Personal Statement Guidance

This document provides guidance on writing a knowledge and skills-focused personal statement for MSc Wildlife Biology & Conservation (distance learning).

The Chartered Institute for Ecology & Environmental Management (CIEEM) is the professional body for ecologists and environmental managers in the UK and accredits our MSc in Wildlife Biology & Conservation full-time (FT) and part-time (PT) programmes. Consequently, it is assumed that applicants to the FT and PT routes have knowledge and experience in the 16 curriculum areas outlined in Table 1 below. This may have been gained through a combination of their undergraduate degree, additional courses/CPD, or work/voluntary experience.

The Distance Learning (DL) students follow the same material and take the same assessments, so the programme cannot be considered as a conversion course. However, the part-time pace of the DL mode can afford time for students who do not have a robust scientific background in ecology, zoology or environmental science to work to plug gaps in knowledge as they emerge. Your application will be considered in relation to the CIEEM themes below and an assessment of the extent of the gap between your current knowledge and the experience of a student with the relevant degree background. Therefore, before applying, you should seek to gain relevant knowledge and skills in relation to the CIEEM themes and evidence these in your application.

To evidence this, please write a personal statement as follows.

Section 1

Motivation. Please explain your motivation for studying this specific MSc. What aspects of the course do you think will add to your own specific knowledge base and skillset? This should be up to 250 words.

Section 2

Knowledge and skills. Looking at Table 1 below, please choose one item from themes A and F and one from another theme, and for each one, explain what expertise you have gained either at undergraduate level, in additional courses/CPD, or during work/voluntary experience. Please be as specific as possible – explain what you did, when, where and what you learned from it. For example, you might choose to explain the knowledge and/or skills you have gained in A3 Ecological concepts, F1 Identification, and G2 Data management, interpretation and data analysis. In total, section 2 should be up to 750 words.

Please note, your CV should also be used to indicate knowledge and skills across the broad range of areas covered in Table 1.

Table 1

The table below outlines the knowledge and skills it is assumed applicants have covered at undergraduate level before entry to a CIEEM-accredited MSc programme (adapted from CIEEM).

THEME A. Ecological Concepts
1. Ecological organisational concepts and classification – e.g. biomes, biotopes, ecosystems, habitats, communities, populations, species, organisms
2. Principal world/UK biotopes, biogeographical regions and habitats – e.g. forests, wetlands, coasts, oceans, grasslands, deserts, polar, boreal, temperate, tropical and sub-tropical, man-made habitats (e.g. agriculture and urban)
3. Ecological Concepts - e.g. energy flow, nutrient cycling, species diversity, habitat diversity, succession, ecosystem change, ecosystem services. Population ecology – e.g. carrying capacity, migration, dispersal, the role of limiting environmental factors, competition, predation. Community ecology – e.g. food webs, trophic structures, inter-specific and intra-specific relationships
4. Abiotic factors and impact on animal and plant distribution – e.g. hydrology – salinity, water flow; geomorphology – landforms and their influence on ecological processes and landscapes, soil development and soil characteristics
THEME B. Human Ecology and Impacts
1. Economic and social aspects of ecology and the natural environment, historic and current land use, landscape ecology, agricultural ecology, urban ecology, ecosystem services and impact and influence of ecotourism
2. Environmental pollution – climate change (causes, impacts and mitigation), major pollutants and their sources, critical loads, effect on ecosystems (e.g. acidification (causes and effects on freshwater, forest and upland ecosystems), eutrophication (freshwater ecosystems) and nutrient enrichment (terrestrial ecosystems)
THEME C. Biodiversity
1. Biodiversity – Concepts of biodiversity (genetic biodiversity, species biodiversity, community biodiversity, habitat diversity), concepts of threat vulnerability, rarity. Major causes of biodiversity loss
THEME D. Environmental Policy and Law
1. Environmental policy and legal frameworks – Awareness of contemporary environmental policy approaches – economic and legal.
2. National environmental policy, related policy and legal frameworks – Relevant planning policy and guidance, impact of planning policy on the environment, development control on both landscape-scale planning policy (e.g. river basin management plans, green infrastructure, integrated coastal management) or site scale (e.g. habitat and species designations)
THEME E. Environmental management
1. Assessing impact of change – environmental impact and risk assessment, avoid – mitigate – compensate hierarchy. Stakeholder consultation. Managing potential user conflict
2. Management planning (e.g. for habitats, resources, recreation). Habitat and species management – principles and techniques of species and habitat translocation
3. Sustainability - concept and principles of sustainability including conventions, international agreements and governmental policies, the meaning of low carbon economy and green economy.

THEME F. Species Identification and Survey Skills
1. Identification – principles of biological classification and taxonomy, use of biological keys. Practical experience of a range of taxa.
2. Survey Design and Sampling Strategies – Survey methods and practice e.g. vegetation description, habitat description, species survey methods, Phase 1 habitat survey techniques, National Vegetation Classification
THEME G. Professional Skills
1. Technical report requirements; professional ethics; industry requirements
2. Data management, interpretation and data analysis. Data presentation