

Royal Holloway, University of London

Course specification for an undergraduate award

BSc Physical Geography (F840)

Section 1 – Introduction to your course

This course specification is a formal document, which provides a summary of the main features of your course and the learning outcomes that you might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if you take full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. Further information is contained in the College prospectus, and in various handbooks, all of which you will be able to access online. Alternatively, further information on the College's academic regulations and policies can be found [here](#). Further information on the College's Admissions Policy can be found [here](#).

Your degree course in BSc Physical Geography is delivered in three stages, each of which comprises one year of full-time study during which you must follow modules to the value of 120 national credits. The degree 'with an International year' comprises an extra-curricular year between the second and third stages which contributes to your final marks on the four year course. The curriculum is based on a strong foundation in Stage one, providing a broadly-based introduction on which is built an increasing specialisation in Stages two and three. Stage two provides integrated modules in substantial areas of the discipline, which take you beyond the introductions provided in the first year, and provide a basis for the research-led specialist options in the third year. In Stage three, a wide range of options are offered and students also complete an independent research dissertation. This is seen as the culmination of training in research design, research techniques, analysis, and presentation.

On all courses you take mandatory modules in research methods and design, which culminate in a specialist field module in both Stage one and Stage two (current field destinations are Spain, Kenya, Sicily, Cyprus and New York).

As all single honours students take a core first year with elements of human and physical geography, there is flexibility to transfer degrees between BA or BSc Geography, BA Human Geography or BSc Physical Geography. However, from Stage two, students following the BA Human Geography or BSc Physical Geography courses are required to take a particular pathway through the modules on offer. There is no formal difference between the BA and BSc Geography courses: you are able to choose the title that best fits their course content and career aspirations after discussion with their personal tutor. Moreover, students enrolled on the BA or BSc Geography will be able to graduate with a degree title of Human Geography or Physical Geography if their portfolio of modules fit the specialist pathways. Advice is provided on appropriate module combinations and pathways depending on your interests and possible future career paths.

While Royal Holloway keeps all the information made available under review, courses and the availability of individual modules, especially optional modules are necessarily subject to change at any time, and you are therefore advised to seek confirmation of any factors which might affect your decision to follow a specific course. In turn, Royal Holloway will inform you as soon as is practicable of any significant changes which might affect your studies.

The following is brief description for some of the most important terminology for understanding the content of this document:

Degree course – May also be referred to as 'degree programme' or simply 'programme', these terms refer to the qualification you will be awarded upon successful completion of your studies.

Module – May also be referred to as 'course', this refers to the individual units you will study each year to complete your degree course. Undergraduate degrees at Royal Holloway comprise a combination of modules in multiples of 15 credits to the value of 120 credits per year. On some degree courses a certain number of optional modules must be passed for a particular degree title.

Section 2 – Course details			
Date of specification update	May 2021	Location of study	Egham Campus
Course award and title	BSc Physical Geography	Level of study	Undergraduate
Course code	1338	UCAS code	F840
Year of entry	2021/22		
Awarding body	Royal Holloway, University of London		
Department or school	Geography	Other departments or schools involved in teaching the course	N/A
Mode(s) of attendance	Full-time	Duration of the course	Three years
Accrediting Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requirement(s)	Royal Geographical Society. Students who successfully complete the course will receive a degree accredited by the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers).		
Link to Coursefinder for further information:	https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/studying-here/	For queries on admissions:	study@royalholloway.ac.uk .

Section 3 – Degree course structure										
3.1 Mandatory module information										
The following table summarises the mandatory modules which students must take in each year of study										
Year	Module code	Module title	Contact hours*	Self-study hours	Written exams	Practical assessment	Coursework	Credits**	FHEQ level	Module status (see below)
1	GG1001	Physical Geography I: Atmosphere, Oceans and the Geosphere	23	127	60%	0%	40%	15	4	MC
1	GG1002	Physical Geography II: Biogeography, Ecology and Scales of Change	22	128	60%	0%	40%	15	4	MC
1	GG1003	Human Geography I: Cultures, Economies, Histories	22	128	60%	0%	40%	15	4	MC
1	GG1004	Human Geography II: Politics, Society, Development and Environment	22	128	60%	0%	40%	15	4	MC
1	GG1011	Geographical Techniques	72	228	0%	0%	100%	30	4	MC
1	GG1032	Geographical Research and Field Training I	45	105	0%	0%	100%	15	4	MC
1	GG1015	Digital Geographies: Introduction to Remote Sensing and GIS	30	120	0%	0%	100%	15	4	MC
2	GG2001	Geographical Techniques II	35	115	0%	0%	100%	15	5	MC
2	GG2003	Geographical Field Training	55	95	0%	0%	100%	15	5	MC

This table sets out the most important information for the mandatory modules on your degree course. These modules are central to achieving your learning outcomes, so they are compulsory, and all students on your degree course will be required to take them. You will be automatically registered for these modules each year. Mandatory modules fall into two categories; 'condonable' or 'non-condonable'.

In the case of mandatory 'non-condonable' (MNC) modules, you must pass the module before you can proceed to the next year of your course, or to successfully graduate with a particular degree title. In the case of mandatory 'condonable' (MC) modules, these must be taken but you can still progress or graduate even if you do not pass them. Please note that although Royal Holloway will keep changes to a minimum, changes to your degree course may be made where reasonable and necessary due to unexpected events. For example; where requirements of relevant Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies have changed and course requirements must change accordingly, or where changes are deemed necessary on the basis of student feedback and/or the advice of external advisors, to enhance academic provision.

*Contact hours come in various different forms, and may take the form of time spent with a member of staff in a lecture or seminar with other students. Contact hours may also be laboratory or, studio-based sessions, project supervision with a member of staff, or discussion through a virtual learning environment (VLE). These contact hours may be with a lecturer or teaching assistant, but they may also be with a technician, or specialist support staff.

**The way in which each module on your degree course is assessed will also vary, however, the assessments listed above are all 'summative', which means you will receive a mark for it which will count towards your overall mark for the module, and potentially your degree classification, depending on your year of study. On successful completion of the module you will gain the credits listed. 'Coursework' might typically include a written assignment, like an essay. Coursework might also include a report, dissertation or portfolio. 'Practical assessments' might include an oral assessment or presentation, or a demonstration of practical skills required for the particular module.

3.2 Optional modules

In addition to mandatory modules, there will be a number of optional modules available during the course of your degree. The following table lists a selection of optional modules that are likely to be available. However, not all may be available every year. Although Royal Holloway will keep changes to a minimum, new options may be offered or existing ones may be withdrawn. For example; where reasonable and necessary due to unexpected events, where requirements of relevant Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) have changed and course requirements must change accordingly, or where changes are deemed necessary on the basis of student feedback and/or the advice of External Advisors, to enhance academic provision. There may be additional requirements around option selection, so it is important that this specification is read alongside your department's Student Handbook, which you can access via their [webpage](#).

Year1	Year2	Year3
None	GG2013 Environmental Systems: Processes and Sustainability	GG3013 Defending Coastal and Wetland Environments
	GG2021 Earth Surface Processes and Hazards	GG3014 Tropical Savannas: Ecology and Management
	GG2041 Environmental Change	GG3018 Global Warming
	GG2043 Biogeography	GG3021 Managing River Environments
	GG2052 Political Geography	GG3026 Glacial Environments
	GG2053 Cities: Economics and Ecologies	GG3028 Digital Landscapes
	GG2071 Perspectives on Development GG2061 Cultural Geographies and the Modern World	GG3034 Arid Africa: Climatic History, People and Geomorphology
		GG3043 Past climates and environments
		GG3045 Humans and Climate Change
		GG3046 Mammals in a Changing World
		GG3047 Volcanoes
		GG3053 Regeneration and Urban Policy
		GG3054 Modernity and the City
		GG3056 The Geographies of Commodities
		GG3060 Post-Capitalist Cities
		GG3061 Geopolitics of Media and Communications
		GG3062 Images of Earth: From Homer to Google
		GG3064 Exploration, Science and the Making of Geography
		GG3065 Geography, Museums and Collections
		GG3069 Geographies of Home
		GG3076 Gender and Development
		GG3080 Fair Trade and Ethical Consumption
		GG3081 Urbanisation and Climate/Environmental
		GG3082 China: Social, Economic and Environmental Development
		GG3090 Critical GIS and the Geoweb
		GG3111 Global Conservation Challenges

		GG3161 Atmosphere: Art, Science and Politics
		GG3162 Remote Control: Geographies of Contemporary Warfare

3.3 Optional module requirements

In stage 2, students following BSc Physical Geography must take 2 of their 3 options (60 credits) as Physical Geography modules (GG2013; GG2021; GG2041; GG2043). In stage 3 you must choose from either GG3001 Independent Dissertation (30 credits) **OR** GG3005 Independent Placement-Linked Dissertation (30 credits). Additionally, in stage 3 students following BSc Physical Geography must select 4 of their 6 options (60 credits) from Physical Geography modules numbered (GG301x, GG302x, GG303x or GG304x).

Section 4 - Progressing through each year of your degree course

For further information on the progression and award requirements for your degree, please refer to Royal Holloway's [Academic Regulations](#). As part of your degree course you will also be required to complete a module to develop your academic writing skills. This module does not carry credit but passing it is a requirement to progress to the next year of study.

You may apply to take an additional year of studies at an overseas university between stages 2 and 3 of your course (available to full time students only). This is a competitive application process and if your application is successful you must take modules at an overseas university nominated through the Erasmus or Student Exchange Programmes. The equivalent of a full academic load at the overseas university must be taken. The modules to be taken overseas are to be agreed with the Director of Undergraduate Education in Geography. The marks achieved are converted into equivalent College marks and count as a thirteenth module, GG3500. This will contribute 20% to the final stage three marks. GL3500 is non-condonable for the degree title 'with an International Year'. In your final year in the Department of Geography you will take the stage 3 modules as listed above. These modules will contribute 80% to the final stage three marks. Please note that students who go out on an international year course will not normally be permitted to transfer back to one of the standard three year courses offered by the Department of Geography, however the Department will give consideration in the case of extreme hardship, documented by extenuating circumstances and supporting material, as it normally would, should a student not be able to complete their year abroad.

The BSc Physical Geography is available in part-mode.

Part time students must take the following **mandatory** modules:

Stage one (a):

GG1011 Geographical Techniques I (30 credits)

and

GG1001 Physical Geography I: Atmosphere, Oceans and the Geosphere (15 credits)

or

GG1003 Human Geography I: Cultures, Economies, History (15 credits)

and

GG1002 Physical Geography II: Biogeography, Ecology and Scales of Change (15 credits)

or

GG1004 Human Geography II: Politics, Society, Development & Environment (15 credits)

Stage one (b):

GG1032 Geographical Research & Field Training I 15 credits)

and

GG1015 Digital Geographies: Introduction to Remote Sensing and GIS (15 credits) and whichever of the two 15 credit modules which were not taken in the previous year.

Stage two (a):

Choose options equal to the value of 60 credits from a list of Stage two modules offered by the Department.

Stage two (b):

GG2001 Geographical Techniques II (15 credits) and GG2003 Geographical Field Training (15 credits) and choose options equal to the value of 30 credits from a list of Stage two modules offered by the Department.

Stage three (a):

You must choose optional modules to the value of 60 credits from the list of Stage three modules offered by the Department. **It is a requirement that one of these modules is GG3001 Independent Dissertation (30 credits) or GG3005 Independent Placement-Linked Dissertation (30 credits). Only one Dissertation is permitted.**

Stage three (b):

Choose options equal to the value of 60 credits from a list of Stage three modules offered by the Department

With the agreement of the Director of Teaching, students may choose to substitute up to 30 credits in Stage two and Stage three for modules from another department.

Section 5 – Educational aims of the course

- to provide a sound and extensive basis for the study of Geography, by developing relevant knowledge, understanding, geographical and transferable skills;
- to provide a flexible and progressive structure in which students are able to gain knowledge, understanding and appropriate skills relating to distinctive research specialism's;
- to provide students with a range of personal attributes relevant to the world beyond Higher Education, to enable them to engage in lifelong learning, to consider ethics and values, and to contribute to the wider community.

Section 6 - Course learning outcomes

In general terms, the courses provide opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate the following learning outcomes. (*Categories – Knowledge and understanding (K), Skills and other attributes (S), and Transferable skills (*)*)

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the range of different geographical interpretations of the concepts of environment and landscape (K) 2. the concept of spatial variation (K) 3. the constitution and construction of the distinctiveness of particular places; 4. the operation of physical systems (K) 5. the significance of spatial and temporal scale for physical processes, human processes and their interactions (K) 6. the significance of historical change in the human and physical worlds (K); 7. difference and inequality within the human world (K) 8. the contribution made by Geography to the development of knowledge (K) 9. the diverse forms of representation of the human and physical worlds (K) 10. the main methodological strategies used in the analysis and interpretation of geographical information (K) 11. the bases for informed concern about the Earth and its people (K) 12. a number of specialised areas in Geography and associated disciplines (K) 13. planning, designing and executing a piece of rigorous research or enquiry, including the production of a final report (S)* 14. undertaking effective field and laboratory studies (with due regard for safety and risk assessment) (S)* 15. working safely in a scientific laboratory, with awareness of standard procedures (S)* 16. preparing effective maps and diagrams using a range of appropriate technologies (S)* 17. taking responsibility for own learning, and developing habits of reflection on that learning (S)* | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. employing a variety of technical and laboratory-based methods for the collection and analysis of spatial and environmental information (such as environmental sampling, dating techniques, statistical analysis, GIS) (S) 19. collecting, interpreting and combining different types of geographical evidence (such as texts, imagery, maps, digital and laboratory data) (S) 20. recognising the moral and ethical issues involved in debates and enquiries (S)* 21. critically judging and evaluating evidence, and assessing the merits of contrasting theories, explanations and policies (S)* 22. problem-solving, decision-making, numeracy, computation, spatial awareness and observation (S)* 23. critically analysing and interpreting data and text, abstracting and synthesising information (S)* 24. developing a reasoned argument, and expressing this verbally in presentations or in writing (S)* 25. information technology (including spreadsheets, databases, word processing, e-mail and the world-wide web) (S)* 26. information handling and retrieval (including the use of on-line computer searches); identifying, retrieving, sorting and exchanging information; investigating a wide range of sources (S)* 27. working with groups/teams and recognising and respecting the viewpoints of others (S)* 28. in addition, these courses foster the development of a range of personal attributes that are important in the world of work, and that strengthens the graduates' abilities to engage in lifelong learning and contribute to the wider community. These include: personal motivation; the ability to work autonomously and with others; self-awareness and self-management; empathy and insight; intellectual integrity; awareness of responsibility as a local, national and international citizen; interest in lifelong learning; flexibility and adaptability; creativity (S)*. |
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Section 7 - Teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching and learning is mostly by means of lectures, seminars, small-group tutorials, field and laboratory work, designated reading, guided independent study and research, practicals and problem-solving workshops; the latter generally providing a forum for you, the student, with the support of your instructors, to work through problem sets and applications in a smaller and more interactive setting. Particular training in geographical skills is given in the skills and research training 'spine' to the degree courses; other modules in the courses also develop and assess these skills in specialist contexts. You complete a month-long introductory course in study skills with your personal tutor. You are expected to meet basic standards in information technology, for which training is provided by the College Computer Centre. Assessment of knowledge, understanding and skills is typically by formal unseen written examination, practical exercises including laboratory work, coursework essays and other exercises, problem-solving workshops, fieldwork exercises and reports, oral and poster presentations and the independent dissertation. Full details of the assessments for individual modules can be obtained from the [Department](#).

Section 8 – Additional costs

Up to £750-£2000 (All students studying this course will have the opportunity in their first year to go abroad for no additional cost. In years 2 and 3 students may choose to participate in fieldwork abroad that would occur additional costs. However it is possible to complete the degree course with no additional fieldwork costs.)

These estimated costs relate to studying this particular degree course at Royal Holloway. General costs such as accommodation, food, books and other learning materials and printing etc., have not been included, but further information is available on our website.

Section 9 – Indicators of quality and standards

QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) Level	4-6
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Your course is designed in accordance with the FHEQ to ensure your qualification is awarded on the basis of nationally established standards of achievement, for both outcomes and attainment. The qualification descriptors within the FHEQ set out the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of individual qualifications. The qualification descriptors contained in the FHEQ exemplify the outcomes and attributes expected of learning that results in the award of higher education qualifications. These outcomes represent the integration of various learning experiences resulting from designated and coherent courses of study.

QAA Subject benchmark statement(s)	http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements
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Subject benchmark statements provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of courses in a specific subject or subject area. They also represent general expectations about standards for the award of qualifications at a given level in terms of the attributes and capabilities that those possessing qualifications should have demonstrated.

Section 10 – Further information

This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the course and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate when taking full advantage of the learning opportunities that are available. More detailed information on modules, including teaching and learning methods, and methods of assessment, can be found via the online [Module Catalogue](#). The accuracy of the information contained in this document is reviewed regularly by the university, and may also be checked routinely by external agencies, such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

Your course will be reviewed regularly, both by the university as part of its cyclical quality enhancement processes, and/or by your department or school, who may wish to make improvements to the curriculum, or in response to resource planning. As such, your course may be revised during the course of your study at Royal Holloway. However, your department or school will take reasonable steps to consult with students via appropriate channels when considering changes. All continuing students will be routinely informed of any significant changes.

Section 11 – Intermediate exit awards (where available)

You may be eligible for an intermediate exit award if you complete part of the course as detailed in this document. Any additional criteria (e.g. mandatory modules, credit requirements) for intermediate awards is outlined in the sections below.

Award	Criteria	Awarding body
Diploma in Higher Education (DipHE)	Pass in 210 credits of which at least 90 must be at or above FHEQ Level 4 and at least 120 of which must be at or above FHEQ Level 5	Royal Holloway and Bedford New College
Certificate in Higher Education (CertHE)	Pass in 120 credits of which at least 90 must be at or above FHEQ Level 4	Royal Holloway and Bedford New College

Section 12 - Associated award(s)	
BA Geography (L700)	BA Human Geography (L701)
BA Geography with an International Year	BA Human Geography with an International Year
BSc Geography (F800)	BSc Physical Geography (F840)
BSc Geography with an International Year	BSc Physical Geography with an International Year