

## PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

This document describes the **Honours Degree programme in Ecology and the Environment**. This specification is valid for new entrants from **September 2015**.

The aims of the Honours Degree programme in Ecology and the Environment are to:

- provide sound knowledge and understanding of the organismal, environmental and molecular principles of the subject through a core of courses, and develop an insight into the current frontiers of knowledge, primarily through a series of specialised level 3 courses many of which focus on ecology, conservation and the environment;
- develop, through a flexible and progressive structure, a range of subject-specific and transferable skills, including practical laboratory skills, fieldwork skills, self-management, information retrieval, communication and presentation skills, working with others, decision making and meeting deadlines, that equip students for future employment;
- provide experience of independent research through a final year project that focuses on ecology;
- produce graduates who can work safely and responsibly with biological materials, laboratory equipment and in the field.

The programme is delivered in three stages, each of which comprises one year of full-time study during which the student must follow courses to the value of four units (one unit is roughly equivalent to 30 national credits). The curriculum is based around a core of mandatory units running through all three stages providing a broad base of biology in stage one, essential training in systematic and quantitative biology and ecological studies in stage two and a study of biodiversity and ecosystems and an individual project in the final stage.

**Stage one** comprises four core courses and seeks to provide the necessary grounding for the study of the subject at degree level. These courses consider major themes of biological diversity, ecological concepts, genetics, cell biology and physiology. In **Stage two** students take a total of 6 core courses to the value of 3 units and choose 2 courses from organismal options available. These take the students beyond the basic foundations laid in stage one and the choices available enable students to specialise. **Stage three** allows for increasing specialisation as students take 4 core courses to the value of 2.5 units and choose 3 courses from organismal options available. Most of these courses closely reflect the research interests of members of staff who are all specialists in their fields. Students also complete an individual research project providing training in a specialised research area and also in generic skills such as literature searching, report writing, use of word processing, graphics and statistics and in independent work. Students can also take up to 1 course unit outside the School of Biological Sciences, but within the Faculty of Science, during their stage two/three. Options are selected in consultation with the student's advisor and the Director of Teaching.

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This document provides a summary of the main features of the programme(s), and of the outcomes which a student might reasonably be expected to achieve if full advantage is taken of the learning opportunities provided. Further information is contained in the College prospectus, the College Regulations and in various handbooks issued to students upon arrival. Whilst Royal Holloway keeps all its information for prospective applicants and students under review, programmes and the availability of individual courses are necessarily subject to change at any time, and prospective applicants are therefore advised to seek confirmation of any factors which might affect their decision to follow a specific programme. In turn, Royal Holloway will inform applicants and students as soon as is practicable of any substantial changes which might affect their studies.

## Learning outcomes

Teaching and learning in the programme are closely informed by current developments (including practical aspects) in the subject and by the active research of staff, particularly in the areas of animal behaviour, biodiversity, conservation, ecology and the environment and evolution. In general terms the programme provides a variety of opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate these learning outcomes:

### *Knowledge and understanding*

- a critical understanding of the diversity and complexity of life and life processes;
- a familiarity with terminology, nomenclature and classification systems;
- a knowledge of the physiology, and molecular and cellular basis of life processes;
- a critical understanding of ecological systems and of the interrelationships between organisms and the environment they live in focussing on population processes, dynamics and interactions; community structure development and biodiversity; ecological methodologies and data analyses; the impact of different approaches to species management and conservation; nutrient and energy flow through populations and communities;
- a critical understanding of genetics and of the evolutionary processes that give rise to the diversity and complexity of life;
- understanding cutting edge developments in a range of areas specific to the subject;
- knowledge and engagement with philosophical and ethical issues arising from some of the current developments in the biosciences;
- well-developed strategies for updating, maintaining and enhancing their knowledge of the Biosciences.

### *Skills and other attributes*

- the ability to employ and evaluate suitable experimental methods (both laboratory and fieldwork based) for the investigation of relevant areas of biology;
- a range of laboratory and fieldwork techniques of key importance in biology;
- working safely in a scientific laboratory and in the field, with awareness of standard safety protocols;
- the ability to apply relevant numerical skills, including statistics to biological data;
- the ability to access bioscience information from a wide range of sources in order to maintain and enhance knowledge of the Biosciences and to communicate that information clearly in oral and written forms;
- assessing the merits of contrasting subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles;
- critically interpreting and evaluating experimental data and relevant literature, analysing and solving problems, and decision-making;\*
- applying subject-specific knowledge and understanding to address familiar and unfamiliar problems;
- the ability to plan, design and execute an independent piece of research through a theoretical or practical project in environmental biology, including the production of the final report;
- taking personal responsibility for learning, and developing habits of reflection on that learning;\*
- identifying, retrieving (including the use of online computer searches), sorting and exchanging information;\*
- abstracting and synthesising information, and developing a reasoned argument;\*
- written communication and verbal presentation;\*
- information technology (including spreadsheets, databases, word processing, email and WWW);\*
- interpersonal skills, including working in groups/teams and recognising and respecting the viewpoints of others;\*
- CV and career preparation.\*

\* transferable skills

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## Teaching, learning and assessment

The overall strategy is to provide a progressive approach to biological concepts and systems of increasing complexity through teaching methods that aid learning and stimulate interest. Teaching is mostly by means of lectures, laboratory and fieldwork classes, seminars, tutorials, study/revision sessions, with knowledge and

understanding further developed by guided independent study. Learning and analytical ability are developed and reinforced through problem solving, essay writing, practical classes (both laboratory and fieldwork), critical evaluation and by giving students the opportunity to design, execute and evaluate their own experiments. Students are encouraged to acquire further knowledge beyond taught material, e.g. by reading topical reviews, original research literature and attending research seminars, especially in the final year.

The practical assignments associated with stage one and stage two courses provide training in a range of subject specific laboratory techniques, including safety assessment. The culmination of these skills is demonstrated in the stage three research project, and for literature skills the preparation of a literature report.

Training in intellectual and key transferable skills is embodied throughout the programme and forms a strong element of the tutorial and study session programmes. All students are required to meet basic standards in information technology, for which training is provided by the College Computer Centre, through the General Information Technology Skills course.

Assessment of knowledge and understanding is by formal examinations at the end of each year, practical assignments (both laboratory and fieldwork based) and other coursework, oral presentations and an independent research project and the independent literature report.

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### **Details of the programme structure(s)**

Please note that the list of available courses offered is subject to change and not all courses run each year. Full details of each of the courses can be obtained from the [School](#).

#### **Stage one:**

Full-time students must take the following **mandatory** courses:

BS1040 The Diversity of Life (1 unit)

BS1050 Ecology: Animal Behaviour to Environmental Conservation (1 unit)

BS1060 Living Systems: Animal and Plant Physiology (1 unit)

BS1070 Cell Biology and Genetics (1unit)

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

#### **Stage one (a):**

BS1040 The Diversity of Life (1 unit)

BS1050 Ecology: Animal Behaviour to Environmental Conservation (1 unit)

#### **Stage one (b):**

BS1060 Living Systems: Animal and Plant Physiology (1 unit)

BS1070 Cell Biology and Genetics (1unit)

#### **Stage two:**

Full-time students must take the following **mandatory** courses:

BS2010 Invertebrate Biology: Structure, Behaviour and Evolution (½ unit)

BS2020 Plant life: from Genes to Environment (½ unit)

BS2090 Insects, Plants and Fungi: Ecology and Applications (½ unit)

BS2XXX Evolution (½ unit)

BS2110 Practical Field Ecology (½ unit)

BS2120 Biological Data Analysis and Interpretation (½ unit)

and two optional courses from the following:

BS2005 Microbiology (½ unit)

BS2140 Animal Behaviour (½ unit)

BS2150 Applications of Molecular Genetics in Biology (½ unit)

BS2001X Marine Biology (½ unit)

Part-time students must take the following **mandatory** courses:

**Stage two (a)**

BS2010 Invertebrate Biology: Structure, Behaviour and Evolution (½ unit)

BS2020 Plant life: from Genes to Environment (½ unit)

BS2120 Biological Data Analysis and Interpretation (½ unit)

and choose one option equal to the value of a half unit from the stage two courses listed above.

**Stage two (b)**

BS2090 Insects, Plants and Fungi: Ecology and Applications (½ unit)

BS2110 Practical Field Ecology (½ unit)

BS2160 Evolution (½ unit)

and choose one option equal to the value of a half unit from the stage two courses listed above.

**Stage three:**

Students must take the following **mandatory** courses:

BS3010 Individual Research Project (1 unit) (Non-condonable fail – must be passed in order to qualify for the field of study)

BS3120 Population and Community Ecology (½ unit)

BS3180 Marine Ecology and Biodiversity (½ unit)

BS3190 Climate Change: Plants and the Environment (½ unit)

and choose three optional courses from the following:

BS3020 Special Study: Dissertation # (½ unit)

BS3060 Conservation Biology (½ unit)

BS3090 Entomology: Pure and Applied (½ unit)

BS3160 Behavioural Ecology (½ unit)

BS3520 Seed Biology (½ unit)

BS3001X Marine Microbiology (½ unit)

BS3XXX Mediterranean Island Ecology Field Course (½ unit)

GG3017 Conservation Biogeography (½ unit)

Part-time students must take the following **mandatory** courses:

**Stage three (a)**

BS3010 Individual Research Project (1 unit) (Non-condonable fail – must be passed in order to qualify for the field of study).

BS3120 Population and Community Ecology (½ unit)

BS3180 Marine Ecology and Biodiversity (½ unit)

**Stage three (b)**

BS3190 Climate Change: Plants and the Environment (½ unit)

and choose optional courses equal to the value of one and a half units from the stage three courses listed above.

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### **Progression and award requirements**

The progression and award requirements are essentially the same across all Honours Degree programmes at Royal Holloway as outlined in the College's Undergraduate Regulations. Students must pass units to the value of at least three units on each stage of the programme. Failing marks of 30 – 39% can normally be condoned in up to 30 credits across stages 1 and 2. In the final stage failing marks in up to 30 credits can normally be condoned. However, on some programmes there may be a requirement to pass specific courses in order to progress to the next stage or to qualify for a particular degree title and this will put restrictions on courses in which failing marks can be condoned (see programme structure above for details). Additionally there are requirements on the number of courses that must be passed in order to qualify for particular joint or combined Honours degrees. In order to qualify for the award of Ecology and the Environment degree, students must gain a weighted average of at least 35%, pass at least 3 Units in the final year, including passing the Individual Research Project and take the core courses specified above. Please note that the individual Research Project cannot be compensated, (that is, cannot be condoned) in order to qualify for an Honours Degree in Ecology and the Environment.

Students are considered for the award and classified on the basis of a weighted average. This is calculated from marks gained in courses taken in stages two and three, and gives twice the weighting to marks gained in stage three. The College's Undergraduate Regulations include full details on progression and award requirements for all undergraduate programmes offered by the College.

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### **Student support and guidance**

- Personal Advisors: All students are allocated a Personal Advisor who meets with them regularly through the programme. The Personal Advisor's role is to advise on academic, pastoral and welfare issues, but with referral of students for professional help, e.g. counselling, if required. Students work closely with their Personal Advisors in tutorial groups of around 7, primarily throughout the teaching terms.
- The Director of Teaching and Academic Coordinators provide a back-up system of academic, pastoral and welfare advice.
- Provision of study skills sessions throughout the academic year focuses on enhancing generic study skills. The aim is to facilitate the transition of students to the University learning environment allowing them to perform to the best of their academic ability. Excellent associated online resources are also available through Moodle, the virtual learning environment, and on the Royal Holloway website.
- All staff are available and accessible through an open-door policy or by operating a defined office hours system, or by appointment.
- Representation on the Student-Staff Committee.
- Staff-undergraduate ratio of 1:15 (2013/14).
- Detailed student handbook and course resources.
- Extensive supporting materials and learning resources in College libraries, the Computer Centre and via the School website and Moodle.
- Dedicated School teaching laboratories are housed in the School of Biological Sciences (Bourne) Building.
- The School of Biological Sciences has two Education Support Office network members.
- College Careers Service and School Careers Liaison Officer, supplemented by a dedicated careers area.
- Access to all College and University support services, including Student Counselling Service, Health Centre and the Disability and Dyslexia Service for students with specific learning difficulties.

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### **Admission requirements**

The Department's standard conditional offer is available on the [Course Finder](#) web page. However, the Department also has considerable flexibility in its admissions and offers policy and strongly encourages applications from non-standard applicants. Students whose first language is not English may also be asked for a qualification in English Language at an appropriate level. It may also be helpful to contact the [Admissions Office](#) for specific guidance on the entrance requirements for particular programmes.

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### **Further learning and career opportunities**

Graduates from Biological Sciences degree programmes have successfully progressed into a wide range of professions, while many have continued onto Postgraduate studies. For further details please refer to the [Careers Service](#).

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### **Indicators of quality and standards**

Royal Holloway's position as one of the UK's leading research-intensive institutions was confirmed by the results of the most recent Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014) conducted by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE). The scoring system for the REF 2014 measures research quality in four categories, with the top score of 4\* indicating quality that is world-leading and of the highest standards in terms of originality, significance and rigour and 3\* indicating research that is internationally excellent. 81% of the College's research profile was deemed to be within the 4\* or 3\* categories, an increase of over 20% since

2008. This result placed Royal Holloway 31st overall in the UK for 4\* and 3\* research and 33rd based on an overall Grade Point Average (GPA) score.

The School of Biological Sciences was ranked joint 3<sup>rd</sup> in the top 10 universities in the country in terms of proportion of 3\* and 4\* research, with 70% of its research profile being of 3\* and 4\* standard.

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### List of programmes offered by the School of Biological Sciences

Programmes are taught almost entirely by staff at Royal Holloway University of London, with some third year courses including contributions from external lecturers who are experts in their subject area. All programmes lead to awards of the University of London. Programmes in Biological Sciences are not subject to accreditation by a professional body. The QAA subject benchmark statement in Biosciences describes the general features which one might expect from Honours Degree programmes in the subject, and can therefore be used as a point of reference when reading this document (see [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)). UCAS codes are given in parentheses (see [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)).

### Single Honours Degree programmes in Biological Sciences taught wholly within the School of Biological Sciences

BSc Biochemistry (C700)	Available Full Time or Part Time
BSc Biology (C100)	Available Full Time or Part Time
BSc Biomedical Sciences (B990)	Available Full Time or Part Time
BSc Ecology and Environment (C150)	Available Full Time or Part Time
BSc Medical Biochemistry (C741)	Available Full Time or Part Time
BSc Molecular Biology (C701)	Available Full Time or Part Time
BSc Zoology (C300)	Available Full Time or Part Time

### Combined Honours Degree programme with Biological Sciences as a major component

BSc Biology with Psychology (C1C8)†

† Programme to be withdrawn with effect from September 2013

### Accreditation

The Honours Degree programme in Ecology and the Environment is accredited by the Society of Biology.

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