

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 University prospectus, and in various handbooks, all of which you will be able to access online. Alternatively, further information on the University's academic regulations and policies can be found [here](#). Further information on the University'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 can choose the title that best fits your course content and career aspirations after discussion with your 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 your 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 a 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	April 2024	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	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 Part-time	Duration of the course	3 years (Full-time) 6 years (Part-time)
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:	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					
Year	Module code	Module title	Credits	FHEQ level	Module status (Mandatory Condonable MC or Mandatory Non-Condonable MNC)
1	GG1001	Physical Geography I: Atmosphere, Oceans and the Geosphere	15	4	MC
1	GG1002	Physical Geography II: Biogeography, Ecology and Scales of Change	15	4	MC
1	GG1003	Human Geography I: Cultures, Economies, Histories	15	4	MC
1	GG1004	Human Geography II: Politics, Society, Development and Environment	15	4	MC
1	GG1011	Geographical Techniques	30	4	MC
1	GG1032	Geographical Research and Field Training I	15	4	MC
1	GG1015	Digital Geographies: Introduction to Remote Sensing and GIS	15	4	MC
2	GG2001	Geographical Techniques II	15	5	MC
2	GG2003	Geographical Field Training	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.

3.2 Optional modules

In addition to mandatory modules, there will 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.

In year 2 you must choose options to the value of 90 credits from the list of Stage two modules offered by the Department. You must take 2 of your 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). Only one Dissertation is permitted. 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).

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 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 first-year undergraduate students are required to take and pass the non-credit bearing Moodle-based Academic Integrity module SS1001 to progress into the second year of study (unless their course includes the alternative mandatory SS1000 module). 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 meet the requirements for progression as stipulated in the [Academic Taught Regulations](#) but fail to pass the Moodle-based Academic Integrity module will not be permitted to progress into their second year of academic 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 Turing 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 University 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.

You must take 2 of your 3 options (60 credits) in stage 2 as Physical Geography modules (GG2013; GG2021; GG2041; GG2043).

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

4 of your 6 options (60 credits) in stage 3 must be taken from Physical Geography modules numbered (GG301x, GG302x, GG303x or GG304x).

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 (*))			
Course learning outcome	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
1) To define and evaluate key debates in specialist areas of contemporary physical geography.	1) To identify the range of physical and human processes that operate in the world and to describe how they interact.	1) To define and evaluate key debates in contemporary physical geographical studies.	1) To define and evaluate key debates in specialist areas of contemporary physical geography.
2) To assess the spatial and temporal variation in geographical processes within specialist areas of the discipline.	2) To recognise the spatial and temporal variations of these physical and human processes.	2) To examine the spatial and temporal variation in geographical processes.	2) To assess the spatial and temporal variation in geographical processes within specialist areas of the discipline.
3) To evaluate how geographical knowledge contributes to identifying, understanding and addressing the challenges facing the world and its societies in the 21st century.	3) To demonstrate an awareness of how the operation of physical and human processes can lead to social and spatial inequalities.	3) To recognise how geographical knowledge contributes to identifying, understanding and addressing the challenges facing the world and its societies in the 21st century.	3) To evaluate how geographical knowledge contributes to identifying, understanding and addressing the challenges facing the world and its societies in the 21st century.
4) To plan, design and execute a piece of rigorous, ethical and safe independent physical geography research.	4) To apply and evaluate the fundamental techniques that geographers use to collect, analyse and interpret data from the human and physical world in a field, laboratory and classroom setting.	4) To plan and design a piece of rigorous, ethical and safe physical geography research or enquiry.	4) To plan, design and execute a piece of rigorous, ethical and safe independent physical geography research.
5) To present geographical ideas and data in forms appropriate to a diverse range of audiences.	5) To appraise the merits of contrasting ideas and express this evaluation through a reasoned argument verbally or through written work.	5) To apply and evaluate specialist physical geography techniques that geographers use to collect, analyse and interpret data from the human and physical world in a field, laboratory and classroom setting.	5) To present geographical ideas and data in forms appropriate to a diverse range of audiences.
6) To apply and evaluate specialist physical geography techniques that geographers use to collect, analyse and interpret data from the human and physical world in a field, laboratory and classroom setting.	6) To recognise the importance and challenges of group work and respecting the viewpoints of others.	6) To demonstrate an ability to present, analyse and interpret geographical data.	

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 University 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](#).

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. Assessments designated as 'summative' will receive a mark 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.

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.

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 incur 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
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
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