

**PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR MSc IN BIODIVERSITY, CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT**

<b>1.</b>	<b>Awarding institution/body</b>	<b>University of Oxford</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Teaching institution</b>	<b>University of Oxford</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Programme accredited by</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Final award</b>	<b>MSc</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Programme</b>	<b>Biodiversity, Conservation and Management</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>UCAS code</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Relevant subject benchmark statement</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Date of programme specification</b>	<b>Update September 08</b>

<b>9.</b>	<b>Educational aims of the programme</b>
	<p>The programme aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop candidates' theoretical understandings, research, analytical and communication skills and advanced knowledge of biodiversity, conservation and management;</li><li>• Provide an advanced critical understanding of the legislative statutory policy and governance context in which biodiversity operates;</li><li>• Develop an ability to synthesise and mediate issues relating to biodiversity at the local, regional and global scales;</li><li>• Facilitate a critical appreciation/understanding of the science underpinning biodiversity and its social and ethical roots;</li><li>• Provide an entry-point for those who wish to go on to further advanced research in the School and elsewhere.</li></ul>

## **10. Programme outcomes**

### **A. Students will develop a knowledge and understanding of:**

1. The key concepts of biodiversity, its definition, meaning and significance.
2. Practical techniques for biodiversity assessment and monitoring.
3. The key components of conservation conventions, legislation and the role of statutory agencies, paying particular attention to the integration of theory and practice.
4. The key research skills and methods of analysis for strategic conservation planning.
5. The development of conservation as a social movement and the challenges it faces in an increasingly globalised world.
6. Specialist topics consistent with candidate's particular interests and the competency of the School.

### *Related teaching/learning methods and strategies*

1. Lectures provided by staff
2. Set readings and related literature focused upon the topics covered in lecture courses
3. Research seminars by staff and visiting faculty, including opportunities for the candidates to become skilled in the art and science of presentation
4. Problem sets and projects designed to develop and test research skills
5. Material designed to distinguish between different methods of research including qualitative and quantitative skills
6. Tutorials and seminars in particular areas of knowledge and skills as required
7. Field trips and study days to ground theory in practice and understand current trends and challenges in applied conservation management
8. The preparation of a research thesis
9. Assessment of candidates' knowledge and competency through the preparation of extended essays, examinations and research dissertations
10. Emphasis on critical appreciation of extant arguments in the field of biodiversity and related issues of environmental policy.

### *Assessment*

1. Formative: Problem-based learning problem sets; data collection and analysis; seminar presentations
2. Summative: Submitted assessed essays or equivalent based upon option courses
3. Formative: Critical feedback on candidates' own research and seminar presentations
4. Summative: Three three-hour examinations at the end of the course based on the core courses and covering substantive issues related to biodiversity, conservation and management
5. Summative: A research dissertation

***B. Skills and other attributes***

*Students will have the opportunity to develop the following skills during the course:*

*I. Intellectual skills*

1. Critical analysis and appreciation of the relevant literature
2. Advanced analytical skills relevant to the formation and assessment of biodiversity, conservation and management
3. Advanced skills of research design including data collection, analysis, and evaluation
4. Advanced skills in the presentation of academic and research argument

Assessment:

As indicated above through the multiple modes of assessment throughout the course and at its end.

*II. Transferable skills*

1. Critical appreciation of argument and knowledge
2. Research design, and the collection, analysis and evaluation of data
3. Use and presentation of advanced knowledge and data
4. Knowledge of the various ways of organising research teams, their management and evaluation
5. Independent learning, the management of time with respect to deadlines, and the preparation of material for assessment

Assessment:

As indicated above through the multiple modes of assessment throughout the course and at its end.

## **11. Programme Structure and Features**

- The Course is offered on a full-time basis, beginning in Michaelmas Term and extending over three eight-week terms to the end of Trinity Term, followed by a dissertation to be handed in by the first Friday in September.
- The Course begins with a week-long orientation programme, an intensive week of instruction and introduction to the relevant issues.
- The Course is based upon a set of eight compulsory core courses and two option courses, plus work for the dissertation during Trinity Term. The dissertation will be no more than 15,000 words and will be completed during the Long Vacation for submission by the first Friday in September.
- With respect to the dissertation, this may be (a) a theoretical argument devoted to some aspect of current biodiversity policy, management or science (b) a piece of related empirical research, or (c) an extended treatment of an issue designed to be the basis of a DPhil research thesis in the School or University.
- Candidates are required to undertake three three-hour length written examinations on the core course material, submit two extended essays on the option courses.
- The examinations are normally scheduled at the end of Trinity Term, and extend over a week. Where necessary, candidates may be required to also present themselves for a viva on the examinations, submitted work, and/or dissertation.

## **12. Support for students and their learning**

1. One-week induction for orientation to the programme and study skills.
2. Student handbook, reading lists and some lecture material available on the web. The web is used extensively for course-specific materials (only available internal to the University).
3. Course director who takes overall responsibility for the course, co-ordinating teaching, arranging specialist supervision for optional papers and thesis writing.
4. University supervisor for each student who provides academic guidance to the individual student and overseeing their progress.
5. A college tutor who is responsible for the general welfare of the student and is available to deal with any problems that may arise regarding academic and personal issues.
6. The course can be fully catered for through the libraries of The School of Geography and the Environment, Plant Sciences, Zoology and the Radcliffe Science Library. With the increasing availability of electronic resources, it is also anticipated that the additional pressure on reading space and hardcopies in the libraries will be minimal.
7. Data files and archives are held in the School's IT Support Unit. This provides online access to major machine-readable geographical datasets, which often form a basis for student theses. A technical officer and other staff of the School provide support for statistical and GIS-related analysis.
8. The School of Geography and the Environment has 7 specialist workstations available for postgraduate students in geography and a further 20 workstations are found in the computing room of the School. Students have access to networked computers in their colleges and the majority of college rooms are connected to the University network.
9. In addition to their college, tutor students are supported by many advisors as and when necessary. They have access to college and university hardship schemes in the case of financial hardship. They have access to Women's Advisors, Chaplains etc. in colleges and ultimately to the Head of the College. The University has a counseling service which provides advice both immediate and long term to students in need. There are college nurses and all colleges have a college doctor and many a college dentist.

### **13. Criteria for Admission**

Candidates for admission apply to the University Graduate Studies Office who forward applications first to the department for academic assessment. The criteria for admission will take account of the previous academic record, references, a submitted statement and evidence of English language competence where appropriate. Previous undergraduate training in biodiversity is not required, but candidates should either have some knowledge of a relevant discipline or be able to show evidence of aptitude for critical enquiry.

The formal requirements for admission are:

1. A good upper second class degree, or its equivalent;
2. For candidates whose first language is not English and who have not undertaken a course of study in an institution where the principal medium of instruction is English are required to demonstrate minimum scores in one of the standard language tests (IELTS, TOEFL). The requirements are a score of 7.0 in IELTS or 600 (or 250 in the new computer-based test) in TOEFL;
3. An ability to write lucidly in the English language, to be able to handle analysis and to show some critical awareness;
4. An aptitude for the conceptual, analytical and methodological approaches that the course employs;
5. For candidates who wish to concentrate on a particular substantive topic for their dissertation, the availability of appropriate supervision within the Division and the University is a precondition for acceptance.

Each successful application is then sent to colleges for consideration and the offer of a college place made subject to confirmation of adequate financial resources.

#### **14. Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of learning**

*Mechanisms for review and evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment:*

annual staff appraisal and mentoring during probationary period;

external examiners' reports with a response from the Chair of examiners considered by the MSc committee then the Divisional Graduate Studies Committee and the Educational Policy and Standards Committee);

divisional review of the course after first five years of operation (2006-07) (postponed to 2008/09);

review of the department and its component parts, undertaken by the Educational Policy and Standards Committee every 12 years, with a divisional review of the department held at the half way point in each cycle.

*Committees with responsibility for monitoring and evaluating quality and standards:*

board of examiners;

MSc Committee

Graduate Studies Committee;

departmental Meeting;

Divisional Graduate Studies Committee;

Educational Policy and Standards Committee.

*Mechanisms for gaining student feedback on the quality of teaching and their learning experience:*

feedback questionnaires on each lecture course or set of classes;

end-of-year reports on the course as a whole;

student/staff discussions of general issues raised by the feedback questionnaires or by the student representatives.

JCC meetings every term. Report and recommendations made to MSc Committee to Department Committee Meeting

*Staff development priorities include:*

regular discussions with the Head of Department;

**weekly informal research seminars for staff and students.**

## 15. Regulation of assessment

### *General Regulations*

The examinations shall be under the supervision of the Life and Environmental Sciences Divisional Board. The subjects of each examination shall be determined by the MSc Course Committee subject to the approval of the School's Graduate Studies Committee and the Departmental meeting of the School. The Course Committee (subject to the Graduate Studies Committee) shall have power to arrange lectures and courses of instruction for the examination.

Examiners are nominated by the MSc committee and confirmed by the Graduate Studies committee. Proposed appointment of an external examiner is forwarded to the Proctors and Vice-Chancellor for approval

No candidate shall be permitted to take an examination unless he or she has been admitted as a candidate for the examination in question by the body responsible for the course and has satisfied any other conditions prescribed in the regulations for that course.

The Course Committee shall have power to prescribe that examiners be appointed for candidates individually in such manner as shall be appropriate for the course of study.

A candidate who has failed to satisfy the examiners in the examination may enter again for the examination on one, but not more than one, subsequent occasion.

The MSc Course Committee may prescribe by regulation that students undertaking a particular course of study shall take the examination in a specific term as a condition of admission, and a student wishing to take an examination later than one to which he or she has been admitted must apply to the board for permission to do so.

Except where otherwise indicated, all material submitted for examination (dissertations, extended essays, etc.) shall be accompanied by a certificate signed by the candidate indicating that it is the candidate's own work, except where otherwise specified. This certificate must be submitted separately in a sealed envelope addressed to the chairman of examiners.

The MSc Course Committee shall from time to time meet to assess and co-ordinate marking schemes.

As well, the MSc Course Committee shall use established University and School conventions as set-out below. The total course grade shall be distributed between (1) the two assessed essays (10% each); (2) the three final examinations (40%); and the dissertation (40%). The MSc committee monitors compliance with conventions and marking schemes monitored by review of examiners' reports.

The grades for MSc completion are:

70 and above	Distinction	Candidate may proceed to PRS status
65-69	Pass MSc	Candidate may proceed to PRS status
60-64	Pass MSc	Candidate may proceed to PRS status
55-59	Pass MSc	Strong case needed for procedure to PRS
50-54	Pass MSc	Not normally allowed to proceed to PRS
49 or less	Fail MSc	

Note: Any candidate wishing to proceed to PRS status and thence to the DPhil., must have an agreed supervisor, who must be able to assure the Board that the candidate has prepared a viable research proposal.

### **Marking Procedure**

The examining board consists of two internal examiners and one external examiner. Candidates are anonymous. All papers are double-marked. Dissertations are marked by the two internal Examiners and the External. *Viva voce* examinations may be held if deemed necessary.

An Examiner, having received a paper, assigns a mark using the marking scale as shown in the table below. Where the marks assigned by the two Examiners differ by only two or three points (and do not involve a difference of grade), they are averaged to produce an agreed mark for the question. Where agreement cannot be reached by Internal Examiners, the External Examiner is asked to adjudicate. In addition, the External Examiner may query any mark assigned to a question, even if the Internal Examiners are unanimous in their judgement. Any differences of opinion are discussed fully at the Examiners' meeting, and if still unresolved may (in very rare instances) form the basis of questions in the *viva voce* examination

## MSc Marking Guidelines

CLASS OR GRADE	MARK RANGE %	DESCRIPTIVE EQUIVALENT FOR EXAMS	DESCRIPTIVE EQUIVALENT FOR PROJECTS/ESSAY	DESCRIPTIVE EQUIVALENT FOR DISSERTATIONS
<b>DISTINCTION</b>	81+	A comprehensive and complete answer that clearly demonstrates a deep understanding of the subject, high intellectual quality and comprehensive knowledge of the facts. As good as could have been expected under examination conditions.	Worthy of retaining for future reference and application to teaching or research. Outstanding work based on a critical appraisal of a good volume of material that makes an original contribution to the subject.	Potentially publishable as a journal paper with editing and minor revision.
	80 70	Goes beyond simply answering the question. Perceptive focused use of a good depth of material. Original ideas or structure of argument and critical evaluation of the literature.	Wide breadth and intensity of accessed data or literature plus critical contribution or original finding relevant to the topic.	Identification with professional research approach. Full completion of task, achievement of stated objectives and good philosophical review of shortcomings. Clear critical appreciation of subject, study methods and findings.
<b>MSc PASS</b>	69 63	Perceptive analytical and critical understanding of the issues plus a coherent, well read and good presentation. MUST show evidence of wide background reading around the subject and a deep approach to study that goes beyond reproducing material given in lectures and seminars.	Thorough, clear treatment showing an understanding of arguments, contribution and context. Efficient use of literature. No serious flaws or misconceptions. Engages with the major issues and comes to sound and coherently argued conclusion.	Clear programme of study and worthwhile objectives. Well conceived and executed. A highly satisfactory piece of work but with some unfulfilled potential.
<b>MSc PASS</b>	62 58 55 50	A “correct” answer based largely on lecture material. Little detail or originality but presented in an adequate framework. Lacks evidence of significant outside reading and, while sound, does not penetrate the subject sufficiently, nor display much critical evaluation.	Adequate treatment of literature or data but with little spark or critical insight. Efficiently reproduces material covered in lectures/seminars but adds only a little that comes from the student’s own course of personal research and investigation.	Good effort and sound outcome but pedestrian or lacking in imagination and critical insight. Failure to achieve objectives fully. Programme of work not particularly ambitious or innovative. Satisfactory, but not stylish or perceptive.
<b>FAIL</b>	49 45 40	Engages with question but is a poorly structured answer based entirely on lecture material and containing several important errors of concept and/or fact. Overall, concepts are disordered or flawed, factual material is poorly presented and there is only shallow consideration of issues.	Basic approach to a narrow or misguided selection of material. Lacking in background or flawed in arguments. Lines of thought are not sustained and conclusions and not supported by the text/project analysis.	Deficient in effort or arguments/discussions poorly resourced. Uncritical use of literature. Little sign of analytical techniques or depth. No clear programme of work and insufficiently clear objectives.
<b>FAIL</b>	39 30	Attempts to engage with the question but with significant errors of content and scope, or poor in knowledge, structure and expression. No evidence of relevant outside reading.	Work is shallow and poorly presented. Lacking in sustained lines of thought or reasoning. No conclusions or conclusions incorrect. No evidence or relevant outside reading.	Low input of effort and superficial write-up conveying little of the context or value of the research. Barely adequate effort given the dissertation’s importance.

<b>FAIL</b>	29-	Significant inability to engage with the question. Either, an answer to an imaginary question, or mostly irrelevant material to the question posed.	Inadequate and without any serious scholarly content.	Insufficient effort to complete a reasonable piece of work. An inadequate thesis.
	0	Copied or plagiarised answer with no intellectual input from the student resulting in immediate academic failure from the module, OR work penalised for late submission submitted without the granting of a specific dated extension by the lecturer of the appropriate module.		

**16. Indicators of quality and standards**

Indicators of quality and standards which will be scrutinised include:

- **Comments from external examiners' reports**
- **Reference quality and standards in internal examiners' reports**
- **Reviews by internal or external bodies, and in particular the first review by the division after 5 years of operation**
- **RAE ratings of the department**
- **Comments from the External Advisory Panel**
- **Information on first destinations from Careers Service**
- **Feed back from employers and former students**
- **Annual monitoring of quality of successful applicants**