this material, e.g. time management is covered in the appropriate Induction Programme. Students are explicitly tutored on their approach to both group and individual projects.

Numeracy support is available through Maths Aid and help with academic writing is available from the Writing Development Centre (further information is available from the Robinson Library).

Academic and Pastoral support

Each undergraduate and taught postgraduate student will be assigned a personal tutor.* A personal tutor is one part of a wider network of advice and guidance available to students to support their personal and general academic development. The module leader acts as the first point of contact for subject-specific academic advice. Thereafter the Degree Programme Director or Head of School may be consulted. Issues relating to the programme may be raised at the Student-Staff Committee, and/or at the Board of Studies. Within the academic unit, students may also receive additional academic and pastoral advice from a range of other student-facing staff including degree programme directors, dissertation/project supervisors, and administrative support staff.

*Arrangements may vary for students taking special types of provision.

The University also offers a wide range of institutional services and support upon which students can call, such as the Writing Development Centre, Careers Service and Student Wellbeing Service. This includes one-to-one counselling and guidance or group sessions / workshops on a range of topics, such as emotional issues e.g. stress and anxiety, student finance and budgeting, disability matters etc. There is specialist support available for students with dyslexia and mental health issues. Furthermore, the Student Union operates a Student Advice Centre, which can provide advocacy and support to students on a range of topics including housing, debt, legal issues etc.

Support for students with disabilities

The University's Disability Support team provides help and advice for disabled students at the University - and those thinking of coming to Newcastle. It provides individuals with: advice about the University's facilities, services and the accessibility of campus; details about the technical support available; guidance in study skills and advice on financial support arrangements; a resources room with equipment and software to assist students in their studies.

Learning resources

The University's main learning resources are provided by the Robinson and Walton Libraries (for books, journals, online resources), and Information Systems and Services, which supports campus-wide computing facilities.

All new students whose first language is not English are required to take an English Language Proficiency Test. This is administered by INTO Newcastle University Centre on behalf of Newcastle University. Where appropriate, in-session language training can be provided. The INTO Newcastle University Centre houses a range of resources which may be particularly appropriate for those interested in an Erasmus exchange.

15 Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of teaching and learning

Module reviews

All modules are subject to review by questionnaires which are considered by the Board of Studies. Changes to, or the introduction of new, modules are considered at the Board of Studies and/or the School Teaching and Learning Committee. Student opinion is sought at the Student-Staff Committee and/or the Board of Studies. New modules and major changes to existing modules are subject to approval by the Faculty Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee.

Programme reviews

The Board of Studies conducts an Annual Monitoring and Review of the degree programme and reports to Faculty Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee. The FLTSEC takes an overview of all programmes within the Faculty and reports any Faculty or institutional issues to the Faculty Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee.

External Examiner reports

External Examiner reports are considered by the Board of Studies. The Board responds to these reports through Faculty Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee. External Examiner reports are shared with institutional student representatives, through the Student-Staff Committee.

Student evaluations

All modules, and the degree programme, are subject to review by student questionnaires. Informal student evaluation is also obtained at the Student-Staff Committee, and the Board of Studies. The results from student surveys are considered as part of the Annual Monitoring and Review of the programme and any arising actions are captured at programme and School / institutional level and reported to the appropriate body.

Mechanisms for gaining student feedback

Feedback is channelled via the Student-Staff Committee and the Board of Studies.

Faculty and University Review Mechanisms

Every six years degree programmes in each subject area undergo periodic review. This involves both the detailed consideration of a range of documentation, and a review visit by a review team (normally one day in duration) which includes an external subject specialist and a student representative. Following the review a report is produced, which forms the basis for a decision by University Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee on whether the programmes reviewed should be re-approved for a further six year period.

Accreditation reports

None of the programmes are accredited.

Additional mechanisms

16 Regulation of assessment

Pass mark

The pass mark is 50

Course requirements

Progression is subject to the University's Masters Degree Progress Regulations, Taught and Research and Examination Conventions for Taught Masters Degrees. There are reassessment opportunities, with certain restrictions. Limited compensation up to 40 credits of the taught element and down to a mark of 40% is possible for candidates who commenced their programme in 2013/14 or earlier. For students starting their programme in 2014/15 or later, no compensation is possible.

Weighting of stages

N/A

Common Marking Scheme

The University employs a common marking scheme, which is specified in the Taught Postgraduate Examination Conventions, namely:

Summary description applicable to postgraduate Masters programmes

<50	Fail
50-59	Pass
60-69	Pass with Merit
70 or above	Pass with Distinction

Summary description applicable to postgraduate Certificate and Diploma programmes

<50	Fail
50 or above	Pass

Role of the External Examiner

An External Examiner, a distinguished member of the subject community, is appointed by Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee, after recommendation from the Board of Studies. The External Examiner is expected to:

- See and approve examination papers
- Moderate examination and coursework marking
- Attend the Board of Examiners
- Report to the University on the standards of the programme

In addition, information relating to the programme is provided in:

The University Prospectus (see <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/postgraduate/>)

The School Brochure (contact enquiries@ncl.ac.uk)

The University Regulations (see <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/regulations/docs/>)

The Degree Programme Handbook (see : <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/afrd/students/>)

Please note. This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and of the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve if she/he takes full advantage of the learning opportunities provided. The accuracy of the information contained is reviewed by the University and may be checked by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

Mapping of Intended Learning Outcomes onto Curriculum/Modules

Module	Type	Intended Learning Outcomes			
		A	B	C	D
ACE8045	Compulsory	1, 4		2, 3	1, 2, 3, 4
ACE8041	Compulsory	1, 3, 4	3, 4	1, 2, 4	1, 3, 4
ACE8028	Compulsory	3, 4	3		2, 3
ACE8042	Compulsory	2	4		1, 2, 3, 4
ACE8030	Compulsory	4	1,3	5	1,2,3,4
ACE8198	Compulsory	3, 4	1, 2, 3, 4	1, 3, 4	1, 2, 3, 4
ACE8093	Compulsory		3	1, 2, 3	1, 2, 3, 4
ACE8022	Compulsory	4		2, 3	4
ACE8061	Compulsory	1, 2, 3	4	1, 4	1, 3
ACE8103	Compulsory	3, 4	1, 2, 3, 4	1, 3, 4	1, 2, 3, 4
ACE8024	Optional	1, 3, 4	3		1, 4
BIO8006	Optional	1, 3, 4	1, 3		1, 2, 3, 4
ACE8021	Optional	2		1, 2	1, 2, 3, 4