

1. Awarding Institution	The University of Newcastle upon Tyne
2. Teaching Institution	The University of Newcastle upon Tyne
3. Final Award	MSc
4. Programme Title	Rural Development and Resource Management
5. Programme Accredited by	N/A
6. UCAS Code	N/A
7. QAA Subject Benchmarking Group	N/A
8. Date of PS Production/Revision	March 2003

9. Programme Aims

The primary objective or mission statement for this programme (which applies to both teachers and learners) is: "To synthesise existing knowledge and develop new understandings which contribute to better managing in and with human and natural resource systems and institutions, in the specific contexts of rural development and environmental conservation and enhancement." This document outlines the aims currently employed to achieve this objective. The aims are under continual review and subject to adaptation and improvement in the light of experience in achieving the objective.

The programme is designed as a 'conversion course', admitting students with a variety of previous trainings and experiences, and seeks to provide sufficient education to provide graduates with the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to contribute to the practice of, and development of further research into rural development and environmental management.

The primary purpose of this programme is to equip graduates with the advanced conceptual understanding, supporting factual knowledge, and analytical skills appropriate for careers in the areas of environmental management and rural development. As such, the programme is necessarily and inherently interdisciplinary. The programme also forms an excellent introduction for those wishing to follow social science research.

Specifically, the course aims to generate:

- (i) Practical understanding of the problems of rural areas and human/environmental interaction
- (ii) The ability to analyse and develop alternative policies and management strategies for rural development and enhancement of the rural environment.

In addition to this fundamental knowledge and understanding (professional expertise and proficiency), the course design and implementation also encourages and assists the development of necessary supporting subject-specific and practical, cognitive and key skills, as specified below, and as detailed in the Degree Programme Handbook (DPH), as the operating manual of the programme.

The specification and continual review of these objectives and the means of achieving them are designed to meet the aspirations and ambitions of all the stakeholders in the programme as nearly as possible given the resources available. The principle stakeholders are: students; graduates; employers; staff; funders. As in any holistic, interactive and dynamic system, the true quality of the programme emerges as more than the sum of the parts, as specified in this document. As such, it can only ultimately be judged by the subsequent experience and contributions of the participants in the programme (both 'teachers' and 'learners', not necessarily always contiguous with staff and students) and their professional colleagues, managers, peers, clients, and paymasters. We continually strive to ensure that this quality is maintained and enhanced.

10. Intended Learning Outcomes, Teaching and Learning Strategies and Methods, Assessment Strategies and Methods

A. Knowledge and Understanding

The programme is focused on students assimilating, developing and demonstrating:

A1. A sophisticated knowledge and understanding of a range of countryside management and rural development principles, mechanisms, systems and issues

A2. A sensible knowledge and understanding of major rural development & environmental issues, problems and policies

A3. Comprehension of critical assessments of contemporary institutions and analyses of rural planning, development and environmental issues and policies

A4. Comprehension of the economic forces and flows shaping rural areas, the countryside and rural resource use

A5. Comprehension of the major social structures and relations shaping the socio-economic character and development of rural areas and communities

A6. An integrated knowledge and understanding of the means through which public policies, private management strategies and common governance systems can assist rural development and environmental enhancement

A7. A sufficient understanding of research principles, methods and project management to be able to undertake personal and team investigations, examinations and explorations of current understandings and presumptions about the salient relationships in these areas, and to be able to interpret and evaluate research programmes and results relating to rural development and environmental management

Teaching strategy

Specialist knowledge and understanding are primarily imparted via lectures, seminars, workshops and practicals, supported by reference materials (often computer-based) and student study. Knowledge and understanding are further promoted, where applicable, by case studies and field trips. Programme content and delivery strategies are under regular review by both programme lecturers themselves, and the programme Board of Studies, chaired by the Degree Programme Director.

Learning strategy

Throughout the taught component of the course, students are expected and encouraged to engage in independent reading and thinking, and are supported in this by the provision of extensive reading lists and reference material related to each module. Where applicable, practical sessions are provided to encourage hands-on development. Students are strongly encouraged to co-operate through group discussions of course material, especially for student-led seminars, and reflection on case studies, as an important aid to the development of critical understanding. While feedback mechanisms are also under regular review by the programme Board of Studies, it is expected that students on this programme will be sufficiently committed to their studies and learning experience to ask for additional assistance and feedback as they individually or collectively feel necessary.

A7, especially, is developed by students through their dissertations, supported by a formal 20 credit course in research methods and project management.

Assessment strategy

Knowledge and understanding are assessed by: seen and unseen written examinations; coursework of various forms (essays, problems solving exercises, case studies etc.); presentations; peer review, and assessment of a final (60 credit) dissertation. A range of approaches is used to: a) allow students to display their particular strengths adequately; b) objectively assess student abilities. The range also test student's abilities to apply material from the courses to real-world situations and issues; while the traditional practice of final written examination is retained to test students' knowledge and comprehension and understanding of principles. The balance of approaches is subject to continual review by the programme Board of Studies, in the light of experience and comments by the programme Board of Examiners. The final blend of assessment to produce the summative performance grade is subject to moderation and final approval by the programme Board of Examiners, including the External Examiner. At the discretion of an External Examiner, a *viva voce* examination is also included in the programme regulations, to clarify, as necessary, the indicative summative student performance.

B. Subject Specific/Practical Skills

The programme provides opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate:

B1. Applied research skills relevant to rural development and environmental and resource management

B2. Analytical skills relevant to understanding rural development and environmental issues and problems

B3. Logical and rhetorical skills in presenting, analysing and arguing cases and issues

B4. Synthetic and evaluative skills in interdisciplinary approaches to and perspectives on complex real world problems in rural development and environmental management

Teaching strategy

These skills are inherent in much of the programme content and material, and in the organisation and delivery of this material by the lecturing staff. In addition, the Department aims to provide an environment that will promote the effective participation by students in the learning process. To achieve this, a combination of strategies is employed. Students are strongly encouraged to co-operate through group work and presentations, relating to case studies, previous policies and research findings, current problems and issues.

Learning strategy

Students are encouraged to acquire skills through appreciation of the course material, and encouraged to practice them through active participation. Learning is reinforced, and further developed, as students apply their new skills to the analysis of data gathered, and to the appraisal and presentation of the resulting information in their dissertation projects.

Assessment strategy

Assessment is generally conducted by continuous assessment and examination, all of which require demonstration of cognitive skills. Assessment methods are detailed in each module outline (DPH) and possibly (at the discretion of an External Examiner) by *viva voce* examination at the completion of the course-work. A major demonstration of these skills is via the programme dissertation – as a supervised but independent applied research project.

C. Cognitive Skills

The programme provides opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate:

C1. Knowledge of major rural development and environmental management issues, from practical as well as social and bio-physical science perspectives, and of past and current policy and management solutions to these issues

C2. Comprehension of the reasons why these issues cause problems for private and public management

C3. Application of established techniques and approaches to explain these problems and issues

C4. Analysis of these approaches and understandings to develop refined definitions and characterisations

C5. Synthesis of these understandings to provide bases for both practical management and for future research

C6. Evaluation of these bases in critical assessments of present management and policy strategies and directions

Teaching strategy

These cognitive skills are fundamental elements of the programme material. All modules involve and demonstrate a particular, focused blend of most, if not all these skills.

Learning strategy

Students are encouraged to acquire and develop their cognitive skills throughout the course. The dissertation project, in particular, encourages the development and demonstration of these skills at an advanced academic level.

Assessment strategy

Cognitive skills are assessed by means of coursework (assignments, presentations, group work), and seen and unseen written examinations. Some are also examined by means of a presentation, and possibly (at the discretion of an External Examiner) by *viva voce* examination. The final assessment of these skills is via the dissertation.

D. Key Skills

The programme provides opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate:

- D1.** The ability to receive and respond (communicate) by means of well prepared, clear and confident presentations, and concise and coherent written documents
- D2.** The abilities to access and organise library, IT and other information sources skilfully and appropriately
- D3.** The abilities to select and apply IT resources skilfully and appropriately
- D4.** The abilities to plan, organise and prioritise work activities in order to meet deadlines and objectives
- D5.** The abilities to work independently, with initiative,
- D6.** The abilities to organise and operate as teams
- D7.** The abilities to identify, characterise and solve problems

Teaching strategy

Key skills are formally taught in the research methods and project management module, which addresses: presentation and writing skills; library and other information skills as part of its induction section. Management of workload in order to meet deadlines is promoted by means of a strict coursework timetable, whilst teamwork skills are developed by group exercises within modules. This also provides opportunities for students to improve their problem solving abilities and to extend their communication, library, IT, and time management abilities. The dissertation project provides students with further opportunities to improve and develop, and demonstrate, all of these skills.

Learning strategy

Students are encouraged to acquire key skills through active participation. Participation in the team components of both the Research Methods and Project Management module and presentations and group work in other modules are designed to improve communication, IT and other skills. The dissertation project provides similar opportunities for skill development through the construction of a research plan for the dissertation, during the literature searching and data identification, collection, and analysis, in presenting and evaluating the results, and drawing conclusion. Dissertations are aimed at either the production of a peer-reviewed publication, or the production of a valuable business or policy plan or practical report.

Assessment strategy

The first three key skills are not independently and directly assessed, since all three contribute directly to assessed components of the programme, and separate assessment of these skills is uneconomic (demands more effort than justified by any separate identifiable benefit). Communication, library and IT skills, and the ability to meet deadlines are indirectly assessed by coursework (assignments, presentations, seminars etc), and all key skills are examined through the dissertation and possibly (at the discretion of an External Examiner) by *viva voce* examination.

11. Programme Features, Curriculum and Structure

(i) Programme Features

This is a one year, full-time modular programme. It consists of two parts: a *taught component*, which runs from late September until mid-May, and a *project*, for which a dissertation is submitted in early September. Successful completion of the taught component (120 credits) is required in order for a student to progress to the dissertation project (60 credits). Each 10 credit unit is nominally associated with 100 hours of student effort, including teaching contact time.

The taught component of the course consists of 5 compulsory modules (2 double, 1 treble and 2 singles) adding up to a value of 90 credits from a required 120 for this component. There are several routes for the optional modules where the students can choose from a variety of routes, organised in under four major themes: Environmental Economics; Applied Environmental Science, Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Techniques; Management and Law.

During the dissertation project, students may undertake a work placement, if appropriate. Dissertation projects may involve desk or literature studies, or a topic relating to a work placement, as well as (or instead of) conventional social science primary research or simulation/evaluation of secondary data. We encourage and support students who wish to publish the results of their dissertations, and several past M.Sc. students have been successful in this area. We also encourage projects with a particular focused application, such as the production of a business strategy or marketing plan, which might not admit of publication but which should pass the test of being practically beneficial to either public or private managers.

Work placements associated with the production of the dissertation are regarded as an innovative practice in this essentially academic and scholastic degree programme, as an encouragement and opportunity for students to put their learning into practice during the degree programme. Otherwise, students are encouraged to follow dissertation projects in the fields and areas of research interest being pursued by supervising members of staff, again to encourage practical (research) application of their skills and learning.

(ii) Curriculum and Structure

The full specification of the programme content and structure, including the contribution of each module to the learning outcomes, is specified in the Degree Programme Handbook, and identified on the attached Teaching, Learning and Assessment Matrix.

In outline, the programme core consists of three two-semester modules: 801: Research Methods & Project Management (20 credits); 884: Rural Society and Development (30 credits); 878: Countryside Management (20 credits); and two 10 credit modules completed during the first semester: 873: Environmental & Resource Economics; 874: Rural and Environmental Planning. Thus the core elements of the programme are concentrated in the first semester (55 credits), and continue, in the case of the two-semester modules, into the second semester (35 credits). The key elements of knowledge and understanding (A1 – A5) necessary

for Rural Resource and Countryside Management are contained in these modules, which are compulsory for all students on the programme. They also lay the groundwork for the Subject specific skills (B1 – B4) and Cognitive skills (C1 – C6). Particular delivery designs in these modules allow students to demonstrate their appreciation and acquisition of these skills, as well as developing their key skills (D1 – D6).

The remaining taught component credits (30 in all to be taken), are provided so far as possible with an equal balance between the first and second semesters, timetabling restrictions making it impossible to allocate all options to the second semester, as might be pedagogically preferable. These optional credits have been outlined above (11.i) and are specified in detail in the Degree Programme Handbook. These options allow students to pursue their knowledge and understanding (A1 – A5) in more detail focused on specific aspects of Rural Development and Countryside Management issues and problems, and also provide a broader range of opportunities to develop and exhibit subject-specific, cognitive and key skills.

The final component of the programme is a supervised individual research project culminating in the submission of a written dissertation (60 credits). The proposal and plan for this research project (undertaken during the third semester) forms the final assessment component of the core Research Methods and Project Management module.

12. Criteria for Admission

Entrance Criteria

A 2nd class degree from a UK University, or its overseas equivalent, is the conventional qualification for entry.

Applicants for whom English is not a first language must provide evidence of a satisfactory command of English, preferably by means of an IELTS score of 7.5.

Applicants with Non-Standard Qualifications

Applicants who hold non-standard qualifications, and/or have relevant experience, are encouraged, and are considered on an individual, case-by-case basis.

Admissions Policy

Upon receipt of a completed application form, UK-based applicants are invited to AEFM, to meet current students, and to attend an informal interview. Offers of places are made to suitably qualified candidates following the interview/visit and may be conditional upon the applicant achieving a minimum of a 2nd class degree (if they do not hold such a degree or equivalent experience at the time of the interview), and upon the provision of a satisfactory reference (if one has not already been provided). Departmental and Faculty Bursaries and any other funding, are awarded on a competitive basis, taking degree grade (actual or predicted), reference, experience and interview performance into account.

Applicants not based in the UK are not required to attend an interview.

13. Support for Students and their Learning

Induction Week

The first week offers a series of introductory/refresher lectures, meetings, visits, and field trips designed to assist student orientation, and to provide a common vocabulary and knowledge base for students with varying backgrounds. For overseas students, this programme is also useful as an introduction to being taught in English. This induction programme includes:

- Ice-breaker - a social event to allow students to meet colleagues and staff in a social atmosphere. Students are introduced to their tutors and buddies (see below for details of roles of tutor and buddy).
- Initial meeting - students meet as a group with the course co-ordinator for welcome and introduction to course.
- Issue of student handbook - handbooks contain general and domestic information, information on the course (including unit descriptions), information on student support available within both AEFM and the University, and safety information.
- Meeting with tutor - each MSc student is assigned a specific member of academic staff as a tutor whose role encompasses both academic and non-academic issues. Initial meetings with this tutor take place during the induction week, during which the workings of the tutor and buddy systems are explained and the results of the initial assessment are discussed. Tutors may recommend attendance at introductory lectures, or an appropriate reading programme. This meeting also serves to initiate the University registration procedures, completion of which then becomes the student responsibility.
- Library tour and workshops - students tour the Robinson Library and are introduced to the use of some of its resources by means of workshops.

Study Skills Support

- A tour of the Robinson Library, and workshops introducing the use of its resources, are provided as a part of the induction programme.
- IT, and other training, is provided via workshops, self-help in the computing clusters, and within dissertation-related workshops. Registration on the University computing system is a required outcome of this induction training.

Academic Support

- AEFM provides each student with a specific academic staff member as tutor for pastoral and academic advice and guidance. Formal meetings with the Degree Programme Director (DPD) for the discussion of progress, feedback generally and problems are held termly during the taught part of the course, and all students have personal and email access to the DPD should problems arise. The DPD and module leaders will also feed back the results of assessments to students, allowing them to monitor the progress of their learning. Difficulties highlighted by these are discussed with both module leaders and the DPD.
- AEFM provides each student with at least one academic member of staff to personally supervise their dissertation project and to advise them on the production of their dissertation. Frequency of meetings is variable according to the particular needs and capacities of both student and staff member. Students are also encouraged to contact PhD students and other staff

members, as well as their own student colleagues, who are working on related research.

- AEFM provides a designated course co-ordinator (the DPD) with overall responsibility for the management of the course. All students have access to the course co-ordinator for advice and discussion of any of academic or pastoral issues arising.

Pastoral Support

- Each student is assigned to the DPD for pastoral and academic advice and guidance. Formal meetings are held termly during the taught part of the course, but students have personal and email access to the DPD at any time should problems arise.
- AEFM provides a designated course co-ordinator with overall responsibility for the management of the course. All students have access to the course co-ordinator for advice and discussion of pastoral issues arising.
- AEFM's student handbooks provide contact information for the Student Counselling Service, and the Student Advice Centre, and contain information regarding the Student Welfare Handbook.
- In addition, AEFM has an established Staff-Student Committee, responsible for discussion and advice to the Head of Department on general teaching and learning issues. The MSc. Programmes elect one of their student members to this Committee, which meets at least once a term.

Support for Special Needs

Students having special needs may draw upon the services of the Disability Unit, led by Mrs Sandra Chilton (sandra.chilton@ncl.ac.uk). Supportive resources include:

- Dyslexia Tutor
- Co-ordinator for Deaf and Hearing-impaired Students
- Technical Support Advisor

The Disability Unit can:

- Discuss individual particular needs
- Advise on physical accessibility
- Arrange an early visit to the campus for assessment of needs
- Advise on special allowances, including the Disabled Students Allowance
- Advise on special equipment

Learning Resources

- AEFM provides an MSc study room, a photocopying allowance, secretarial help if required and access to the departmental archive, which holds material not available elsewhere.
- AEFM students have extensive IT support available at University level.
- Field trips are organised as necessary and appropriate, both within and outside specific module curricula.
- AEFM provides an expert and enthusiastic group of teaching staff, with a typical staff:student ratio of 1:10.
- The Robinson and Medical School Libraries provide an extensive range of appropriate books and journals, as well as extensive access to e-based material
- The student handbook provides an extensive reading list on each module outline, *and a listing of the most appropriate of the Robinson and Medical School Libraries' periodical holdings.*

14. Methods for Evaluating and Improving the Quality and Standards of Teaching and Learning

Student Evaluations of Individual Units and the MSc Programme

- On completion of each unit in the taught component of the course, student opinion is gathered by means of two unit evaluation questionnaires. The first of these addresses issues related to the unit, whilst the second assesses the performance of the individual lecturers responsible for its delivery.
- On completion of the MSc programme, overall student feedback is assessed by means of a course evaluation questionnaire.
- Student opinion issues related to the quality of the degree programme, may also be communicated to tutors, to the Staff Student Committee, or directly to the Board of Studies by means of the Board's student member.

Feedback on Student Evaluations of Individual Units and the MSc Programme

- Data from evaluation questionnaires are summarised by the course co-ordinator and are presented at a meeting of the Board of Studies. Discussion of issues raised, and actions agreed, are reported to students via the student member of the Board.

Reviews of Individual Units and the MSc Programme

Both individual units, and the programme as a whole, are periodically reviewed in the light of the following criteria:

- Student evaluation data
- Feedback obtained from past graduates
- Feedback from actual and potential employers of graduates; the *Industrial Advisory Board*
- Feedback from the external examiner
- Feedback from University Taught Programme review
- Feedback from University Subject Review
- Feedback from independent external reviews (QAA, HEFCE)
- Relevance of the programme in relation to key issues
- Relevance of the programme in relation to employability of graduates
- Relevance of the programme in relation to funding sources

Committees Responsible for Monitoring and Evaluating Quality and Standards

- Board of Studies : Monitoring and evaluation quality and standards is primarily the responsibility of the Programme Board of Studies. Membership of the Board of Studies consists of the main course teachers, plus a student member nominated by the students.

- Board of Examiners: Issues related to examinations, marks and awards are the remit of the Board of Examiners. The Board of Examiners is composed of the principal teaching staff and the external examiner for the programme.
- The external examiner for the programme is responsible for ensuring that the quality and standards of teaching and learning on the programme are at least consistent with, if not exceed, peer programmes elsewhere. Both the Boards of Studies and of Examiners receive regular (annual) reports from the external examiner, with a summary evaluative report at the end of each three year term served by an external examiner.
- Staff-Student Committee. Wider student issues, possibly related to quality and standards of teaching and learning may also be raised at Staff-Student Committee meetings. The committee has a membership of academic staff and six students, and is chaired by a nominated member of staff.

Staff Professional Development

- All staff maintain an active research portfolio in their specialist areas, ensuring that programme material is informed by up-to-date and relevant research findings, and ensuring that staff are continually developing their understanding of the issues and systems.
- As from 1994, all newly appointed lecturers are required to complete a graduate diploma in teaching methods
- The Department has a 'teaching buddy' scheme to encourage and assist regular critical appraisal of teaching modes and styles

15. Regulation of Assessment

(i) Assessment Rules and Degree Classifications

The course consists of two parts: the *taught course* and the *project*. Both parts must be completed satisfactorily in order to obtain the MSc degree.

The taught component of the programme is assessed by two means:

- (a) Unseen written examination papers to be sat at the end of the taught course in late May and early June.
- (b) Continuous assessment.

To pass the taught part of the course, students must get an average mark of at least 50% (but not necessarily 50% for each element). Students who fail to do so may be eligible for a Diploma (pass mark of 40%) but will not be permitted to proceed to the dissertation project. All examination papers are double-marked internally, and checked by the external examiner before the summative performance scores (and, if necessary, their component parts) are considered by the Board of Examiners prior to recommendation to University Senate. The external examiner may also review continuous assessments were these are relevant to the overall grading of the student's performance.

The project is assessed by the submission of a dissertation. This is examined by two internal examiners (members of AEFM staff) and the external examiner. Some or all students have an individual *viva voce* examination with the internal and external examiners on the same day. Students who pass the taught course but fail the dissertation are eligible only for a Diploma.

The award of an MSc with Distinction may be made to students who achieve a mark of 70% or more overall.

The specification of the standards applied in the examining of elements of this programme is contained in the Degree Programme Handbook, and is not repeated here.

(ii) The Role of the External Examiner

An external examiner for the course (currently Professor Peter Midmore of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth) is appointed by the Faculty Teaching Committee, on the advice the programme Board of Studies. The external examiner is a distinguished member of the academic community whose knowledge spans the range of activities covered by the programme. The external examiner may often have industrial experience, in addition to academic credentials.

The external examiner's role is that of moderator. In order to do this, the external examiner:

- Sees and approves examination questions
- Sees examination scripts and comments upon standards of marking
- Sees coursework and comments upon standards of marking
- Sees and approves dissertation project topics
- Examines dissertations
- Performs *viva voce* examinations of some, or all, students
- Attends the June Board of Examiners, at which performance under the taught component of the programme is finalised
- Attends the final September Board of Examiners meeting, if required
- Reports to the University regarding standards, and comparability of standards

16. Indicators of Quality and Standards

Professional Accreditation Reports

- The course is not accredited by a specific professional body.

Internal Review Reports

The course was reviewed internally as a part of the Newcastle University's Annual Programme Review through the 1999-2000 Taught Programme Review scheme.

- *The 1995-1996 Annual Programme Review. Faculty Teaching Committee commended, as exemplary, the student handbook*

Previous QAA Reports

The quality of educational provision has been independently reviewed by HEFCE as a part of the 1994 Quality Assessment Exercise. The outcome of this review process was the award of a maximum 22/24 "excellent" score by the HEFCE review team.

Feedback from graduates and their employers.

- **See** New Rural Economy – NREC - report: "Evaluation of the New Rural Economy Project", for the CRE, by European Economic Development Services Ltd., March, 2004

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 he/she takes full advantage of the learning opportunities provided. It should be noted that there may be variation in the range of learning opportunities reflecting the availability of staff to lead them. Every effort is made to ensure that the modules described in the specification are available and delivered as specified. However, specific circumstances may prevent this on occasion, and precise delivery according to specification cannot be guaranteed. The accuracy of the information contained is reviewed by the university and may be checked by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

Key Sources of Information about this course may be found in:

- Degree Programme Handbook for the MSc in Rural Resource and Countryside Management 2001-2002
- AEFM's Departmental Postgraduate Prospectus and brochure
- The University of Newcastle upon Tyne's Postgraduate Prospectus
- The University of Newcastle upon Tyne's Taught Postgraduate Masters' Degree Entrance and Progress Regulations
- The University of Newcastle upon Tyne's Regulations for Higher Programmes in the Faculty of Science; Degree of Master of Science in Rural Resource and Countryside Management
- HEFCE Quality Assessment Report, University of Newcastle upon Tyne,