

Finding the Right Course – Undergraduate Study

Important points to consider when choosing which course you would like to study include:

What aspects of ecology or environmental management are you interested in?

- Are you interested in marine, freshwater or terrestrial ecology?
- Do you want your degree to involve a lot of fieldwork?
- Are you more interested in plants, animals, habitats or environmental management?
- Do you have a specific job in mind after your degree? And if so, are there any particular requirements for that job?

Do you want to study a single subject, or a combined programme (ecology/environmental management with another subject)?

- Do you want to study a single subject e.g. Ecology, Animal Ecology, Botany etc.?
- Do you want to study a broad subject, and specialise at a later stage e.g. Biological Sciences, Geography or Environmental Sciences?
- Do you want to study a combination of subjects e.g. Business Management and Ecology, or Environmental Management and Human Geography?

Do you want to study full-time or part-time?

- There are various options for studying ecology or environmental management, including part-time and work-based learning courses as well as full-time undergraduate degrees. Some degrees also offer the flexibility of an optional sandwich year, whereby you can take a year out of your studies to gain valuable work experience.
- For more advice on study options that suit your needs you can speak to a careers advisor at your school or college or contact universities directly to find out how many hours of teaching there are each week.

What are the entry requirements for the course?

- Entry requirements for full-time undergraduate degrees in the UK can be found on the UCAS website, or on individual university/college websites. The UCAS Tariff point system translates the grades that you achieve in your qualifications to points.
- Information about part-time courses is available on individual university/college websites.
- Entry requirements for courses in the Republic of Ireland can be found on the Central Applications Office website, or on individual university/college websites. The CAO also use a point scoring systems for entry requirements, based on your qualifications.
- Institutions consider mature applicants, or those with non-standard qualifications, on an individual basis taking into consideration their skills, experience and prior learning.

What units will you study, and do they reflect your interests?

- It is important to choose the right course. Courses change regularly and you should check the current prospectus and consider which subjects interest you, and what will be the best option for you career-wise. Details of the units that make up a degree are usually listed on the course pages of the university website or in the latest prospectus, if not contact the university/college.
- These units/subject areas can vary a lot from course to course. Some courses will include more plant ecology, some will involve more terrestrial units than aquatic and some will include a higher proportion of practical fieldwork.
- Some environmental management degrees are concerned with management of the natural environment, and others include more units on waste management, resource management

and contaminated land etc. so it is worth checking the units that your course includes to make sure it's the right course for you.

How much fieldwork/practical laboratory work does the course involve?

- To work as an ecologist you will need to have done fieldwork and acquired survey skills. It is therefore important to consider how much fieldwork is offered as part of the course, and what type of fieldwork it is (UK or overseas, day trips or residential visits etc.). You should remember that exotic fieldtrips will not necessarily provide you with the field identification skills for work in the UK and Ireland.

Does the institution offer the option to study final year projects as well as dissertations?

- The final year of a degree programme usually offers the opportunity to study a topic in detail. You can either carry out an honours project (an investigation that includes practical work) or a dissertation (a piece of written work on a specialist topic).
- Final year projects can provide valuable experience of independent research, practical work, data analysis and interpretation, and report writing. Not all universities offer final year projects, so it is worth checking if this is something that you would like to pursue, or something that would be of benefit to your future career choice.

Does the course offer opportunities for work placement or studying abroad?

- Some courses are available as four year sandwich courses, whereby you study the first two years of the course at the university, then spend a year working in a relevant post gaining experience, returning to the university to complete your final year.
- Some universities also offer the opportunity to study abroad for a year, so it is worth considering whether this is something that will help your future career in a competitive market.

Is the course accredited?

- Some courses are awarded formal recognition/endorsement by leading professional accrediting organisations such as ourselves.
- Courses that gain accreditation meet the standards that have been set out by the accrediting body. Criteria for accreditation vary with each awarding body, but generally consider the course aims, course content, and learning outcomes, and can also consider the teaching quality, number of students per staff member etc. The UCAS website details whether courses available for study in the UK are accredited.

Can I defer my application if I want to take a Gap Year?

- If you decide that you would like to take a year out of education between school/college and university, you should check with the university first to make sure that they accept deferred entry on your chosen course.
- Every university has a different policy on deferred entry (and it can vary depending on the course you are applying for) so it is best to check with the university before you submit your application through UCAS or the CAO.