

Royal Holloway, University of London
Course specification for a postgraduate award
MSc Past Climate and Environmental Change

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](#).

The course offers comprehensive and flexible postgraduate training in the dynamic field of Global climatic and environmental change across the Quaternary Period (the last 2.6 million years).

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 a brief description for some of the most important terminology for understanding the content of this document:

Degree course – Also referred to as 'programme', this term refers to the qualification you will be awarded upon successful completion of your studies. 'Courses' were formerly known as 'programmes' at Royal Holloway.

Module – This refers to the credits you will study each year to complete your degree course. Postgraduate taught degrees at Royal Holloway comprise 180 credits. On some degree courses a certain number of optional modules must be passed for a particular degree title. 'Modules' were formerly known as 'course units' at Royal Holloway.

Section 2 – Course details			
Date of specification update	May 2024	Location of study	Egham
Course award and title	MSc Past Climate and Environmental Change	Level of study	Postgraduate
Course code	3798	Year of entry	2025/26
Awarding body	Royal Holloway, University of London		
Department or school	Department of Geography School of Life Sciences and the Environment	Other departments or schools involved in teaching the course	N/A
Mode(s) of attendance	Full time and part time	Duration of the course	One year (52 weeks) full-time Two to five years (104 - 260 weeks) part-time
Accrediting Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requirement(s)			
Link to Coursefinder for further information:	https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/studying-here/	For queries on admissions:	https://royalholloway.ac.uk/applicationquery

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				
Module code	Module title	Credits	FHEQ level	Module status (Mandatory Condonable MC or Mandatory Non-Condonable MNC)
GG5201	Key records in Past and Current Climate Change	15	7	Mandatory condonable
GG5230	Field Training Course (Scotland)	30	7	Mandatory condonable
GG5232	Biological Responses to Environmental Change	15	7	Mandatory condonable
GG5291	Key Concepts in Past and Current Climate Change	15	7	Mandatory condonable
GG5293	Climate Data Analysis and Communication	15	7	Mandatory condonable
GG5238	Landscape Dynamics and Hazards	15	7	Mandatory condonable
GG5237	Geospatial and temporal data science	15	7	Mandatory condonable
GG5299	Dissertation	60	7	Mandatory non-condonable

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.

3.2 Optional modules

In addition to mandatory modules, there may be a number of optional modules available during the course of your degree. 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; please contact the [Department](#) for further information.

There are no optional modules on this degree course.

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](#).

Progression throughout the year/s is monitored through performance in summative or formative coursework assignments. Please note that if you hold a Student Visa and you choose to leave (or are required to leave because of non-progression) or complete early (before the course end date stated on your CAS), then this will be reported to UKVI.

All postgraduate taught students are required to take and pass the non-credit bearing Moodle-based Academic Integrity module SS1001 to be awarded. The pass mark for the module assessment is stated in the on-line Academic Integrity Moodle module. Students may attempt the assessment as often as they wish with no penalties or capping. Students who otherwise meet the requirements for award as stipulated in the [Academic Taught Regulations](#) but fail to pass the Moodle-based Academic Integrity module will not be awarded.

Part-time students will normally complete 4 modules to the value of 60 credits in the first year of study and complete the remaining two modules (to the value of 30 credits), a field training module (to the value of 30 credits), and the Dissertation/Final Project in the second year of study.

Section 5 – Educational aims of the course

The aims of this course are to:

- Provide a sound understanding and detailed knowledge of past climate and environments change, and how these events help us better understand future climatic changes.
- provide a *conversion course* for students of, for example, Biology, Physical Geography, Geology, Ecology, Archaeology, Oceanography, Environmental Science who wish to develop or augment a background in global environmental history and processes;
- provide a *training course* for students wishing to continue postgraduate study to PhD standards, and who require fundamental training in appropriate palaeoenvironmental, stratigraphical and/or quantitative principles and methods;
- provide a *vocational course* for teachers and professional scientists who desire or require a fuller understanding of the time-dependent elements of environmental change as essential context for their career.

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 (*))

1. To identify and critique the principles and debates that define our knowledge of past climate and environmental change.
2. To assess the response of different components of the Earth system (including surface processes, biological systems and human societies) to past climate and environmental change.
3. To recognise how knowledge of past climate change plays a role in identifying the possible impacts of future change and the potential viability of approaches to managing the impact of these changes on the Earth system
4. To plan, design and execute a rigorous and safe piece of independent research in the field of past climate and environmental change.
5. To apply data-science tools and techniques for handling large, complex datasets in the analysis and visualisation of past climate and environmental change.
6. To apply and evaluate, to a professional level, the methods and techniques that are widely used to reconstruct patterns, rates and impacts of past climate and environmental change.
7. To synthesise and communicate scientific knowledge related to past climate and environmental change to a range of audiences, both specialist and generalist.

Section 7 - Teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching and learning is mainly by seminars, workshops, problem solving, group working, practical classes, completion of coursework and private study for the taught modules and departmental/college research training; and for the dissertation by independent research and private study, supported by research supervision. Students receive regular, scheduled, feedback on their performance in taught modules, their dissertation plan and draft proposal (spring term), and their dissertation. Completion of tasks is monitored centrally to ensure students experiencing difficulty can be identified and provided with appropriate support. Full details of the assessments for individual modules can be obtained from the [Department](#).

Contact hours come in various 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, for the assessments listed as 'summative', 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

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).

Section 8 – Additional costs

£50 to £200 (Due to the timing of the GG5230 Field course, students are expected to find and fund their own travel to and from the Scottish Highlands (Fort William)).

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	7
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
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– 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
PG Diploma in Past Climate and Environmental Change (Banner code 3799)	Passes in at least 120 credits, with fails of between 40% to 49% for up to 30 credits condonable (with the exception of any course specific requirements).	Royal Holloway and Bedford New College
PG Certificate in Past Climate and Environmental Change (Banner code 3800)	Passes in at least 60 credits with no condonable fails. Students must pass GG5291, GG5232 and a further 30 credits from any combination of taught mandatory modules.	Royal Holloway and Bedford New College