

**DRAFT PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR MSc IN ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AND  
MANAGEMENT**

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| <b>1. Awarding institution/body</b>            | <b>University of Oxford</b>   |
| <b>2. Teaching institution</b>                 | <b>University of Oxford</b>   |
| <b>3. Programme accredited by</b>              | <b>n/a</b>  |
| <b>4. Final award</b>                          | <b>MSc</b>  |
| <b>5. Programme</b>                            | <b>Environmental Change and Management</b>                              |
| <b>6. UCAS code</b>                            | <b>N/A</b>  |
| <b>7. Relevant subject benchmark statement</b> | <b>Earth Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Environmental Studies</b> |
| <b>8. Date of programme specification</b>      | <b>Update September 2008</b>  |

**9. Educational aims of the programme**

- To produce students who have a broad appreciation of all aspects of the management of people and institutions in relation to environmental change, who are analytical in their approach, and are competent and aware decision-makers.
- To display the nature, causes, extent, temporal characteristics and impacts of major types of environmental change, and to delineate how these changes operate on a global, regional and local scale.
- To provide knowledge of the legal, economic and ethical underpinnings of remedial action or management, at different scales and within different organisational contexts.
- To develop a sympathetic understanding of how remedial action impinges on different societies, and different groups within society, and to understand the effects, equity, and limits of such possible action.
- To provide a basic understanding of techniques that enables the monitoring and analysis of environmental change and its management.

## **10. Programme outcomes**

### **A. Students will develop:**

- 1. a knowledge and understanding of the basic principles involved in the wide range of subject material (as above) that can be involved in tackling the management of environmental change**
- 2. specialist knowledge in at least two fields**
- 3. an ability to bring 1 and 2 above together in order to develop an understanding of alternative courses of action in the management of environmental problems**
- 4. appreciations of the complex and multi-faceted nature of environmental problems and to realise that no one simple formulation or solution to them is likely**
- 5. an ability to convey ideas and recommendations clearly and logically in both verbal and literary form**

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

A core lecture course develops knowledge in broad areas of environmental issues and management strategies.

Small group teaching is provided in 18 specialist optional courses which together with the dissertation allow students to explore topics in detail, in tutorials consisting of one to two hours of structured discussion on aspects of the option subject, using a short piece of written work (e.g. an essay, or up to six pages of notes on reading) as the basis.

The “Friday Workshop” programme offers students the chance to undertake field visits, intensive training and specialized preparation for examinations and dissertations, and includes such topics as experimental design, research methods, ecological surveys, and other topics not dealt with in other parts of the MSc course.

In addition, weekly seminars are commonly held by either a member of the University, ECI, or by an invited visitor, so that students have the opportunity to hear eminent practitioners and to share in the stimulus of current research.

Individual tutorial-type supervision (up to eight hours) is provided in preparation for the dissertation.

Four short residential field courses, which are an integral and compulsory component of the degree, are designed to illustrate aspects of the core course, and in particular to introduce students to environmental management issues and to the professional managers dealing with those issues. An optional field trip to Brussels is also scheduled in order to learn about environmental management in European Union governance.

#### *Assessment*

The core course is examined by three 3-hour written examinations; options based on tutorials give rise to Assessed Essays; the dissertation is a supervised student selected project.

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

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

#### ***I. Intellectual skills***

Preparation of reports and projects involving research skills, data processing etc. Small group project work including presentations; students are expected to give a formal public presentation on their dissertation topic. Debate and argumentative skills. Integrative skills for interdisciplinary approaches.

#### *Teaching/learning methods and strategies*

Lectures, seminars, tutorials, small group project work; field-based project work; data collection and analysis

#### *Assessment:*

Written examination

Two assessed essays (4,000 words)

Dissertation (15,000 words)

#### ***II. Practical skills***

Experience of methodologies and techniques in core course. Dissertation, according to topic, provides additional experience and acquisition of laboratory and fieldwork skills. Some experience of mathematical modelling and computer simulation is offered by the Environmental Modelling option.

#### *Assessment*

As indicated under I

#### ***III. Transferable skills***

use of IT; data analysis; independent learning; library skills; integrative skills with interdisciplinary material; report/project writing and presentation

#### *Assessment:*

As indicated under I

## **11. Programme Structures and Features**

### **Core Course:**

1. Issues and driving forces: Lectures, field visit, examination
2. Managing the environment: Lectures, field visit, examination
3. Methods and techniques for environmental management: Lectures, examination

### **“Friday Programme”**

Field trips, including presentation and follow-up sessions

Lectures on experimental design and research methods

Dissertation preparation, including presentations

### **Field Courses**

Four short residential courses.

### **Interdisciplinary Module**

One week module on climate change

One week module on energy

### **Options**

Students select one option in each of the first two terms, and may select an *additional* option each term if numbers allow. Typically 12-16 options are offered over Michaelmas and Hilary Terms

### ***Learning Year 1***

#### *Subjects*

Issues and Driving Forces

Managing the Environment

Methods and Techniques

Options: choice of two from current list

#### *Assessment*

As above

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

Support is provided by the School of Geography and the Environment (SoGE), specifically the Environmental Change Institute (ECI).

A course director who takes overall responsibility for the course, co-ordinating teaching and arranging specialist supervision e.g. for the dissertation.

Director of Graduate Studies for the School who may be consulted as required.

Students are sent a reading list for preparation in advance of starting the course.

Students are given a one week induction course, which includes the first field visit.

Library provision is at SoGE, the ECI and University Central Library

Information Technology provision is at SoGE, ECI and colleges. The ECI appoints a supervisor for each student, plus a supervisor for dissertation work.

Residential field courses are taught by four tutors plus visiting experts.

The University Careers Service provides advice on future plans.

A college adviser who is responsible for the student's general welfare and who may be consulted on academic and personal issues. In addition to the college adviser, a student has access to others when necessary, e.g. Tutors or Graduates, Women's Advisors, Deans of Divinity, and ultimately the Head of House. Students may apply to college and university hardship schemes in case of financial difficulty. The University has a counselling service which can provide immediate and long-term advice and support to students in need. There are college nurses, and all colleges have a college doctor, and, in many cases, a college dentist.

## **13. Criteria for Admission**

*Minimum qualification requirements;*

a good II.1 degree or better (plus equivalent overseas).

*Procedures for interviewing and assessing candidates;*

There is no formal interview. Students may have an informational interview as part of campus visit or phone contact (perhaps 40-50 students per year).

*Criteria for offering a place;*

Academic excellence as expressed in exam results and referees' opinions. An outstanding dissertation might be a crucial factor. An important consideration is the applicant's ability to write English and to articulate and argue a case. It is expected that most students admitted to the course will have a first degree equivalent to a good 2i at a UK university.

Relevant environmental experience and/or deep interest in the environment. Many things can be considered in forming an opinion: career to date; vacation jobs, placements; dissertation topics, voluntary work etc.

What can the applicant bring to the course such as useful skills and experience? Has the candidate a commercial or industrial background and a deep interest in the environment?

Personal qualities of enthusiasm and ability to work in and with a group. This is important because teaching is undertaken in small groups and the overall size of the intake means that an ability to co-operate is essential.

An assessment of the applicant's suitability for the course and vice-versa. We may decide that despite an applicant's worth we do not think that they are suitable for this particular course. For example, there is emphasis on interdisciplinarity and an ability to see connections.

Evaluations are based on the application form, on referees' comments, on the applicant's statement of study plans, and on interviews.

The selection process does not attempt an absolute valuation of an applicant's worth; the aim is to rank, and therefore to offer places to the most suitable candidates.

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

- new lecturers are given mentors who are available to advise on teaching. The mentor is also required to attend at least some of the lectures given and to report back to the Division on their quality.
- annual staff appraisal.
- staff development opportunities include regular discussions with the Head of Department, and workshops held jointly with the Institute for the Advancement of University Learning to reflect on and develop teaching methods.
- examiners' reports, internal and external, which are considered in turn by the course steering committee, (consisting of all the course tutors and student representatives), and the Graduate Studies Committee of the School of Geography and the Environment
- Student evaluation and feedback:
  - (i) end of MT, either oral or written
  - (ii) end of TT, written
  - (iii) specific evaluations, written, for the Climate Change and energy modules

These evaluations are discussed at tutors' meetings (2-3 per year) and appropriate action taken/response made.

- evaluation by regular divisional and EPSC review, and response to recommendations

## 15. Regulation of assessment

### General Regulations

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 (45%); and the dissertation (35%). The MSc committee monitors compliance with conventions and marking schemes monitored by review of examiners' reports.

The grades for MSc completion are:

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|--------------|-------------|---|
| 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 at least two internal examiners and one external examiner. Candidates are anonymous. All papers are double-marked. Dissertations are marked by the two internal Examiners and reviewed by 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<br>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<br>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<br>58<br>55<br>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<br>45<br>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 are 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<br>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**

- References to quality and standards in internal, and particularly external, examiners' reports.
- Reviews by internal or external bodies.
- Comments from the External Advisory Panel of the School.
- Information on first destinations from the Careers Service and from ECI alumni records.
- Feedback from employers and former students.
- Publications by students and previous students