MSC WILDLIFE BIOLOGY & CONSERVATION

MANAGING YOUR DISTANCE-LEARNING OR PART-TIME MSc

Flexibility and self-management

The distance-learning or part-time MSc offers flexibility regarding when you start and your pace of learning. However, this flexibility in start times (September or January), speed of study (taking one or more modules per trimester) and the ability to pause your studies when life gets in the way (called "suspending studies") means that distance-learners end up doing modules in a variety of orders and at different rates. We expect some degree of self-management in terms of selection of modules for each trimester but there are also some restrictions on what order modules can be taken in. This document outlines how to select a route through the MSc.

How to get your MSc award

To get the final MSc (which means passing all modules that sum to 180 credits), you need to have completed three elements: (1) passed all of the four Trimester 1 taught modules (60 credits in total); (2) passed all of the four Trimester 2 taught modules (60 credits in total) and (3) passed the 60 -credit Research Project module (which can be started in any Trimester).

The modules and their trimesters are outlined in Table 1, below.

Table 1. The three sets of modules that are needed to achieve the MSc: Trimester 1 modules, Trimester 2 modules and Research Project module. Each set is worth 60 credits.

Module set	Module	Abbrev.	Credits	Period module run
Trimester 1 modules	Humans & Wildlife	HW	20	Sep to Dec
	Scientific Methods	SM	20	Sep to Dec
	Principles of Wildlife Management	PWM	10	Sep to late Oct (6 weeks)
	Case Studies in Applied Ecology	CSAE	10	Late Oct to Dec (5 weeks)
Trimester 2 modules	Management of Aquatic Protected Areas	MAPA	20	Jan to Apr
	Biodiversity & Conservation	BC	20	Jan to Apr
	Species Identification Skills	SIS	10	Jan to Mar (6 weeks)
	Field Methods in Wildlife Biology & Conservation	FMWBC	10	Mar-Apr (6 weeks)

Research project module	Research Project	RP	60	This module can be started in Sep, Jan or May, and for a PT or DL student takes two trimesters, so either: Sep-Apr, Jan-Aug, or May-Dec.

Some suggested routes

Below in Table 2 are some commonly used routes. All being well, if you do not need to suspend or do not fail any modules, you can follow one of these routes. **Please let us know when you start what your preferred route is likely to be and notify us if you want to change.**

Please note that some funders such as Student Finance England (SFE) and the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) do not fund MSc degrees longer than a certain length of time. The teaching team do not have any direct involvement with fees and funding so it is up to you to contact your funder, if you have one, check the number of academic years (or total duration) of study your funder will support and select your route appropriately. Please note these study durations only apply if you do not suspend your studies or fail any modules. Some routes mean you may have to take more credits in some trimesters than others, as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Some suggested routes of study for September or January starting part-time MSc students. Module abbreviations are explained in Table 1.

		Start in September			Start in January		
		Route S1	Route S2	Route S3	Route J1	Route J2	Route J3
Academic year	Tri	3 1/3 years	2 1/3 years	3 years	3 2/3 years	2 2/3 years	3 years
1	1	HW	HW+PWM	HW			
	2	MAPA	MAPA+SIS	MAPA+SIS	MAPA	MAPA+SIS	MAPA
	3						
2	1	SM	SM+CSAE	SM	SM	SM+PWM	SM+PWM
	2	BC	BC+FMWBC	BC+FMWBC	BC	BC+FMWBC	BC
	3		RP				
3	1	PWM+CSAE		PWM+CSAE	PWM+CSAE	HW+CSAE	HW+CSAE
	2	SIS+FMWBC		RP	SIS+FMWBC	RP	SIS+FMWBC
	3	RP					RP
4	1				HW		
	2				RP		
	3						

Colour	Intensity of study
	20 credits per trimester
	30 credits per trimester
	No study in this trimester

Distance learners who have five days per week available to devote to study might choose to study full-time. If you want to do this you should discuss it with the programme leader at the earliest opportunity (ideally, before application to the programme) to ensure that you are well prepared for the demands of this pace of study. The order of modules in the full-time programme is shown in Table 3. Note the January starting full-time option requires 16 months to complete because there is no study in the Trimester 3 (summer) as it is too soon after starting to do the Research Project module, but some

students find this useful for gaining additional relevant work or voluntary experience during the summer survey season.

Table 3. Full-time routes starting in September and January (60 credits per trimester). Module abbreviations are explained in Table 1.

Trimester	Start in September (12 months)	Start in January (16 months including 4-month gap)
Trimester 1 Sept-Dec	HW SM PWM+CSAE	
Trimester 2 Jan - Apr	BC MAPA SIS+FMWBC	BC MAPA SIS+FMWBC
Trimester 3 May-Aug	RP	
Trimester 1 Sept-Dec		HW SM PWM+CSAE
Trimester 2 Jan-Apr		RP

Colour	Intensity of study
	60 credits per trimester
	No study in this trimester

Time commitment for different routes

Doing the MSc full time (60 credits per trimester) should be considered as the workload for a full-time job, and will have regular assessments to engage with or submit throughout the term. Therefore, the slowest routes (S1 and J1) of 20 credits per trimester have an expectation of about 13 hours per week on average, although this includes self-study and work on assessments so will vary between students who have different working styles. A module based on lectures may have on average about 4 hours of recorded material to watch each week, although not in each week, and other weeks there will be self-guided data analysis practicals to work through.

Ordering of modules

Due to the nature of the programme, with topics and skills feeding into later modules and logistical constraints of staff, there are a few restrictions in place that you need to consider when plotting your route to gain your MSc, as outlined in Table 4.

Table 4. Restrictions that you need to consider as you select modules through the MSc.

Restriction	Why
(1) Trimester 1 and Trimester 2 taught modules can only be studied in those trimesters, even at a distance.	Teaching staff have a range of demands on their time through the academic year (including teaching and research commitments outside the MSc) and it is not possible to teach or assess a taught module outside of its designated trimester.

(2) You must have passed all of the Trimester 1 taught modules and all of the Trimester 2 taught modules before starting the Research project (with a minor exception: see 3)	The project represents the culmination of your learning on the MSc, and an opportunity to put in practice some of the knowledge and skills learned on the taught modules (as well as develop new ones).
(3) You CAN start the Research Project if you have done all of the taught modules but only have ONE single re-assessment remaining.	From experience, students can often manage to do their Research Project module and one re-assessment at the same time, but any more that that would distract from the project itself and increase risk of failure.
(4) You should do the Scientific Methods module before you do Biodiversity & Conservation or Case Studies in Applied Ecology.	Scientific Methods contains an introduction to the R programme (software for data analysis), and so this will make Biodiversity & Conservation and Case Studies in Applied Ecology somewhat easier as they also use R for different aspects (note, unavoidably, full-time January starters do BC before SM but this requires additional time devoted to learning R if it is not already part of their skill set).
(5) Most Trimester 1 and Trimester 2 modules last the whole trimester (c. 11-12 weeks) and are 20 credits. However, of the four 10-credit modules, Principles of Wildlife Management and Species Identification Skills run in the first 6 weeks of their Trimester and Case Studies in Applied Ecology and Field Methods in Wildlife Biology & Conservation in the last 5/6 weeks of their trimester. So, if you are only doing one of these, you will have six-week period with less teaching and one with more. If you are doing both, it will be similar to doing one of the larger, 20-credit modules as they do not overlap in terms of time.	Case Studies in Applied Ecology is designed to build upon material covered in Principles of Wildlife Management, and Field Methods in Wildlife Biology & Conservation is designed to build upon knowledge gained in Species Identification Skills so they run consecutively.
(6) If doing the 10-credit modules (see point 5) in different trimesters, you must do Principles of Wildlife Management before you do Case Studies in Applied Ecology and Species Identification Skills before Field Methods in Wildlife Biology & Conservation.	Case Studies in Applied Ecology is designed to build upon material covered in Principles of Wildlife Management, and Field Methods in Wildlife Biology & Conservation is designed to build upon knowledge gained in Species Identification Skills.

How to enrol on each module

Before each taught trimester (Trimester 1 and Trimester 2) the programme leader will contact distance-learners and part-time students, signposting to this document and asking you to contact the programme leader and programme administrator with what modules you wish to enrol on next. We will check these are appropriate and, if so, enrol you on those, or else discuss different options. If we don't hear from you, we will enrol you onto what we think is the next appropriate module. When you are entering your final taught trimester, you should also contact the programme leader and the module leader for the Research Project module about selecting/developing a project and advisor. There will be information on the programme's main Moodle site about selecting a project.

Suspending studies

If at any point you want to take a break from one or more trimesters, you can contact the programme leader and request to suspend your studies for up to one year in the first instance (which can be extended to two years subject to authorisation from the programme leader). When you return from suspended studies you must resume at the beginning of a trimester/module.

Early exit

We want all students who start the course to achieve the MSc but we recognise that life circumstances get in the way. If at any point you want to exit the programme you can achieve a certificate of credit if you have 10-60 credits already passed, a PGCert (postgraduate certificate) in Wildlife Biology & Conservation if you have 60-110 credits already passed or a PGDip (postgraduate diploma) in Wildlife Biology & Conservation if you have 120-170 credits already passed.